

Center for Academic Service-Learning (CASL)

Agency Partner Handbook

Palm Beach Community College
Center for Academic Service-Learning
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<http://www.pbcc.edu/x10427.xml>

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	Page
What is Service-Learning ?.....	3
Service-Learning, Volunteerism, or Internships?.....	4
How the Agency Will Benefit.....	4
Service-Learning Roles and Responsibilities	5
Service-Learning Agency Checklist	6
Orientation for Students.....	7
Tips for Success.....	7

WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

Adapted from Boise State University

What is Service-Learning?

PBCC defines Service-Learning as “a teaching method that increases student engagement and success through community involvement to apply theories or skills being taught in a course. Service-Learning furthers the learning objectives of the academic courses, addresses community and civic needs, and requires students to reflect on their activity in order to gain an appreciation for the relationship between civics and academics. “

At PBCC we envision a College that is a diverse community of active learners where achievement occurs in an environment without boundaries. We envision a responsive collaborative institution committed to the ongoing renaissance and enrichment of its community. Service-Learning provides a teaching method to assist faculty, students and the community in fulfilling the PBCC vision.

Service-Learning emphasizes reciprocity between campus and community, between those who serve and those who learn.

EXAMPLES:

- English students assist in an adult literacy program.
- Sociology students educate their peers on HIV/AIDS prevention.
- Ecology students join neighborhood children in developing community gardens

SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE MODELS AT PBCC

INTEGRATED CLASS

- Can be a required or optional course component
- 1-30 hours of service over the semester
- Class discussions or writing assignments relate service and course theory

JUSTIFICATION FOR SERVICE-LEARNING

“It is easy for education to become trapped within the classroom... Instruction can become another exercise in dispassionate analysis. The usual array of instructional approaches, case studies, debates, guest speakers, analysis of videos and text, utilizes indirect abstract knowledge. Using these methods students perceive people of different backgrounds as objects for analysis. Alone these traditional methods can simply provide students with a more sophisticated lens to validate their own unreflective social assumptions. Without flesh and blood contact with people in the social systems they are involved with students participate in a form of civic education that runs the risk of promoting a kind of ethical or civic voyeurism - people skilled in passive observation and dispassionate analysis of the suffering of others and the systems of poverty.”

*Falbo, Mark C. Serving to Learn: A Faculty Guide to Service Learning.
Ohio Campus Contact, 1996; 41.*

SERVICE-LEARNING, VOLUNTEERISM, OR INTERNSHIPS?

SERVICE-LEARNERS ARE STUDENTS, NOT VOLUNTEERS. Students have specific learning objectives for their service experience. Agency staff helps students learn. Their service is a class assignment with specific deadlines for starting and completing service.

- **Service-Learning** is usually a course requirement. It ensures students not only participate in course-related service but also reflect upon what they are doing, relate it to the class, and evaluate what they are learning. The service is intended to equally benefit the student and the service recipient; sometimes there is tension in this balance.
- **Volunteering** is a worthwhile and important activity, but students generally do not learn from volunteering in the same way; they do not connect it to classroom instruction and academic course content. The primary emphasis is on the service, not the learning.
- **Internships** often focus on learning job skills instead of serving the community, whereas Service-Learning emphasizes the student making a contribution to the community at the same time as they use the service as a vehicle for learning course material. Service-Learning experiences can often lead to internships. Service-Learning provides students with shorter-term community experiences which can help them refine or redirect their goals for longer internships.
- **Reflection** is another key difference between Service-Learning, internships and volunteerism. In Service-Learning, students reflect on relationships between the service, community issues, and the class. Both faculty and community partners are encouraged to engage students in reflective discussions. Community partners often enjoy participating in classroom reflection as well.

