

WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

SERVICE-LEARNING

STUDENT HANDBOOK



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WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

Service-learning has been described as “learning by doing,” and at Western Kentucky University, it is considered a form of “experiential learning” where students participate in an organized activity that meets community needs. In service-learning classes, students work in the community on issues that make education relevant and exciting through curricular service-learning. Course materials such as lectures and readings improve the quality of service, and in turn, the service experience enhances the classroom dialogue, student understanding, and student learning. Service-learning may take the forms of community placements, projects, or community-based research. Co-curricular service-learning takes place when groups of students conduct a service-learning project not directly tied to a class.

Three Necessary Components to Service-Learning:

1. **Meaningful Service:** The students and faculty work with community organizations or community leaders to identify a project or activity that addresses a real community need or contributes to the necessary work of a community organization.
2. **Applied Learning:** Students apply academic knowledge and critical thinking skills. The project or activity is directly related to course-learning goals. The project contributes to the students' understanding and/or practice of academic concepts or skills.
3. **Reflection:** The project includes structured reflection and assessment leading to a deeper understanding of course content and civic engagement. Students participate in a structured reflection process which facilitates the integration of the service experience and course content, and helps transform experience into meaningful learning.

How is Service-Learning Different?

Service-learning is different from other community outreach and academic experiences because it attributes equal weight to both service and learning goals. Think of community outreach activities on a continuum. At one end, the focus is on the community as the beneficiary of service. On the other end of the continuum, the focus is on the student as the beneficiary of learning.

Service-learning differs from:

- Volunteerism and community service, where the primary emphasis is on the service being provided and the benefit of the service activities to the community or recipients.
- Internships, which provide higher-level students with opportunities to apply concepts and skills from their field of study, but are not focused on service. Even internships that include developing a substantial project that benefits the community may not be considered academic service-learning unless they are credit-bearing and include structured reflection components.
- Field experiences, which provide students with co-curricular service opportunities that are related to, but not fully integrated with, their formal academic studies and/or do not include structured reflection components.

Service-learning places equal emphasis on community and student and on service and learning.

WHAT IS REFLECTION?

Reflection is one of the critical components of service-learning. So what is it? Simply speaking, reflection is any activity that helps you to connect what you are learning in your academic program and what you are doing in your service-learning project.

Reflection can take a variety of forms. Consider these examples:

- Writing (journals, directed writings, summary reports, essays)
- Telling (end of semester presentations for your community partner, in-class presentations, class discussions)
- Multimedia (collages, photo or video essays)
- Activities (role-playing, interviewing classmates)

Your professor will probably guide you through reflection activities that have been designed to work well with your particular course and service-learning project. However, reflection is critical to maximizing the learning potential of service-learning experiences, and you should feel free to spend time reflecting on your own, as well!

Why Practice Reflection?

- It can help you transform experience into meaningful learning.
- It will help you to thoroughly examine and interpret concepts and experiences and form well-thought-out opinions.
- Reflecting will help you understand course content and relate it to your experiences outside the classroom.
- Reflection can make you aware of things you had not noticed at first.
- The reflections in your journal will show me that you are truly engaging with, understanding, and internalizing the class content and learning experiences.

Writing a Reflection – Questions to Consider:

- What did you learn?
- What did you do?
- What did you observe?
- What new ideas or insights did you gain?
- Why is it important?
- How did it make you feel?
- Did you understand everything?
- Did you agree or disagree?
- What did you like? Dislike?
- Did anything surprise you?
- Did it change or expand your perspective?
- Was there anything you had not considered or experienced before?
- How did it relate to things you had experienced or learned about before?
- Did you discover anything about yourself you were not aware of?
- How can you apply what you learned?
- How can you use it in your own life in the future?
- How was the interaction? Any frustrations?
- Did anything make you feel uncomfortable?
- What was successful and what could be improved?
- How did the group operate? What roles are you and other group members taking?
- What are the next steps?

- Were you able to apply anything you learned in the classroom to your out-of-classroom experience?

