FAU

WEPPNER CENTER FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE

Division of Student Affairs
Florida Atlantic University

Academic
SERVICE-LEARNING
AT FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

Community Partner Guide

*The Weppner Center for Civic Engagement & Service (WCCES)
supports the development and implementation of
Academic Service-Learning experiences in
academic courses and programs of study at FAU.*

*Our goal is to enrich the learning experience for students
through relevant and meaningful community service.*

Academic Service-Learning programs consist of four main roles:

The Community	Students	Academic Instructors	A S-L Program Staff

**Successful Academic Service-Learning (A S-L) programs largely depend on the level of
partnership and collaboration between community agency and educational institution.**

*This handbook is about understanding and developing a critical partnership with results that can be
dramatic and transformational for your agency, the Academic Service-Learner, and our community.
Please review this handbook carefully as it is the first step in the process of becoming an Academic
Service-Learning partner and placement site.*

What is Academic Service-Learning?

- Academic Service-Learning (A S-L) is a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service *with* academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.

- A S-L is more than a volunteer activity; it is designed to enrich the learning experience through hands-on activity by integrating community service with instruction. It requires students to apply what they learn in the classroom and to reflect on their experiences by thinking, discussing, and writing about them.

- A S-L teaches students how to apply academic knowledge to real-life civic issues, promotes teamwork and collaborative problem-solving, develops life skills and makes learning more personally meaningful.

Mechanics of Academic Service-Learning

How is your agency selected as an A S-L partner?

Faculty members incorporate an Academic Service-Learning (A S-L) component within their class curriculum, either as an option or a requirement. **Sometimes faculty members choose** an agency or agencies whose needs are related to his or her teaching objectives and design an A S-L project around both the course objectives and community needs. **Other times, faculty give students freedom to choose** their project and seek out their own community partner. In this case, students choose an agency based on recommendations from their professor or based on the community opportunities assessments collected by the Weppner Center for Civic Engagement & Service (WCCES). These Community Opportunities Assessments are posted on our website at http://www.fau.edu/volunteer/ServiceLearning/Community_Opportunities_Database
The faculty member then **sets a minimum number of hours** to be completed and develops a **reflective component** that may include assignments such as journals, readings, class discussions, writing assignments, and class presentations about the service experience.

What are the benefits of Academic Service-Learning?

The benefits of Academic Service-Learning are reciprocal

For Faculty

· Incorporate diverse teaching styles
· Represent the college for best teaching practices
· Further engage students
· Partner with the community
· Incorporate diverse teaching styles
· Fulfill service requirement for tenure
· Obtain opportunities for research/publishing

For Students

· Apply and understand concepts from class
· Build résumé
· Experience civic responsibility
· Prepare to lead lives of engaged, democratic citizenship
· Explore career options
· Learn about community agencies and their clients
· Gain awareness of social issues
· Develop life skills
· Broaden horizons

For Community Partners

· Gain community development expertise
· Connect to University resources
· Acquire skilled volunteers
· Utilize invaluable people-power to fulfill community opportunities
· Inject fresh energy and creativity
· Strengthen advocacy efforts
· Enhance public awareness of community needs
· Build long-lasting relationships
· Identify potential employees

> The Academic Service Learning activities in our courses...not only challenge students to apply their learning in a real world context, but result in students' personal satisfaction and feeling of empowerment that they can make a difference in their communities.
>
> - Susan T. Toth, Director of Education, Pine Jog Environmental Education Center
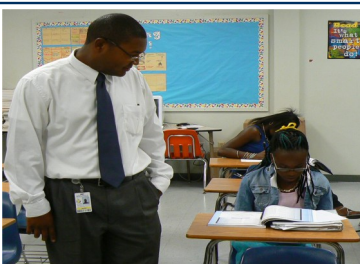
How do Academic Service-Learners differ...

...from regular volunteers?

- A S-L students serve in conjunction with an academic course - their service work is part of their grade.
- A S-L students may need things ordinary volunteers do not: a steady schedule, ongoing supervision, signed timesheets, and performance evaluations.
- A S-L students are more accountable for the quality and consistency of their work.
- The combination of focus on meeting community needs, clear learning objectives, and intentional reflection on what is being learned makes A S-L unique and fundamentally different from Volunteerism, Community Service, Field Education, and Internships.

...from interns?

- Internships are often stand-alone learning experiences without a substantial class component. Time spent on A S-L is part of a student's overall out-of-class work for a course.
- Many internships require 70– 120 hours of work per semester. A S-L typically requires 10 – 40 hours of work per semester.
- Sometimes interns are paid. A S-L activities are always unpaid.

> **Speaking of interns...**
> **Does the Weppner Center for Civic Engagement & Service provide interns?**
> No, internships are typically arranged through the *University Co-operative Education Program*, run by the FAU Career Development Center. Their contact info is below:
> **FAU Career Development Center**
> http://www.fau.edu/cdc/
> **561.297.3520   career@fau.edu**

What are appropriate tasks for A S-L students?

The range of appropriate placements is defined by the specific content of the particular course and tasks should always be relevant to course learning objectives.

