

BUFFALO STATE

Civic and Community Engagement



BUFFALO STATE

The State University of New York

Engagement, Excellence, and Social Responsibility

Service-Learning Faculty Handbook

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Buffalo State Civic and Community Engagement

Service-learning is an important and growing movement in higher education. There is also growing support on campus and in our region for community engaged learning. The Buffalo State Civic and Community Engagement Office (CCE) supports Buffalo State faculty, students, and community partners involved in CCE partnerships and volunteer initiatives. In addition, we are a member of the Western New York Service Learning Coalition (WNYSLC), a regional organization that supports and expands service-learning connections to improve and benefit our local communities.

This handbook has been written to increase your understanding of service-learning and how it can work in your classes. In addition, CCE has built a resource library in our office. The bibliography for our resource library as well as additional information and links can be found on our website at <http://cce.buffalostate.edu>

The Civic and Community Engagement Office seeks to create long-term, meaningful partnerships between you – the faculty member – and community agencies through service-learning. These partnerships result from an increasing understanding nation-wide that higher education institutions have a responsibility to the communities in which they are located. Students benefit from these experiential learning opportunities; communities benefit from the knowledge and expertise of student learners; and classroom curricula come to life through student contact with the knowledge, experience, and expertise in the adjoining community.

The Buffalo State Volunteer and Service Learning Center (VSLC) was created in the fall of 2003 with the assistance of a Learn and Serve grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service. The grant was written in partnership with the West Side Community Collaborative (WSCC), a collaboration of over 30 West Side nonprofit, community, and faith-based organizations, plus representatives from local public and private schools. Although partnership is not limited to the WSCC area, the focus of the service-learning program at Buffalo State is to develop and implement activities with partners in neighborhoods near campus. In July, 2017, the VSLC was renamed the Civic and Community Engagement Office (CCE) to more accurately reflect the value Buffalo State places on its community collaborations.

Definition of Service-Learning

Service learning is “a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

Unlike extracurricular voluntary service, **service-learning is a course-based experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material** through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations. Unlike practica and internships, the experiential activity in a service-learning course is not necessarily skill-based within the context of professional education. To be sure, at institutions where many students come from underserved populations, service activities often include on-campus as well as off-campus activities. However, few (service-learning) programs provide assistance to for-profit enterprises – except where those enterprises themselves can be regarded as serving more than proprietary interests.”

(Bringle & Hatcher, 1996)

Service-learning...

- meets identified community needs;
- is collaborative between the college *and* community partners;
- provides structured time for individuals to reflect about what they did during the service activity and the connection between in-class and out-of-class learning;
- promotes cognitive as well as affective growth and development;
- enhances what is taught (and learned) elsewhere by extending the learning environment beyond what is usually considered to be its “normal limits;”
- helps foster caring for others.

(Adapted from AmeriCorps NCCC, Service-Learning Resource Kit)

Benefits to Students and Faculty

- Students and faculty report that service-learning has a positive impact on students' academic learning.
- Students and faculty report that service-learning improves students' ability to apply what they have learned in "the real world."
- Service-learning participation has an impact on such academic outcomes as demonstrated complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development.
- Students engaged in service-learning report stronger faculty relationships than those who are not involved in service-learning.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on reducing stereotypes and facilitating cultural and racial understanding. (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, and Gray, 2001.)
- Feedback from selected students:
 - 'I became more aware of "real world" issues and I learned how the agency where I was placed depends on the community to meet the needs of the homeless.'
 - 'I didn't just talk about a problem, I did something about it. I got involved.'

Benefits to the Community

- Service-learning initiatives provide the community with energetic, enthusiastic college students who meet educational, human service, safety, and environmental needs.
- Service-learning creates a spirit of civic responsibility. Many students may commit to a lifetime of volunteering after this experience.
- Feedback from selected community partners:
 - 'Buffalo State offers many ways to share its mission with the work of our organization and its commitment to those in need.'
 - 'Your students fulfilled a key role in our organization by reaching out to prospective clients and helping our agency move into a new office. They also introduced fresh ideas to incorporate in our marketing plan.'
 - 'Your student committed a great deal of time to our organization that benefits our work long term.'

Step 1: Establishing a Service-Learning Course (3-6 months before semester begins)

Initially, a faculty member makes a decision to: 1) incorporate service-learning into a course he or she already teaches; or 2) develop a new course that includes a service-learning component. The service-learning project that students will complete should directly relate to the content of the course. Service-learning projects do not replace class time and instruction. They are out-of-class experiences, like other assignments (e.g., reading, writing an essay, etc.). They are offered to enhance classroom learning. Faculty-guided reflection in class provides students opportunities to connect course learning objectives to community experiences.

