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# WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

## Service Learning

**T**ulane's Service Learning Program started in the Spring of 1997 and has grown rapidly over the past few years. Tulane students with wide-ranging interests, enrolled in a wide variety of college courses, work in many different community settings. Service learning has been described as "learning by doing" and is viewed by many experts as the ideal way for college students to acquire knowledge and skills. Service learning is different from volunteer work in that the community activity is closely tied to the academic course content. Students taking a service learning course work in community agencies whose members help them relate course content to real life experiences. In order for the program to contribute to the community and be beneficial to students, it is important that the community partner take an active part in planning and implementing the service activities. This handbook describes what you can expect of Tulane's Office of Service Learning and how you can be involved in the service learning program.

## Community Sites

Students are placed in many different local agencies, schools, hospitals, and government offices, with sites selected that will provide experiences consistent with course content. Past placements have included the following sites:

New Orleans City Hall, New Orleans Public Schools, several local hospitals, National Center for the Urban Community, Grace House, WWOZ, NO/AIDS Task Force, Fair Housing Action Center of New Orleans, Williams Research Center, Agency for Environmental Health, and Hispanic Apostolate.

## Tulane's Office of Service Learning

The mission of Tulane University's Office of Service Learning is to engage faculty members, students, and community partners in an endeavor that combines community service with academic learning. Service learning aims to benefit students' education, further faculty research and teaching, and build community.

To achieve this mission, the office strives to help create a "classroom without walls" that is beneficial to community partners, college students, faculty members, and the university in the following ways:

## For Community Partners, service learning:

- gives access to the services of university students
- increases volunteer diversity in sex, age, and race
- allows agencies to identify needs and meet those needs through the development of a service project
- builds on-going relationships between the university and the community partner
- offers support through a mini-grant program

## For College Students, service learning allows them to:

- apply concepts from the classroom to their service at participating community agencies
- learn to work with a diverse community
- gain knowledge and expertise from the community
- evaluate, question and reformulate their civic values
- prepare to participate in internships and research
- explore career options
- provide worthwhile assistance to a community agency

## For Faculty Members, the service learning office will:

- assist in the development of innovative approaches to instruction
- provide support for service learning courses (orientations for students, site monitoring, reflection activities, and mini-grants for new courses)
- sponsor programs, speakers, and symposia on service learning
- support faculty members' efforts to disseminate information through conference presentations or publications
- provide opportunities for collaborative community research and project development

## For the University, service learning:

- furthers the goals of Tulane's strategic plan
- drives the university as an active, engaged partner in the community
- facilitates university teaching, research, and program development
- increases student retention

In conclusion, the Office of Service Learning aims to facilitate collaborative learning between the university, community members, faculty, and students by integrating each group's cultures with the New Orleans urban setting to foster mutual understanding and accessibility.



# HOW DO WE PLACE SERVICE LEARNING STUDENTS?

## Faculty Interest

**T**he development of a service learning course usually begins with faculty interest. A professor will contact our office if s/he wants to learn more about service learning or if s/he is interested in teaching a service learning course. Or, staff members may contact professors who are teaching courses that might benefit from a service learning component. A staff member from the Office of Service Learning explains the benefits of service learning and the services our office provides and the faculty member then decides whether s/he would like to develop a service learning course.

## Initial Search for Tentative Sites

Once the faculty member commits to teaching a service learning course, a Program Coordinator from our staff looks for service sites that correspond with the course. The office always begins its search for service opportunities with agencies that have worked with service learners in past semesters. When a new site expresses interest in a partnership, a Program Coordinator meets with the community site representative to discuss service learning, talk about the course content, and come up with a short job description(s) for the service learning students. The jobs or projects should benefit the community agency and tie into the students' academic coursework. At this point in the process, the partnership with the community agency is not finalized.

## Discussion of Prospective Sites with Faculty Members

After meeting with a number of prospective community partners, the Program Coordinator meets with the faculty member to narrow the list of sites. Eventually, the faculty member decides on one to four service learning sites that tie in best with the academic course. Sites that are omitted from the list are then considered for other service learning courses and for internships organized through the Office of Service Learning. The Office of Service Learning keeps files on all current service opportunities and makes them available to students seeking service opportunities.

## Contact with Community Partners

A Program Coordinator contacts all of the initial sites regardless of whether they will be asked to participate or not. Program Coordinators work with agency representative(s) to prepare a 10-week service plan for students and an on-site orientation. At this time, your agency will also be asked to identify a person to be the on-site Community Coordinator and contact person for Tulane students and service learning staff members.

The Office of Service Learning strives to provide each of our community partners with a continuous level of service throughout the school year. However, service learners may not be available for both the Fall semester (September to early December) and the Spring semester (February through April), because many courses at Tulane are taught only once a year.