Different Reflection Formats

The Three-Part Journal

An effective reflection activity is the *three-part journal*. After visiting your community partner site, respond to the following questions. Make sure to differentiate between the three different types of responses. These questions can also be used to guide a discussion.

1. *Describe the experience.* Make sure to include useful details and try to leave out personal thoughts, feelings, and judgments.
2. *Connect your course readings, lectures, and discussions to the experience.* Discuss your experience in terms of concepts and themes covered in your course.
3. *Describe your personal reaction to the experience.* Include your thoughts, feelings, and judgments. Include what you can learn about yourself and your assumptions from what you did and how you reacted. How does the combination of course materials and your work in the community relate to you personally and professionally? How does it affect your understanding of the community and your role in it?

Three Key Questions

You could use these questions for short writings or group discussion.

1. *What?* What was your project about? What was the problem or issue you tackled? What causes it? What did you do?
2. *So What?* Why does it matter? How was it significant? Who did it help and why? What did you gain from it? What did those you served gain from it?
3. *Now What?* What is the situation like now? What else could be done? What's the next step? What are the long-term repercussions of your work? Who else could get involved and how?

The Reflection Drill

These quick questions are a good way to share with others or think to yourself about what you experienced.

1. What did you learn?
2. How do you feel?
3. How can you use this in the future?

Tips

1. Remember to support your statements. For example, do not simply state "I disagree," "I did not like that," or "that was my favorite part." Always explain why.
2. Do not use personal beliefs as hard evidence. "I was raised to believe otherwise" is a valid statement and important realization – particularly if you

can reflect on how and why that was so – but only as long as you do not confuse it with proof that validates or invalidates the points of view of others.

3. Do not be afraid to critique or share your opinions, but back up your statements and explain yourself. Give examples.
4. Show that you are aware and can understand other points of view whenever possible. Try to relate this particular reading or experience to a broader context, to your life, or to other applicable situations

PREPARING FOR A SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

As a service-learning student, you will be working with professionals to address real and vital issues in our community. It is assumed that you will approach your service-learning project with professionalism, respect, and sincerity. Below are some guidelines to help you prepare for and engage in your service-learning partnership:

1. Learn about the community and your partner organization.
 - Seek out useful information about the community, organization, and project on which you will be working. The information you need will vary depending on your particular project, but you may consider learning about:
 - The population and/or geographic area being served by your partner organization.
 - The organization's mission statement.
 - The names of the organization's staff and their responsibilities and roles within the organization.
 - A brief history of the organization.
 - The role that volunteers play in the organization.
 - In service-learning, all partners – faculty, students, and community partners– are considered teachers and learners. Open yourself to learning from the community and the organization with which you are working.
 - Be careful that you do not assume that you know how to solve perceived “problems.” Often problems are more complex than they initially appear.
 - You may come from a very different community than the one you work with during your project. Be open to seeing things in new way. Seek out other people's viewpoints and ask questions.
 - Make an effort to identify community strengths, as well as community needs.
 - Work to understand the relevance of your service-learning project to your learning goals or course objectives.
2. Establish a positive working relationship.
 - Discuss the community partner's expectations and determine what you need to know to do what is expected of you.
 - Be aware that non-academic settings do not work by the academic calendar.
 - Understand that your community partner has other responsibilities and priorities in addition to the project on which you are working together.
 - Remember that your community partner might have limits on the time they can spend on your service-learning project.

GUIDELINES FOR STUDENTS IN SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECTS

