

## Getting the Most Out of Service-Learning

Many times, your instructor will provide a list of sites where you can conduct the service work required for your service-learning class. Whether you have two, twenty or two-hundred options, here are some tips to consider that will help you select the site which best meets your needs and the course requirements:

- 1) The most important thing in choosing a good service site is to **do some research**. **Read** up on the agency via their website or any materials you can get from the instructor or the agency. **Talk to an agency representative** about what, exactly, you will do if you serve with their organization. Talk to friends, family and/or other students who may have first-hand knowledge about the agency. The more information you have, the better!
- 2) Consider the course objectives and find a placement that is directly aligned with them.
- 3) When possible, try to find a service site that is related to something you are passionate about.
- 4) Look for an organization that allows you to apply your unique skills, talents, and experience.
- 5) Find a site that provides you with experiences and skill that will benefit you the most.
- 6) Select a service site that you feel **good** about, not one that seems the **easiest**. (Easy is not always best!)

Perhaps most important, **get started right away!** It can sometimes take days or even weeks before you are able to talk directly with a representative from the agency where you are interested in serving. Also, some agencies require certain screening be conducted (like fingerprinting, TB tests or interviews), and an orientation or training be completed. Finally, many agencies have a limit to the number of service-learning students they can accommodate in a given semester. Since you need to complete your hours before the end of the semester, procrastinating your initial contacts and starting your service hours can cause some serious challenges.

The community site will provide you with a “hands-on” opportunity to apply course content to serving others. As a representative of the university you should go out into the public with a clear understanding of your role and the importance of it in the community. Students are expected to present themselves and represent their school in an acceptable manner. Here are some tips on how to get the most from your Service-Learning experience.

**Time Management:** Students should arrive on time to their service appointments. If for some reason you are unable to attend, or will be late, this should be

communicated promptly to the site supervisor, volunteer coordinator, or in the manner prescribed by your site coordinator. Students should practice self-directed behavior at all times. If you run out of things to do, communicate with the site supervisor immediately. If the volunteer coordinator/supervisor is not available try to be productive in some acceptable manner. You should not be studying, talking on you cell phone, texting, surfing the web, or talking to others about non-service topics during your service work.

You can read more [Tips for Time Management at the Mayo Clinic Website](#).

**Appearance:** Each opportunity to serve is unique. Students should be sure that they understand the requirements of their service activity so that they dress appropriately. Students should always respect the community benefits organization's dress requirements. Additionally, many organizations have sign-in requirements and /or name badges required for visitors or volunteers. Be sure to adhere to each organization's expectations in this area every time you serve.

It is expected that students will present themselves in a manner that is fitting the service activity. Practicing good basic hygiene is always important. Be sure to shower and brush your teeth and hair regularly. Additionally, make sure that you wash your hands after using the restroom. To most students, these may sound like things your parents told you when you were 5 years old, but sometimes we forget that dressing and preparing our appearance for our service site is even more important than how we prepared ourselves for Kindergarten!

NOTE: Tattoos and piercings: Please note that in some circumstances you may be asked to reduce exposure to tattoos and piercings. When in doubt, speak with the volunteer coordinator or your instructor.

**Behaviors:**

Students are expected to act in the best interest of those being served. You should always keep in mind that you are a **guest** at your service site and should respect the organization's policies, procedures, and volunteer guidelines.

Always observe safety and security procedures or activities required by our community partners. If you are not sure of the site's policies and procedures, ask your site coordinator.

You can almost always expect that during your service you will work with people who are different from you in some important ways. Their age, gender, culture, race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, education, religious and /or personal beliefs may be different from what you are used to dealing with at home and school. Seek to ***understand and respect*** the personal and cultural differences of those you interact with as part of your activity. You are not there to make them understand you or for them to adhere to your beliefs. Please be respectful of these differences at all times. Use respectful language and avoid slang terms or derogatory

statements. Please be open to any changes in your service activities and try to remain flexible. Remember: Serving is a privilege.

**Respect the privacy of all clients:** If you are privy to confidential information with regard to the person(s) with whom you are working (i.e. organizational files, diagnostics, personal stories, etc.), it is vital that you treat it as privileged and **confidential** information. You should use pseudonyms in your course assignments if you are referring to clients or the people with whom you work at the service site. However, you do have an obligation to report any activity or behavior that is detrimental to another you are obligated to report it to the proper authorities. If you witness any behaviors that make you uncomfortable contact your site supervisor or instructor immediately.

One of the required forms you must complete is a “Learning Plan”, which will be given to you by your instructor. Among other things, this Learning Plan will require you to agree to the following.

*While participating in this learning activity, I will (a) exhibit professional, ethical and appropriate behavior; (b) abide by the Learning Site’s rules and standards of conduct, including wearing any required personal protective equipment; (c) participate in all required training; (d) complete all assigned tasks and responsibilities in a timely and efficient manner; (e) request assistance if I am unsure how to respond to a difficult or uncomfortable situation; (f) be punctual and notify the Learning Site if I believe I will be late or absent; and (g) respect the privacy of the Learning Site’s clients.*

The agreement goes on to state:

*While participating in this learning activity, I will not (a) report to the Learning Site under the influence of drugs or alcohol; (b) give or loan money or other personal belongings to a client; (c) make promises to a client I cannot keep; (d) give a client or representative a ride in my personal vehicle; (e) engage in behavior that might be perceived as harassment of a client or Learning Site representative; (f) engage in behavior that might be perceived as discriminating against an individual on the basis of their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, mental capacity, or ethnicity; (g) engage in any type of business with clients during the term of my placement; (h) disclose without permission the Learning Site’s proprietary information, records or confidential information concerning its clients; or (i) enter into personal relationships with a client.*

For your own safety, and for the safety and well-being of those served, it is vital that you follow these agreements.