## HOW DOES AN AGENCY PREPARE FOR SERVICE LEARNERS?

### Choosing a Community Coordinator for your Site

It is a good idea to choose a Community Coordinator at your agency before the on-site orientation. This person should be accessible to students and service learning staff. The Community Coordinator will be responsible for delegating tasks/assignments to service learning students, answering student questions, and occasionally meeting with service learning staff members. Larger organizations may want to have more than one Community Coordinator if students are assigned to a variety of tasks. Also, it is a good idea to have at least one other staff person who knows when service learners are coming in and is aware of service learning projects.

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### Prepare a Semester-Long Service Plan

When creating a service plan, please keep the following things in mind:

#### Limited Volunteer Hours

It is important to remember that Tulane service learners are only required to complete a limited number of service hours. Depending on the service learning course requirements, service learners will work a total of 20-40 hours at your agency over the semester (2-4 hours per week for approximately ten weeks).

#### Course Themes

Service learning projects should correspond with themes covered in the course. Agencies are supplied with a course syllabus and are encouraged to work with the professor who will be teaching the course to ensure that the service project and the course are connected to one another.



## Location

Agencies will want to consider: Where will service learning take place? Do you have adequate work space for service learners at your agency? You may want to schedule service learners at different times and days during the week to avoid having too many service learners at your agency at one time.

## Will service learners visit sites throughout the city?

If you prepare a service learning project which allows service learners to work off-site, plan a series of meetings during the semester so that you can review and direct works in progress. Service learners are expected to have regular contact with on-site Community Coordinators throughout the semester.

## Supervision

Think about how much supervision will be required for the proposed project. Be realistic about the amount of supervision your agency will be able to provide. Projects should be designed to allow service learners to work independently and not have to rely on a site representative for assignments each time. If you would benefit from projects that require assignments to be issued weekly, please prepare backup work for service learners if their supervisor is unavailable when they are scheduled to be at the agency.

## Importance of Organization

Students are only at your site for a short time (2 to 4 hours per week, for 10 weeks). Therefore, it is very important to be organized at the on-site orientation and throughout the semester. The on-site orientation is the most convenient opportunity to give the service learners important information, such as, future meetings, and instructions.

One way to stay organized and keep service learners on task is to have a service learning assignment notebook at your agency. If you choose to use this organizational method, the Office of Service Learning can supply you with the necessary materials. The Community Coordinator at your agency can write weekly tasks for small groups of service learners to complete by the end of the week. As students come in throughout the week, they can check the notebook for their assignment, work on their assignment until they leave, and then write what they have completed in the notebook so that any service learner working on the same project (and the Community Coordinator) will know what still needs to be completed. At the end of the week, the Community Coordinator can review the notebook to see what work has been completed and then s/he can write in more instructions for the following week.

## Transportation

Since most students choose to take advantage of the transportation provided by Tulane's Office of Service Learning, it is important to keep our van schedule in mind when scheduling times for students to work. Your office will be provided a copy of the schedule at the beginning of each semester.

## Sign-In Procedures

The Office of Service Learning asks that all community partners have service learners sign in every time they come to your agency. We will provide you with a sign-in folder for students at the on-site orientation. In addition, service learners will be required to keep timesheets for their professors indicating the number of hours that they complete. We ask service learners to have someone from your agency initial their timesheet during each visit.

## Prepare an On-Site Orientation

All community sites must conduct an on-site orientation for service learners. Our office staff will work with your Community Coordinator to schedule an orientation time and help you to create a service learning orientation. The purposes of an on-site orientation are to familiarize service learners with your agency and staff, inform them of their responsibilities, introduce them to your specific policies, and provide the necessary training to service learning students. The more information that you can cover during the on-site orientation, the more prepared students will be to work at your agency.

The following are some things that you might want to include in your on-site orientation:

### ***Agency Information***

Educate the students about your organization. Who do you serve? How are you funded? What is your mission?

### ***Provide a list of contacts/numbers***

Who does your agency work with on a regular basis? Please list people/agencies that will help students get their work done.

### ***Responsibilities / Performance Appraisal***

What is expected of the Service learners?  
How will their performances be appraised?

### ***Policies***

Sign-in/out, dress code, accountability and office rules.

### ***Training***

What kind and when?

### ***Final Product***

What is final goal/product that is expected from service learners by end of service?

### ***Scheduling***

What are your agency's hours of operation? When should students complete their service? When will you meet with students during the semester to review work they have done independently? When will you complete the site report on your individual service learning students?

## **WHAT TRAINING WILL STUDENTS RECEIVE?**

**A**t the Office of Service Learning, we feel that training and orientations are essential for a quality service experience. We will work with your agency to offer the following training sessions and orientations for our service learning students:

### **Service Learning Orientation**

The Office of Service Learning will provide a general orientation for all service learning students at Tulane. At this orientation, service learning staff members will review our student orientation handbook with the Tulane students and discuss some guidelines that all service learners should follow (dress code, timesheet procedures, the importance of scheduling, etc.). We will discuss the specific service learning requirements for the course, familiarize students with our office, go over our transportation schedule, and introduce the site at which students will be working. The service learning staff will provide your agency with a copy of the student orientation handbook.

