GENERAL INFORMATION
**WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?**

Service Learning (SL) is a specially designed learning experience in which students combine reflection with structured participation in community-based projects to achieve specified learning outcomes as part of an academic course and/or program requirement. By participating in academic community partnerships at the local, national or international level, students gain a richer mastery of course content, enhance their sense of civic responsibility, and ultimately develop a more integrated approach to understanding the relationship between theory, practice, ideas, values, and community.

Service learning:

- Focuses equally on education and service
- Meets identified community needs
- Is reciprocal because it benefits both the student and the service recipient
- Helps build partnerships between colleges and community-based organizations and schools
- Enhances the academic curriculum
- Promotes learning through active participation
- Provides structured time for reflection
- Enables students to use skills and knowledge in real-life situation
- Involves the community as teachers
- Fosters understanding of diversity and caring for others
- Builds leadership and cooperation skills
- Addresses complex problems in complex settings
- Promotes critical thinking and problem-solving in specific contexts
- Promotes deeper learning
- Provides opportunities for students to learn about challenges in their own communities

**SERVICE LEARNING: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS**

**Reciprocity:** The service and learning must be worthwhile and valuable for both the student and the community. There must be reciprocity between the server and those served.

**Reflection:** Intentional, systematic reflection about the experience must take place in order to accomplish critical thinking in community service experiences. Reflection of the service learning experience encourages introspection of other aspects of the student's life, thereby promoting learning before, during and after the service.

**Meaningful service:** Service tasks need to be worthwhile and challenging in order to strengthen students' critical thinking.
Diversity: A priority is placed on involving a broad cross-section of students working in diverse settings and with a diverse population within the community.

**BENEFITS OF SERVICE LEARNING**

**Benefits to Students**

- Learn from the agency personnel, clientele, experience and the instructor
- Explore majors and careers gain valuable job experience and strengthen the resume
- Enhance critical thinking skills and moral/ethical development
- Provide practical application of academic pursuits
- Increase understanding of multicultural values and traditions

**Benefits to Faculty**

- Form new ways of encouraging students' academic progress and comprehension
- Build avenues for greater understanding through intentional critical reflection
- Improve the motivational base for instruction and learning
- Generate support and positive publicity in the community
- Establishes relationships with people in the community

**Benefits to the Community**

- Increases opportunities for collaboration and the creation of possible solutions
- Enhances meaningful services to the community
- Increases awareness of community needs
- Creates opportunities for community partners to participate in student learning
- Builds community awareness of college programs and services

**POSSIBLE LEARNER OUTCOMES**

The following is a list of learning outcomes that research has shown are often (though not certain) achieved through service learning. One significant aspect of an effective service learning experience is for the student and instructor to review these possible outcomes and identify which are most important to the student and then set goals accordingly.

- Personal growth and development
- Self-esteem, sense of personal worth and competence
- Self-understanding, insight into self
- Independence, autonomy, assertiveness
- Sense of usefulness, of satisfaction in doing something worthwhile
- Personal power, belief in ability to make a difference
- Conscious set of personal values and beliefs reinforced in action
- Openness to new experiences, to take risks and accept challenge
- Ability to take responsibility, acknowledge consequences of actions
- Capacity to be productive, to stay determined in difficult tasks
- Exploration of new identities, unfamiliar roles
- Intellectual development and academic learning
- Basic academic skills (writing, reading, calculating, etc.)
- Subject matter knowledge and skills gained and enhanced through a broader range of experiences and associations
- Knowledge and understanding of people, of social reality, of how to get things done in a democratic society
- Higher-level thinking skills (critical thinking, problem solving)
- Application of academic knowledge and skills to real problems
- Skills learned from experience (to observe, ask questions, synthesize)