Student Service Learning:
Your Guide to a successful Service Learning Experience!

"Teachers open the doors, but you must enter by yourself."

~*Chinese Proverb*

Welcome to the **Community Partnerships Department (CPD)** and the **Service Learning Program**! This program allows students to work side by side with community partners to address a specific community need that is also related to an academic course. Working outside of the classroom will allow you to tap into the various community based knowledge systems to enhance your understanding of the course curriculum.
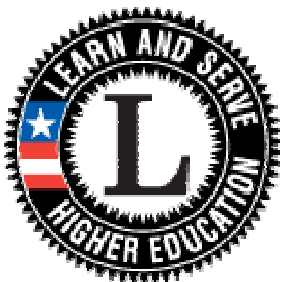
Have you ever wondered how a social or psychological theory would actually apply in "the real world?" Service Learning provides the answer and the experience.

"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."

~*William Butler Yeats*

What's in this Guide?

- **Service Learning Basics**
- **Troubleshooting Service Learning**
- **Quotes from Service Learning Students**
- **Examples of Service Learning Courses and Projects**
- **Useful Tips for a great experience!**
- **Service Learning Contract**
- **Service Learning Tracking Form**

To learn more about community based learning opportunities, please visit the Community Partnerships Department at:
http://www.thechicagoschool.edu/content.cfm/training_and_service

The Basics:
What is Service Learning?

You are most likely reading this because you have just registered for a Service Learning course OR you are thinking about enrolling in one. To better understand the benefits and what to expect from a Service Learning course, let's clarify the definition.

Service Learning combines service in the community with academic learning in the classroom. It is a **course based**, **credit earning, unpaid** educational experience where students address identified community needs by completing course related projects. You gain experience and education in the field and the community partner receives assistance; a perfectly symbiotic relationship!

Reflection is the most important part of Service Learning! Structured reflection activities led by your course instructor help you to connect what your learning in the community to what your studying in the classroom. You will increase your understanding of the course content, delve into social justice issues, and develop a deeper sense of what it means to be civically engaged; all through reflection and action.

"It has truly been somewhat of a culture shock to see children living in the same city I grew up in, who are extremely gifted and capable not even exposed to opportunities that I never looked at as privileged."

Move beyond the walls of the classroom…

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Q&A: Troubleshooting Service Learning

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1. What is Service Learning?

Service Learning allows you to **EXPERIENCE** what you are learning in a classroom while a community partner's needs are met. It's a win-win situation! Service activities are integrated into classroom curricula that help to broaden your understanding of the course content, gain a deeper appreciation of the issues at hand, and enhance you awareness as your place as a community citizen. What defines your community parameters?

2. How is Service Learning different than Volunteering or Community Service?

Service Learning moves beyond community service by providing an opportunity for students to deeply connect to academic learning through reflecting on and discussing the experiences that are impacting themselves and the community.

> *"I learned to understand myself and to overcome a lot of biases I had toward the poor."*

> *"There is only so much a book, DSM, or articles can teach you, until you actually work with survivors of trauma, abuse, etc."*

3. Where do students complete service learning projects?

Students can choose their own community organization, use the Community Partnerships Partner List, or ask their faculty member for suggestions.

4. What will I learn in a Service Learning course vs.. a non Service Learning course?

Reading about riding a bike only gets you so far! It's when you jump onto the seat and begin to peddle when you fully learn and understand the process. **Service Learning will give you the chance to live, breathe, and actively observe what you can only read about in a classroom**.

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"Service Learning improved my communication skills and leadership abilities. It also helped me further develop my conflict resolution skills…and gave me the opportunity to have an experience in a real environment."

5. What is reflection and why is it important?

Reflection allows you the time to stop, actually smell the roses, breathe in their luscious perfume, and observe how you feel in that moment. Without allowing yourself time to analyze, interpret, and observe your responses to experiences, you are missing out on many of life's opportunities, connections with people, and opportunities to learn more about yourself. To reflect on your service is to move beyond superficial knowledge to an embodied understanding. Think of a time when you read about homelessness and now think of moments when you witnessed it firsthand, what is the difference?