The faculty member then

- a. identifies what learning objectives the service-learning experience will meet;
- b. determines in what way the service will tie in with course content;
- c. decides whether the service-learning will be a requirement or an option within the course;
- d. determines a minimum number of service hours the students must complete for the course (A minimum of 15 hours of service-learning is recommended, but actual requirements vary on average from 10-30 hours.);
- e. revises the course syllabus to incorporate a description of the service and how learning will be assessed;

Reflection: Structured reflection activities are a key component to successful service-learning. (Please refer to the Appendix, page 15 for additional information and suggested activities.)

- f. can request for S-L designation, if desired (See Appendix, page 17.).

Step 2: Identifying Service-Learning Sites (1-3 months before semester begins)

- a. *Designing content-specific service-learning partnerships*

Whether a community partner is involved with work that provides human services, cares for the environment, promotes good health, empowers students and communities, or offers a myriad of other nonprofit missions, the agency must provide students with experiences that will teach.

A few examples of mutually beneficial service-learning opportunities include the following:

*marketing students who hone skills by promoting an organization's identity or advertise services;

*sociology students who learn about community development through data gathering and information analysis of community strengths and challenges;

*anthropology students who learn about the cultural aspects of death and dying from senior center members;

*education majors who learn to teach by tutoring K-12 learners;

*hospitality students who learn about special event planning by assisting with the planning of a community event.

b. *Identifying placement sites and activities*

The next step is finding the appropriate service activity for your students. Numerous resources are available to help you find appropriate service-learning placement sites.

- The Civic and Community Engagement Office gathers information and project ideas from the community and shares these ideas with faculty members looking for service project ideas. Our faculty have partnered with more than 200 community agencies! Before every fall and spring semester, CCE hosts two community partners' meetings so that faculty can meet in person with agency representatives who are eager to work with us on specific projects. Bring your syllabus to share! These face-to-face conversations are most productive and lead to the best possible matches, consistent with the goals and objectives of the courses and the agencies' unmet needs.
- Some faculty members have existing contacts with community organizations that may be good hosts to service-learning students. However, the scope of a project can often be larger than one community partner can handle. The WNYSLC maintains a list of community partners at <http://levesqueinstitute.niagara.edu/programs/wnyslc/> who have been identified through a formal membership application process and site visit by WNYSLC staff to ensure that sites have the capacity to effectively supervise students in service positions.
- Talking with other faculty who have had successful service-learning placements is another great way to find a suitable community partner. In addition, reviewing the syllabi of similar courses may help you identify new possibilities for partnerships. Sample syllabi are available on the Campus Compact website at www.compact.org/syllabi.
- The Volunteer Center at The Service Collaborative of WNY (www.volunteerwny.org) maintains a region-wide database of opportunities and can be still another good source for prospective partners

c. *Defining service requirements and logistics*

Once service activities are determined with the partner(s), details of service requirements must be worked out.

Suggested Topics For Discussion with Community Partner:

- requirements for background checks or other volunteer screening;
- any required agency volunteer orientation or other introductory orientation for students at the service site, to include safety in the workplace (See Appendix, page 19, for additional details.);
- total number of service-learning students the agency partner can accommodate and the number of students to be on-site at any given time (It is a good idea to be conservative, since service-learning can be demanding on supervising staff's time.);
- dates that students will begin and end their service;
- hours the agency is open and hours that students are needed to assist with the designated project;
- identifying the person who will be supervising students;
- expectations of students in the community, e.g., appropriate dress, punctuality, etc.;
- syllabus, that includes the learning objectives, which should be provided to the community partner with a copy to CCE;
- details of what the students will accomplish (This may be a specific project to be completed, a template or timeline, or general expectations of daily activities. Some faculty members choose to use learning contracts, agreed upon mutually by students, faculty, and community partners.);
- how faculty and partners prefer to communicate, the frequency of check-ins, and contact information;
- inviting your community partners to present their potential projects to your class. If they agree, contact CCE by email at cce@buffalostate.edu or call 878-3919. so that arrangements for mailing guest parking passes can be made.

The faculty member is obviously the first link for students who have questions or problems when completing their service requirements, but the Civic and Community Engagement Office can also assist in this area. CCE staff are available to communicate with the community partners throughout the semester via phone, e-mail, or in person to check about concerns. They will keep you informed about any feedback we receive from the partner. If a problem should arise that you have difficulty troubleshooting, feel free to contact Civic and Community Engagement for additional support.