### **On-Site Orientation**

Generally, service learners are undergraduate students with limited workplace experience. Therefore, it would be helpful to educate service learners about the work environment at your agency by giving them tips on how to dress, proper office procedures and etiquette. Remember that service learners will not be familiar with your agency's work environment until they have visited a few times. Therefore, please encourage service learners to ask questions.



## Race, Class and Community Workshop

The Office of Service Learning, in collaboration with the Community Action Council of Tulane University Students (CACTUS) and Tulane's Office of Student Employment, and with the participation of our community partners, provides a workshop for all service learners to help them develop sensitivity to community views and concerns. The workshop deals with issues of race, class and culture; personal identity and privilege; a history of the university's involvement in the New Orleans community; and the importance of students' contributions to university-community collaborations.

## Education Training Session

The Office of Service Learning will provide education training sessions for all service learners working in educational settings. Students are required to attend sessions dealing with issues specific to their site, such as suggestions for tutoring in Reading, suggestions for tutoring in Math, how to be an effective in-classroom assistant, and problem-solving strategies for working in education settings.

## WHAT SUPPORT DOES TULANE'S OFFICE OF SERVICE LEARNING PROVIDE?

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**T**he Office of Service Learning at Tulane tries to provide as much support as possible to community partners. We will work with you to create a valuable experience for your agency and the Tulane service learners. Our office works to facilitate the following:

### Contact with your Agency

A Program Coordinator from the Office of Service Learning will be in contact with your agency throughout the semester. The Program Coordinator will make visits to the site, answer questions about service learning, offer suggestions, and serve as a liaison between students, faculty, and community partners, as needed.

### Community Grants

**School-based service learning sites** may apply for service learning enhancement grants each semester. These grants help provide materials to supplement the on-site service experience. In addition, the Service Learning Program Coordinator will work with each school-based site to plan an end of the semester celebration

**Any non-school site** may apply for a celebration grant near the end of each semester. Celebration grants offer community partners the opportunity to thank their service learners and give service learners an opportunity to reflect on the work they've done over the semester.

Copies of grant applications are included in the Appendix.

## Faculty Contact

We will work to keep faculty informed of what their students do on-site and encourage communication between the professor and the site.

## Rap Sessions

Our office conducts a number of rap sessions that are open to all who are involved in service learning partnerships. These rap sessions give students the opportunity to discuss their service experience with other service learners and our office staff. Students and staff offer suggestions to one another on how to improve their experiences on-site and how to be more effective in their service activities. We encourage agency partners to take an active role in this process. Please contact the OSL staff if you are interested in attending a rap session.

## WHAT FEEDBACK DOES THE AGENCY GET?

**T**he Office of Service Learning wants to hear what you think! One way to incorporate input from sites into our service learning program is through brief reports.

## Office of Service Learning Reports

Tulane's Office of Service Learning contacts your agency on a weekly or bi-weekly basis to informally discuss the service learners at your site, get feedback from you, and discuss any feedback received from students. In addition, the Service Learning Program Coordinator will use these conversations to keep informed of students' progress on-site. The Program Coordinator compiles e-mail updates which are sent to community partners, faculty members and service learners on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, depending on the number of service learners at the site. If there is information that you would like service learners and faculty members to receive, please inform your Program Coordinator and s/he will be sure to include the announcement in the e-mail update.

## Newsletters

The Office of Service Learning at Tulane produces a service learning newsletter twice a semester. Our newsletter includes information about community sites, gives advice to students and faculty interested in service learning, and highlights exceptional service learning students. If you would like to include something in the service learning newsletter, please contact your Service Learning Program Coordinator.



## Site Reports on Service Learners

We ask that the Community Coordinator at each site complete a short report on each individual student at the end of the service experience. This report will give the students' professor an idea of how well each student worked with your agency. A copy of the form is included in the Appendix.

## General Site Reports

The Office of Service Learning asks each community site to complete a brief overall evaluation of the service learning program at their site at the end of each semester. This report will give you the opportunity to evaluate the Office of Service Learning staff, talk about student performance in general, and report on any particular problems or successes that you had during the semester.

## Student Reports

Every service learning student will be asked to answer two brief student surveys about his/her on-site service experience: One about half-way through the semester and another after completion of service hours. These reports will let students highlight what they enjoyed most and will allow them to offer constructive suggestions on how to improve the service experience in the future. The Office of Service Learning staff member who works with you throughout the semester will administer these surveys to the students and will share all pertinent information with you.

***We look forward to working with you!***



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