6. How much time do I have to devote to Service Learning?

SL time commitments vary from 2-4 hours per week to many more. You, your community partner, and your course instructor will decide what is most appropriate. Do you want to dig in deeper? Do more hours. Do you have 5 other jobs? Do less hours.

7. Do I get paid for Service Learning?

No. Getting paid for Service Learning would be like getting paid for a lab course. You apply a theory in a lab to further understand that theory. **Your service in the field is part of the course**. Think about a politician who might seek monetary gain when lobbying for specific legislation, is this serving the people's interest or a personal interest? How does the intention behind the service change your perspective?

BUT….

If you complete your required 2-4 hours of service and want to also earn some cash, you can work extra hours for FWS (if eligible).

8. If I have a problem at my site, and speaking to my site Supervisor is not an option, who do I report to?

You should try to resolve the problem by talking to your site supervisor first. However, if that is not an option or did not work, you have can speak directly to your course instructor or the community partner site liaison from the Community Partnerships Department. We are available to consult with you **AFTER** you approach faculty.

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9. Do I receive a grade for my Service?

NO. **Your service is only the initial step to your grade**. Similarly, you don't receive a grade for reading several articles; you receive a grade for the paper that you wrote from **what you learned** in the articles. A grade may be given to your assignment related to your service experience (e.g., portfolio, reflective journals, reflection paper, etc), but not to your service itself. However, you will not receive a grade without completing the hours required. (see #15).

10H What is my course instructor's role in Service Learning?

Your instructor is your primary support regarding professional development and personal challenges that you may face at your site. **Detailed responsibilities are outlined within the contract**.

> "I felt like because I was becoming more exposed to and educated about diversity within society, I was beginning to notice discrimination and bias all around me."

11. Am I doing service for my community partner or the Chicago School?

Both! Our community partners trust that Chicago School students are well trained. Therefore, they rely on us to "hire" and send students to fill their available positions. **You must complete a Service Learning Contract with us AND your partner to confirm your placement**. In this way, you are doing service in the community but receiving additional practical and professional support from TCS.

12. What is the difference between an academic clock and a community clock?

Flexibility! You are used to a structured syllabus, strict deadlines, and weekly assignments. Some community partners are not so structured and efficiently organized. Be patient and OBSERVE the challenges and opportunities for learning, develop flexibility, problem solve, and bring ideas to areas that need improvement.

> "If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else."
>
> Booker T. Washington

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Useful Tips for a Great Experience!

1. *Request a performance evaluation from your instructor or Site Supervisor for feedback.*

2. *Don't burn bridges! If you need to end a partnership, do so gracefully. You never know what future contact may know your community partner.*

3. *Manage work-school-social-spiritual balance for self care.*

4. *Wear a hat of humility- you are there to LEARN, about organizations, clients, and programs, take it ALL in!*

5. *Be curious and open about new ways of learning and participating. Try something new and be creative!*

13. What if I don't like the work I am assigned at my site?

First, ask yourself, "Why?" What were your expectations? How have they changed? Is there a way to turn a challenge into an opportunity? How do you normally address challenges? How should you approach your site supervisor to modify your tasks and responsibilities to better fit your interests? Do you see other opportunities to incorporate additional work that you enjoy? Once you answered these questions and still feel dissatisfaction with your work at your site, consult with your course instructor and Community Partnerships liaison.

14. My syllabus contains exact dates and deadlines but my community site seems so unstructured, how can they coexist? How do I mange this conflict?

Breathe in. Breathe out. Repeat.

It is likely that you will encounter many challenges at your community partner. Awareness of your best practices to manage these challenges is key to your personal and professional success.

15. Where and How do I track my hours?

Your hours are tracked by your faculty in class or either by Jill Glenn (Director of Community Partnerships) or Dr Jones (Asssisant Director)**. YOU MUST TRACK YOUR HOURS TO GET A GRADE!** Turn in your hours to your assigned point of contact.