

What Is Service Learning?

Service-learning is not the same as volunteerism. In order to be considered a service-learning activity, the following criteria must be met:

- Students participated in an organized service experience that benefited both the recipient of service AND the students' learning.
- Service experience was part of a course-based, credit-bearing, educational experience.
- Service met an identified community need.
- Service experience was closely linked to course objectives.
- Planned, purposeful, and intentional reflection on the service activity occurred in order to help link the service experience to course content.
- The service experience provided opportunities for students to utilize skills and knowledge in real-life scenarios.
- Service and learning goals had equal weight in the course and each enhanced the other.

By contrast, in volunteerism, the primary emphasis is on the service being provided to a recipient (not on student learning), the service is not connected to the learning objectives of the course, and the service occurs without intentional reflection.

Service-learning experience falls into one of the following categories:

- **DIRECT/INDIRECT service-learning.** Students directly or indirectly engage in a service activity relevant to a course and reflect on their experiences using course content as a basis for analysis and understanding. Examples of DIRECT service include sorting food at a food pantry, tutoring elementary school children in reading, "adopting" a grandparent at a retirement home. Examples of INDIRECT service include developing a social media strategy, planning a fundraising or awareness event, grant writing.
- **Problem-based service-learning.** Students act as "consultants" working for a "client" and work closely with community partners to understand a particular problem or need that exists. Students apply content from the course, and previous knowledge, to address a problem or need and make recommendations to the community partner.
- **Service-learning internships or fieldwork.** These are similar to traditional internships or fieldwork but are done for nonprofit agencies, hospitals, and/or schools. Unlike traditional internships or fieldwork, service-learning internships/fieldwork have regular and ongoing opportunities for reflection about larger social issues and the need for the service being provided. For example, a nursing fieldworker at a public health agency would not only be asked to practice medical procedures, but also reflect on low-income healthcare.
- **Community-based action research.** Students complete research for community partners (nonprofits, hospitals, schools, etc.) based on a community-identified need. Students work closely with faculty to learn research methodology as well as with community partners to understand need. Typically, findings are shared with the agency after analysis is complete.