Reflection is the Difference

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For more information on posting positions at PBCC

Palm Beach Community College Career Center

careercenter@pbcc.edu

<http://www.pbcc.edu/x1276.xml>

HOW THE AGENCY WILL BENEFIT

- **Potential Employees:**
College students look at their Service-Learning experience as a way to interact in the “Real World”. This may be their first experience with possible employers. Students want to make connections with agencies and organizations that allow them to interact on a professional level. And this is a great opportunity for your agency to take a trial run with someone that may end up working with you in the future.
- **Idealism:**
Students often have the most current resources available to them through their classes. They are often idealistic and offer a fresh creative approach to problem solving. This perspective allows students to be more willing to offer up suggestions, thereby encouraging your organization to consider new alternatives.
- **A Base of Future Community Support:**
Your Service-Learning students are your best boosters! This may be their first experience with addressing a community need, students will want to get the word out to everyone they know. A positive experience with your agency can help spread the word about your cause to friends, family, and even other civic and church groups.

SERVICE-LEARNING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. THE AGENCY PARTNER: (non-profit organization)

- Designate a Service-Learning supervisor who will serve as the liaison with CASL, the faculty, and the students.
- Follow the recommended CASL agency checklist, including:
 - Provide Service-Learning project descriptions to the Service-Learning staff before first day of class
 - Schedule orientation dates and times before first day of class, send to CASL
 - Orient the student to the agency partner's rules, policies, procedures, methods, and operations, community issue, and population served (during the third-fourth weeks of semester).
 - Sign student agreement and log sheet (log sheet includes opportunity for you to evaluate the student)
These forms will be provided by students
 - Check-in formally with the students regularly (recommended: beginning, middle and end of semester AT THE MINIMUM).
- Notify the faculty partner immediately, preferably by phone, on any cause of dissatisfaction or of misconduct on the part of the student
- Maintain good communication with students, CASL staff, and faculty (return calls/e-mails within 2 days)
- Offer suggestions and ideas for improvement in CASL procedures and opportunities

2. PBCC SERVICE-LEARNING STAFF

- Recruit, support, and facilitate faculty, students, and agency Service-Learning partnerships
- Find, screen, and orient agencies whose needs match class learning objectives
- Provide workshops and trainings about Service-Learning
- Facilitate student placement through classroom visits and agency referral lists, upon request
- Provide contracts and forms that clarify responsibilities and increase accountability
- Support and troubleshoot with students, agencies, and faculty
- Evaluate the Service-Learning experience for students, agencies, and faculty
- Maintain regular contact with agency partners, faculty, and students (at beginning, middle, and end of semester).
E-mail upcoming opportunities and information
- Seek and respond to feedback from agency partners, students, and faculty

3. FACULTY PARTNER:

- Set learning objectives for the service experience that relate to course objectives
- Identify community issues or service that relate to the class
- Contact screened agencies to clarify course goals and service expectations
- Adapt syllabus, class assignments, lecture examples, and class discussion to include links between course theory and service experience. Structure and schedule reflection assignments or activities
- Discuss with students the Service-Learning expectations and requirements, agency orientation dates, deadlines for starting service, and evaluation guidelines
- Use written agreements, time logs, evaluation instruments (recommended by CASL)
- Maintain regular contact with agency partners (recommended: beginning, middle, and end of semester)
- Evaluate student learning of service experience

4. STUDENT:

- Complete required amount of service hours and/or service project
- Attend agency orientation at scheduled time
- Sign agreement with agency partner
- Start service by the fifth week of the semester, or as specified in the course syllabus
- Track hours using hour log sheet, or another method specified in the course syllabus
- Maintain regular communication with agency partner regarding service hours and activities (recommended beginning, middle and end of semester AT THE MINIMUM).
- Respect rules, regulations, and confidentiality standards of agency
- Participate in reflection activities and assignments
- Evaluate Service-Learning experience

SERVICE-LEARNING AGENCY CHECKLIST

STEPS TO A MEANINGFUL SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Preparation

- ❑ Contact Center for Academic Service-Learning (CASL) staff to discuss partnership details, expectations, coordination, and agreements. www.pbcc.edu/x10427.xml
- ❑ Design a thorough position description for the students, and make available
- ❑ Schedule dates for orientation and service, including dates, times, and location.
- ❑ Discuss the Service-Learning partnership with your faculty partner.
- ❑ Review Memorandum of Understanding on the SL website <http://www.pbcc.edu/x10806.xml> .