1. Strive to be non-critical and non-judgmental.
 - Approach challenges and detours in your service-learning project as opportunities to learn and grow.
 - Realize that you may not already know how to do what is expected of you. Be prepared to learn from your community partner.
 - Maintain regular contact with your community partner and your professor regarding your service-learning project.
 - If you become concerned about any aspect of your project, let your community partner or professor know of your concerns.
 - Maintain a positive and enthusiastic attitude, and keep things in perspective.
 - Enjoy, celebrate, and build on small Accomplishments.
2. Be accountable.
 - Think about the purpose of your service-learning project and work to generate an outcome that will contribute to the work of your community partner organization.
 - Set goals that are realistic and address the needs of the organization.
 - Ask questions and listen to what is being said. The people who work and live within the community can help you to become a more effective participant.
 - Be clear in your communication. Set personal boundaries that are appropriate and comfortable for you.
 - Keep appointments and commitments that you set with your community partner, and let your community partner know when you are not able to be present.
 - Be accountable to other members of your group. Make sure that you are carrying your share of the load.
 - Recognize your limits. If you are given something that you think you cannot handle, make sure you discuss the situation with your community partner and your professor.
3. Be aware of your rights and responsibilities.
 - Approach your position as you would any job. Learn any policies, procedures, and expectations that you must follow while working with your community partner.
 - Community partners are informed that they must abide by WKU's Non-Discrimination Policy, found in the WKU Student Handbook, as well as in this document.
4. Keep an open mind.
 - Enter your service-learning partnership with an open mind, show respect for differences, and avoid imposing your culture and value system on others.
 - Observe and respect cultural differences in language, expectations, and values.
 - Expect uncertainty at first. Your level of comfort and responsibility will increase as the project progresses.
 - Be flexible and adapt to changing situations!

HELPFUL INFORMATION

The following is a list of specific tools, activities, and approaches that will help you, your professor, and your community partner develop a strong, effective service-learning partnership. It may be helpful to refer back to this list throughout your service-learning experience.

1. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of each person involved.
 - Make sure that you are clear about your role and responsibilities during your service-learning project.
 - Make sure that you are clear about the roles and responsibilities of your community partner during your service-learning project.
 - If you are working in a group, make sure that each group member has a role to play.
2. Share contact information.
 - Make sure you have appropriate contact information for your fellow group members and community partner.
3. Plan ahead and create a timeline.
 - With your group members and community partner, create a timeline for the full project, with realistic goals that work for your schedule AND your community partner's schedule AND the course schedule.
 - Follow through with scheduled appointments and try to avoid rescheduling meetings.
 - If you must change something in the timeline, inform your fellow group members and community partner as soon as possible.
 - Make effective use of the time that you have with your community partner. It is helpful to bring an agenda or list of items to discuss to your meetings with your community partner.
4. Develop a service-learning contract, written agreement, or project plan.
 - Your professor may have a specific format that s/he would like you to use. The purpose of this document is to outline roles, responsibilities, timeline, and projected project outcomes, as well as any other information that is relevant to your project.
 - Make sure that you, your professor, and your community partner agree on the expected final product.
5. Communicate.
 - Communicate clearly and honestly.
 - Develop a plan for checking-in regularly with your fellow group members, your community partner, and your professor throughout the semester. Your professor might have a specific plan for communication that s/he would like you to follow.
 - If problems arise, discuss them with your group, your professor, and/or your community partner. Do not let issues drag on.
6. Be prompt.
 - Demonstrate that you respect your community partners and fellow group members by arriving on time to scheduled appointments and meetings.

7. Dress appropriately.
 - Clothing should always be neat, clean, and appropriate to the work you are doing. If it is not clear what is expected, ask your community partner about appropriate attire. The following items of clothing are NOT appropriate for most community settings:
 - Short skirts
 - Ripped clothing
 - Halter-tops
 - Hats (unless you are working outdoors)
 - Shorts
 - Tank tops
 - Form-fitting clothing
 - Low-cut (or high-cut) shirts
 - Flip-flops or smelly, dirty sneakers
 - Offensive t-shirts
8. Respect the confidentiality of your community partner.
 - We encourage service-learners to talk about their experiences with others and reflect upon them in journals. However, please do not use real names when discussing your experiences off-site. Simply change the names or omit names altogether.
 - Depending on the nature of your service-learning project, you may be dealing with truly confidential information. Ask your community partner if there are specific confidentiality guidelines that you need to follow.
9. Be clear about costs related to your service-learning project.
 - Generally, service-learning courses have limited funds available to support expenses. If you anticipate that there will be costs related to your project, make sure that you communicate clearly with your professor and community partner about who is responsible for the costs. You may explore ways to minimize or eliminate expenses.

