



Mount Wachusett
Community College

Service Learning



Agency Tips & Documents

2008/2009 Academic Year

Common Questions Agencies Ask about Service Learning

What is Service Learning?

Service Learning is a teaching method that includes community service activity as part of the medium of learning. Service Learning students are actively involved in providing a minimum of 20 hours service at a community based organization or agency.

Service Learning engages students in service within the community as an integrated aspect of a course. Service Learning structures opportunities for them to reflect on their service experience to gain a better understanding of course content and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Service Learning is an active, collaborative, and inquiry based learning experiences that meets defined course objectives and identified community needs. Service Learning options are offered in many departments including: Business, Science and Technology, and Social Sciences.

How is Service Learning different from other types of practice-based education?

Service Learning emphasizes the service contribution of students and links the service experience to specific learning objectives of a course. Service Learning:

- is unpaid and service oriented.
- is designed to provide service as a means of reinforcing classroom theory.
- focuses on analysis and reflection of the experience.
- occurs during a minimum of 20-30 hours over the semester.

Internships and Cooperative education typically occur after necessary course work is complete. They provide students with experience to develop professional skills and:

- are not service oriented.
- are intense experiences with a focus on career orientation.
- designed to focus on the technical aspect of a career.
- require a commitment of 120 hours or more to complete.

Will Service Learning take too much time?

It does take time to set up the logistics of a Service Learning option, to train, orient and supervise Service Learning students. It gets easier each time you accept a Service Learning student since the amount of time required to complete required forms, evaluate student performance and communicate with our faculty decreases as you become familiar with the program and our objectives.

What risks are involved in Service Learning?

College insurance does not cover Service Learning class work off campus. Students are to be considered as volunteers and it is up to each agency to determine the need for volunteer insurance and limited criminal history checks. Students need to be informed of potential risks before they volunteer. All students have signed an informed consent form indicating they are aware of risks and will not hold the college liable in the case of an accident. They have also completed a Service Learning Contract, listing the specifics of their service including course, personal and agency objectives and their minimum service hours.

Do students receive a grade for their work?

Their work in the community is part of the course designed for them. They received credit for the course, which includes the community service and the learning that results from the service. As with any course, their grade is a reflection of that learning and their commitment to learn.

How is the Service Learning student's performance evaluated?

Service Learning is defined with an emphasis on learning. Student performance will be evaluated in a number of ways including: their participation in the Service Learning activity including time commitments, specific papers, journals or activities that are devoted to reflecting on the experience and the completion of course objectives. You will be asked to provide input with regard to the Service Learning students' performance via communication with his/her instructors and in completing and returning the MWCC Agency Evaluation of Service Learning Student (included in this package).

How do I keep track of their hours?

Each student receives a MWCC Service Learning Time sheet (included in this package). This form must be signed and returned to their instructor before final credit is awarded. If your organization or agency requires any other form of volunteer tracking, please notify the student and the Service Learning office.

How do I keep in contact with MWCC regarding our Service Learning project?

You should have a designated time to contact the student's instructor to discuss how the student is performing and any other pertinent information. Some faculty members will want to arrange site visits to observe the student's work at your agency. Contact the Service Learning office immediately if you have any problems with the student's attendance, performance or an accident occurs. The Service Learning office number is 978-630-9288.

Advice on Supervising a Service Learning Student

What can I expect our Service Learning student to do?

- Fulfill the objectives stated in their Service Learning contract while learning about your agency and performing needed community service.
- Listen to constructive feedback and learn from reflecting on their successes and challenges.
- Succeed in the planned service experience through a combination of appropriate service tasks, support and flexibility.

What is our Service Learning student NOT expected to do?

- Know how to do everything right away. Service Learning students are not temporary workers or regular paid adult employees. They are students who are reinforcing their classroom learning while performing a service to your agency and the community.
- Repetitive, boring assignments for prolonged periods of time that have no relationship to the objectives stated in their Service Learning contracts.
- Meet excessive standards of performance. Don't set student up for failure. Provide whatever training, supervision or instruction you feel necessary to insure success.
- Don't expect Service Learning students to do everything perfectly all the time. They need to be given a chance to understand what they do right and wrong. Reflecting on their actions and reactions are a part of learning from their successes and failures.

What do I do if the Service Learning student efforts are not satisfactory?

- To prevent this situation, make your explanations about a particular task clear and direct, including expected completion time, format, etc. To confirm that the student understands, ask him/her to repeat the instructions to you.
- If the student's efforts do not meet your expectations, you should provide feedback to the student, explain what was not satisfactory about their work and give him/her another chance to do it better. Help the student reflect on their actions and reactions to help reinforce their learning.
- Contact your Service Learning student's instructor or the Service Learning office at MWCC if you are unable to help your Service Learning student improve his/her performance. It is imperative that you communicate with us so that we may help the student achieve his/her goals or take other action if necessary.

What should I do with the Service Learning student on his/her first day?

- Orient them to your department and to the employees s/he will be interacting with. Answer questions such as: What is the main purpose of this department? What does each person do?
- Cover basic expectations with regard to your workplace including:
Working hours and Service Learning time commitment; What to do if the student is going to be late or cannot attend as scheduled; Dress code; Confidentiality; Policies and Procedures; Who should be called if there is an emergency; and Available equipment and how it should be used.
- Go over the tasks and responsibilities of the planned work experience:
What is he/she expected to do; Review his/her Service Learning Objectives (stated on contract); and Are there any dangerous situations the student should be aware of?
- Establishing a working relationship with the student:
How often will you meet; Who will supervise his/her work; How often will s/he work independently and Do you have any specific expectations for the student?
- Spend concentrated time with the student and have the resources available to help him/her complete the tasks involved in their Service Learning experience.
- Once the Service Learning experience is underway, provide feedback to the student about his/her performance and, help him/her reflect on their actions and reactions. Plan a short meeting every two weeks to discuss your assessment of the students Service Learning commitment.

Your Service Learning Role and Responsibility

When agreeing to collaborate in a Mount Wachusett Community College Service Learning Opportunity your agency is expected to:

- Identify real needs for Service Learning volunteer assistance.
- Determine the need for CORI investigations & arrange for them.
- Understand the educational objectives of the Service Learning experience.
- Inform students of any and all potential risks.
- Provide feedback to the student, instructor and Service Learning office.
- Complete and return all required MWCC forms and contracts.
- Orient and train students to accomplish tasks.
- Supervise and support the work of our Service Learning students.
- Evaluate student performance in terms of their Service Learning objectives
- Assess impact of Service Learning students on your agency or clients.
- Assist Service Learning students as they reflect on their experiences.

Students involved in Service Learning experiences are expected to:

- Conduct his/herself in a professional manner and communicate any questions, problems or concerns with their agency supervisor and instructor.
- Perform their Service Learning experience reliably and well:
by being punctual, conscientious and consistent in attendance,
notifying supervisor and instructor if they are unable to participate as scheduled, and
considering as confidential all information and situations concerning other people, clients, employees and agencies/organizations.
- Treating each person they work with, and for, with respect.
- Complete and return all required forms and contracts.
- Attend any required training, orientation, evaluation or review sessions.