Action

- ❑ Review and sign Service-Learning Agreement with student (student will bring it to the orientation).
- ❑ Orient the students to the agency, the clients, the community need, the service work, the staff, and the connection with their class.
- ❑ Help students understand the community issue your organization addresses. Provide background information (fact sheet, article, etc.).
- ❑ Assist service-learners to begin service by setting a start date. Help the student feel comfortable in your agency and prepared to learn and work.
- ❑ Sign student service log sheet regularly; students will bring it with them.

Reflection

- ❑ Check-in with students to help them process their experiences at your agency. You might find their responses very interesting.
 - Examples:
 - “Do you feel like you are making a difference? How?”
 - “Has this experienced changed the way you view [veterans, homeless issues, etc.]?”
 - “How does this relate to your coursework?”
 - “How is this experience affecting you?”

Evaluation

- ❑ Evaluate the student on the “Supervisor Evaluation of Student” form.
- ❑ Solicit feedback from service-learners and agency staff.
- ❑ Critically evaluate the endeavor. Did the service meet a critical need? Did participants learn from the experience/value it? Did your organization benefit?
- ❑ Consider what you might do differently next time. Contact CASL staff to suggest how they can be more helpful to you and your agency.

Celebration

- ❑ Recognize the service-learners’ efforts, as well the efforts of those at your agency who helped the students learn. This is also a wonderful opportunity to invite students to continue working with your agency.

ORIENTATION FOR STUDENTS

Once the agency and service-learner have agreed upon a placement and a specific assignment, the service-learner needs an orientation including:

- ❑ An introduction to the agency, including the physical plan and layout of the agency as well as a historical background.
- ❑ An explanation of the program (goals and objectives).
- ❑ A description of the client base, including numbers of clients served, socio-economic and other demographic data, and political subdivisions served.
- ❑ Community issues the program addresses and why there is a need for the service. A discussion of the service-learner's role, including specific tasks and specific benefits to the agency, and specific importance to the population serviced, and to the community in general.
- ❑ An introduction to the staff. Although persons who will be supervising the volunteer should attend, it is important the volunteer be introduced to all agency personnel with whom contact will be made. This gives the student a sense of his/her role within the context of the agency structure.
- ❑ A handbook or other written materials should be distributed to the service-learner during the orientation.
- ❑ Establishment of a start date. Keep in mind the number of hours the student must complete during the semester. The earlier the Service-Learning students can start their service the better; however, students must start by the fifth week of the semester. Don't let the students leave orientation without knowing when they plan to return. One way to limit risk in any activity is to properly educate, train, and prepare participants.
- ❑ Discuss risk and safety guidelines. Training students in safety procedures, potential dangers, and the risk management policies of your organization. In addition to proper education, waivers and informed consent forms can help document how organizations communicated potential risks and that participants understood those risks.

AGENCY TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Adapted from Miami Dade Community College

- **Service-Learners are students, not volunteers:**

Supervisors should keep in mind that Service-Learning students have a two-fold objective for their service experience. First the students must perform a service that helps to meet a community need; second the students incorporate that service into their course concepts in order to further their understanding of the material.

- **Be aware that some students may not meet your needs. Be Selective:**

The final decision is yours, some students may not fit the needs of your agency. Talk to the Service-learning staff, we may be able to find the student a more appropriate placement.

- **Be an involved teacher and mentor:**

Students look to their agency supervisor as their role-model in the community. The agency supervisor is a partner in the students education; helping students make the connection between abstract concepts and their actual service.