- Natural and Social Sciences: Deborah Renzi
<mailto:renzidk@buffalostate.edu>
- Education: Laura Rao
<mailto:hilla@buffalostate.edu>
- Professions: Aurora Schunk
<mailto:schulam@buffalostate.edu>
- Arts and Humanities: Aurora Schunk
<mailto:schulam8@buffalostate.edu>
- Learning Communities: Deborah Renzi
<mailto:renzidk@buffalostate.edu>

Step 3: Teaching the Course

In your first class meeting, review the service-learning requirement with your students. You are welcome to request a CCE staff member to present an orientation or feel free to use the *powerpoint presentation* at <http://cce.buffalostate.edu/resources>, "Service-Learning Orientation," created by Civic and Community Engagement to frame your own remarks. Please emphasize to your students that by participating in service activities, they are representing themselves, you, the faculty member, and the institution, and they must behave accordingly. If our community partner is not present, describe the potential projects, location, hours of operation, etc., to the students yourself.

Students are expected to do the following:

- actively participate in the service activity;
- promptly notify faculty member and community partner of any time conflicts in the service placement;
- perform service requirements in a timely manner;
- complete service-related coursework, such as journals and reflection activities.

Subsequently, distribute the student availability sheet (<http://cce.buffalostate.edu/facultyforms>) so that students can provide feedback related to their preferences before you do the matching. After that is completed, notify CCE, the agencies, and the students. Additional information regarding transportation/directions can be accessed at

http://cce.buffalostate.edu/sites/cce.buffalostate.edu/files/uploads/Documents/Service-Learning/CP%20Map_July2014.pdf

We urge you also provide your students with a service log (<http://cce.buffalostate.edu/facultyforms>) if you want a record of their hours, independently of any method the community partner uses to account for their having completed the required hours of service.

- **Communication:** Communication among community partners, faculty, students, and CCE is very important to the success of the service-learning activities. It will be especially effective if the partners communicate periodically throughout the semester.
- **Evaluation of Student Learning:** Students must be evaluated on what they have learned relative to the course curriculum as a result of their community based experiences. This can be done in a variety of ways including a series of reflective journal entries evaluated by a rubric, an end-of-semester presentation connecting course theory to practice, or the evaluation of materials produced for the community partner. See Appendix on page 15 to explore ideas for evaluation. A CCE staff member can also discuss additional possibilities.

In addition, you may choose to use the Service-Learning Evaluation of Student by Community Partner (<http://cce.buffalostate.edu/facultyforms>) to solicit individual feedback about your students from community partners. We recommend that you use this form only if your students have completed 20 hours or more of service. This information may be helpful for grading purposes depending on your course learning objectives.

- **Project Assessment:** Periodically assessing your partnership or project is very important and can help the faculty member and community partner agency to gauge the degree to which the service-learning project achieves its purpose. The Civic and Community Engagement Office sends end-of-semester surveys to community partners to assess the impact of service-learning and identify possible areas of improvement, and shares the relevant information with faculty members.

A periodic faculty survey will also be emailed to you so that we can gather feedback on your experiences using service-learning as a pedagogy.

- **Recognition:** The recognition of service is an important aspect of encouraging student community engagement. Students, faculty, student groups, and community partners are recognized for their outstanding service to the community every May at a Celebration of Service featuring visual and poster presentations and an awards ceremony that acknowledges students, faculty, student groups, and community partners for their outstanding commitment to service. Mid-semester every fall and spring semester, CCE will email you an announcement regarding the awards nomination process. We encourage you and your students to consider submitting nominations. In addition, all service-learning students registered for your course in Banner will receive certificates. They will be mailed to you for distribution at semester's end..

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Reflection

Reflection, the *critical* link between service and learning, is often times the most challenging part of service-learning for faculty and students alike. For that reason, the following describes the rationale for promoting critical reflection and provides strategies and examples of possible reflection activities to incorporate into your class.

What is Reflection?

Reflection can take on many forms, all of which are structured exercises designed to analyze connections between the service and classroom components of the course.

Eyler, Giles and Schmiede (1996) concluded from their research that critical reflection in service-learning is:

- *Continuous*: an on-going part of learning in the course that provides continuity through each event or experience; reflection occurs before, during, and after the experience.
- *Connected*: the link between service and the intellectual and academic interests of students, resulting in the synthesis of action and thought.
- *Challenging*: an intervention to engage students in issues in a broader, more critical way; reflection pushes students to think in new ways.
- *Contextualized*: appropriate for the setting and context of a particular service-learning course or program; reflection corresponds in a meaningful way to the topics and experiences that form material for reflection.