WKU CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT

Purpose

Western Kentucky University developed a Code of Student Conduct in order to fulfill its mission and promote a positive environment for all members of the University community. As a member of the University community, a student is granted rights and responsibilities, which are defined within the Student Handbook. It is the responsibility of every student to become familiar with the WKU Code of Conduct and the rights and responsibilities of students. Ignorance of the WKU Code of Student Conduct is not acceptable justification for violation of any campus policies or procedures.

The regulations within the Code of Student Conduct are intended to govern the student conduct at Western Kentucky University. The University will take disciplinary action against a student for an off-campus offense only when the nature of the offense is such that, in the judgment of the Vice-President for Student Affairs and Campus Services, the continued presence of the student on campus is likely to interfere with the educational process and the orderly operation of the University. Students who violate the law may incur penalties prescribed by civil and criminal authorities. However, the University reserves the right to review student incidents independent of action by civil and criminal authorities and apply the University disciplinary process as it serves the educational mission of WKU, a function separate and distinct from civil and criminal proceedings. Below are statements of policy regarding the rights, responsibilities, and code of conduct for Western Kentucky University.

Rights

- The right of respect for personal feelings, freedom from indignity, and to expect an education of the highest quality.
- The right to speak on University property provided that his/her behavior does not infringe on the rights of others as further defined in the University policy on time, place, and manner of meetings, assemblies, and demonstrations.
- The right of freedom to hear and participate in dialogue and to examine diverse views and ideas.
- The right to participate in all areas and activities of the university, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
- The right to engage, either individually or in association with others, in off-campus activities, exercising rights as a citizen. When so engaged, in a context in which the participant is identified as a student, there exists a responsibility to make clear that the student does not represent the University.
- The right of due process in the disciplinary procedure in accordance with rules of procedures prescribed in the Code of Student Conduct.

SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM GOALS

Learning Objectives

I intend to learn:

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Service Objectives

I intend to accomplish:

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

These tie with the course goals or student group mission in the following ways:

- _____

- _____

- _____

RESEARCHING ISSUES AND COMMUNITY NEEDS

This report outlines the sources that were valuable in gaining the knowledge I needed to understand the issue and to take the action necessary to make a lasting positive change.

(You may list books, periodicals, interviews, websites, and any other sources.)

Source # 1: _____

Synopsis of my findings:

Leads, ideas, or follow-up questions:

Source # 2: _____

Synopsis of my findings:

Leads, ideas, or follow-up questions:

Source # 3: _____

Synopsis of my findings:

Leads, ideas, or follow-up questions:

Action Plan

Objectives:

- _____

- _____

- _____

Resources Needed:

- _____

- _____

- _____

Step-by-step Timeline:

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

JOURNAL

Week 1

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 2:

Week 2

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 3:

Week 3

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 4:

Week 4

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 5:

Week 5

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 6:

Week 6

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 7:

Week 7

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 8:

Week 8

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 9:

Week 9

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 10:

Week 10

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 11:

Week 11

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plan for week 12:

Week 12

Action Taken:

Challenges:

Accomplishments:

This is what I learned:

Plans for follow-up in the future:

MID-POINT PROGRESS REFLECTION

Write an essay or have a discussion to reflect on your progress so far. Consider these sample questions:

- Are you on target to successfully accomplish your service-learning project?
- Are you making a positive, lasting change in the community?
- What have you learned?
- If applicable, is the service-learning project complementing and helping you to better understand your course content?
- Is the experience providing you with knowledge and skills that will help you in your future career?
- How will you be able to apply what you have learned from this experience to your own life?

FINAL REFLECTION AND EVALUATION

Write an essay or have a discussion to reflect on your experience with this program. Consider this sample questions:

- Did you successfully accomplish the objectives of your service-learning project?
- What evidence do you have of the positive impact of your service in the community?
- What were your biggest challenges?
- What were some of your most rewarding accomplishments?
- What could have been done better or differently?
- What still remains to be done?
- What did you learn?
- If applicable, how did the service-learning tie in with your class?
- What knowledge and skills did you acquire as a direct result of taking part in this service-learning program?
- How will you be able to apply what you have learned from this experience in your own life?