→ The best results are achieved when project tasks are carefully planned in advance.

→ Students may work on projects on campus, at home, or at your agency's sites.

→ Students should have some degree of contact with the people your agency serves. Projects that involve direct, hands-on work with your agency's staff and/or community are ideal.

→ However, we understand that your agency may need assistance with projects that involve indirect or capacity-building work such as publicity, research, technical assistance, or support for special events. So, depending on the course, these projects may be appropriate as well.

Example:
Helping a YMCA increase the number of children served would be a great task for a marketing class while tutoring at-risk youth would not

Example:
A student serving at your agency for a Spanish class should perform tasks that will allow him or her to speak Spanish, or learn about your agency's role within the Latino community.

Example:
Clerical tasks such as filing, bookkeeping, and answering phones would only be acceptable if they apply to a course's learning objectives, as they may in a Business Administration course

Tips for Agency Success

1. Remember, Academic Service-Learners are students, not volunteers

Students use their A S-L experience as the basis for understanding their college course. Help students think about the organizational context, relevant social issues, and agency impact. Students should be doing service _with_ the community and not for or to the community.

2. Plan Ahead

Clear, well thought-out A S-L placement descriptions outlining tasks, responsibilities, and skills needed must be communicated to the student and to the student's instructor.

Things to consider:

- Are there projects that you and your staff are doing now that could be divided up and given to one or several academic service-learning students?
- Is there a project that would benefit the community you serve and that you've always wanted to do but never had the time to organize?
- Positions that carry some degree of responsibility and involve community contact are ideal.

3. Be Selective. Some Academic Service-Learning students may not match your needs.

Although the WCCES will refer student A S-L candidates to your agency, _the final selection will be made by you._ If a student's qualifications and/or motivations are not in harmony with your needs, it is your right and obligation to not accept this student.

4. Plan around the Academic Calendar

Students must be able to complete their project within the semester time frame of 12-15 weeks, maximum. Agencies are asked to provide orientation and training at the beginning of student placement and provide projects that can be completed in one semester. Below is a general guide to the FAU Calendar:

Fall Semester: 3rd week of August – 2nd week of December
Spring Semester: 1st week of January – 1st week of May
Summer A & B Semester: Mid-May – 2nd week of August

5. Orient. Train. Supervise. Reflect.

Academic Service-Learning students will need the following to ensure a beneficial experience:

Orientation should provide A S-L students with answers to questions like:
- _Where do I fit in?_
- _What is expected of me?_
- _How do I get support if my supervisor is not available?_

You may want to introduce them to other staff, give them a tour of the facility, and share with them your mission.

Training should ensure students have required knowledge about the organization and its activities to perform their tasks. For example, if A S-L students were completing a project tutoring middle school students once a week, they would need to know with which assignments they could assist.

Supervision should provide feedback to students on how they are doing and what can be improved upon. Supervision should also ensure that students feel their work is meaningful and that their experience matches the previously decided upon project plan.

Reflection should help the student interpret the experience and the relationship between what he/she is doing and the work of the agency and others. See the attached reflection ideas for further suggestions.

6. Be a mentor

The student-supervisor relationship is one of the most significant parts of the student's experience and often determines the success of the placement. The supervisor is truly a partner in the student's education and should view him or herself as an educator.

7. Say Thanks!

Like everyone, students want to be welcomed and appreciated. This could be a letter of recognition, a thank you note, or even just a simple acknowledgment of a job well done.

8. Talk To Us!

Keep the Weppner Center for Civic Engagement & Service staff and the student's professor informed of any concerns, problems, successes, or other pertinent issues related to the placement and/or student. We are here to facilitate the entire process and ensure that all parties are satisfied.

Steps to Becoming a Community Partner

Academic Service-Learning sites should be willing to do the following:

1. Become familiar with this Academic Service-Learning Community Partner Guide.

2. Arrange a phone conference with a member of the Weppner Center for Civic Engagement & Service (WCCES) staff to address any concerns and discuss your agency's Academic Service-Learning opportunities.

3. Use the **Community Opportunities Assessment Form** to prepare an Academic Service-Learning Opportunities Description that includes your agency's mission, specific A S-L opportunities and estimated project hours, orientation/training procedures, and any special conditions or requirements. Examples are available in the **Community Opportunities Bank** on our website.

4. Review the opportunities you have developed to ensure that you have a plan in place to foster student learning at your agency.

5. Interview A S-L student candidates to clarify the responsibilities of the project and to evaluate the students' abilities and appropriateness for the specific Academic Service-Learning opportunity. *Make a note of their professor's name and contact information - this will prove helpful if you contact our office with questions.

6. Provide the A S-L student with appropriate orientation, training, on-going supervision, evaluation, reflection, and recognition.

7. Report any problems, concerns, or issues to the WCCES and/or to the student's professor.

8. Join **NobleHour**, the electronic hour-tracking program used by FAU. This will expedite the hour tracking process and allow your agency to validate students' Academic-Service Learning hours online through **www.NobleHour.com**.

Contact Us

Website: www.fau.edu/volunteer

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