Sample Reflection Activities

- **Discussion Sessions**: Structured discussions allow students to share experiences and learn from students working at other sites or other times at the same location. The sessions may be designed with particular themes. Questions that will assist with conversation during a discussion include:
 - What did you see that reinforced a key course concept (Name one.)?
 - What did you see that contradicted a key course concept (Name one.)?
 - If your service experience reinforces this course concept, what are the implications? Or, if your service experience contradicts this course concept, how do you reconcile these contradictions?
 - What perspective do you now have on the various viewpoints presented through course concepts and your service experience?

- **Electronic Discussions:** The faculty member sets up a site for students to discuss their service experience via Blackboard or e-mail on a regular basis and posts questions for consideration and topics for directed writings.
- **Journals:** Journals are a common way to assess student learning in a service-learning course. A description of the students' service activities as well as written, thoughtful reflections about those activities should be included.
 - Personal Journals: Students may write about any aspect of the service-learning experience on a regular basis.
 - Directed Journals: Students are asked to describe what they did at the service site after each session, to comment on their reactions and feelings about what happened, and to analyze what happened on the basis of conceptual material from the course.

Journals should be collected throughout the semester. Early and regular feedback for students' journal entries is critical in teaching students how to develop their reflection skills. Students might be asked to address some of the following questions:

- What have I learned about myself through this experience? Do I have more/less understanding or empathy than I did before my service?
- In what ways, if any, have my sense of self, my values, my sense of "community," my willingness to serve others, and my self-confidence/self-esteem been altered through this experience?
- Have my motivations for volunteering changed? In what ways?
- How has this experience challenged stereotypes or prejudices I have/had?
- Have I challenged myself, my ideals, my philosophies, my concept of life, or of the way I live?
- What would I change about this situation if I were in charge?
- What have I learned about this agency, the people, and the community?
- Was there a moment of failure, success, indecision, doubt, humor, frustration, happiness, sadness?
- Do I feel my actions have had an impact? What more needs to be done?
- Does this experience complement or contrast with what I am learning in class? How?
- Has learning through experience taught me things that are different from or the same as the class? In what ways?
- From this service experience, can I identify an underlying or overarching issue that influences the community?
- Do social issues have a different meaning for me as a result of this experience? In what way?
- How will this experience alter my future behaviors/attitudes?

(Adapted from the Volunteer Action Center-Florida International University)

Service-Learning Designation

A college senate-approved service-learning course designation was implemented at Buffalo State beginning in the Spring 2012 semester in response to students' request for service-learning course information during registration. In order to receive the designation, faculty must ensure that their course meets the approved criteria described below, request designation, and receive approval from a faculty review board.

College Senate-Approved Service-Learning Criteria:

1. Students meet an identified community need through service in partnership with organizations, schools, or other community groups. The course requires a minimum of 10 hours of service for designation (for a 3-credit course); however, the VSLC recommends at least 15-20 hours of community-based work.
2. The service experience relates to the subject matter of the course and is clearly described in the syllabus.
3. Students are provided structured opportunities to reflect critically on their service experience through writing, discussion, presentation, artistic endeavors, etc.
4. At least 15% of the final grade for the course must be based on academic assignments that explicitly link the community service to the academic content of the course.

Your syllabus should also include a summary statement such as

"The service-learning component of this course will allow students to work [State number of hours or write "a minimum of 10 hours."] throughout the semester with [List community partners, if possible.] to meet identified community needs through [Describe project.]. Reflection activities that describe how students reflect by means of journals, in-class discussions, reflection paper, etc. will connect the community-based experience to course material and be part of the course grade."

We strongly encourage faculty members to discuss their plans with their chairs since there is NO formal department chair approval needed.

The designation process is as follows:

Faculty submit a *Service-Learning Designation Request Form* with a syllabus demonstrating the criteria outlined above. <https://buffalostate.wufoo.com/forms/s15jrbjb1ihjeh/>

1. Members of the Buffalo State Service-Learning Oversight Committee will review the form and syllabus.
2. If approved, faculty and department chairs will be notified.
3. Once a course is approved, a syllabus will be required to be on file in CCE each semester the course is taught as service-learning.

Approved service-learning courses are attached to the sections submitted as service-learning. Service-learning participation will also be recorded on student transcripts.

Safety First

Reminders to students...

- Familiarize yourself with any new area and be aware of your surroundings.
- Travel with a companion when possible.
- Carry only what you need.
- Let someone know where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Always lock your doors and leave a light on.
- If you are driving, park in well-lit areas.
 - Check your back seat before entering your car.
 - Do not open your window more than one inch if you respond to strangers who approach your car.
 - Keep your doors locked.
 - Never leave valuables in plain sight.
- Never transport a client in your own vehicle.
- Never ignore gut feelings.
- Expect the unexpected.
- If you become a victim of a crime, call 911 (or 878-6333 if you are on campus). Make certain these emergency numbers are entered into speed dial.

References and Sources

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