

WORKING WITH THE COMMUNITY
SERVICE-LEARNING
STUDENT GUIDE



MISERICORDIA
UNIVERSITY®





WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?

Service-learning courses use service projects for local community organizations as a primary teaching method. Service-learning courses are specifically designed to integrate the academic course content into real, impactful projects that not only meet the learning objectives of the course, but will provide genuine value to the community as well.

As a service-learning student you will work with a community partner organization to develop a project or provide a service that meets a need within the community, and then reflect back on the experience and its impact on you and the community you have helped serve.

Service-learning projects typically fall into one of three categories:

- **Direct service:** In which students interact directly with clients from the community partner organization, such as tutoring children, or working with the elderly.
- **Indirect service:** In which service is not provided directly to individuals but the service benefits the community/organization, such as updating marketing materials, or renovating a community center.
- **Advocacy:** In which students create an awareness of a community issue or cause, such as holding a fundraiser or educational event.

YOUR COMMUNITY PARTNER

You will have the opportunity to work with a local non-profit, school, or community organization to complete your service-learning. Your course instructor will provide you with basic information on the community partners for your course. It will be up to you to build the relationship and work effectively with the organization to achieve your project goals.

Here are some helpful guidelines for working with a community partner:

RUNNING LATE OR ABSENCES

If you are running late or unable to attend for any reason, **call ahead and let your supervisor know**. Avoid calling off at the last minute – your community partner, clients, and fellow Misericordia service-learning students are relying on you, so it is important to be respectful and give as much notice as possible if you need to be absent. You should aim to give a minimum of 24hrs notice if you are going to be absent.

If you are scheduled to be on Misericordia transportation, you will also need to call the Office of Service-Learning and/or van driver to let them know. The Office of Service-Learning can be reached at (570) 674-6203, and the Service-Learning van driver at (570) 328-1715.

CLEARANCES

Your community partner may require you to have criminal and child abuse

clearances to be able to work with them. Consult your course instructor early on to find out if clearances are required. Clearances can take up to several weeks to be processed. You can find instructions on how to apply for clearances on myMU.

WAIVERS

You may be asked to sign risk and liability waivers, confidentiality agreements, or other paperwork by Misericordia or the community partner. Check with your course instructor and community partner what is required.

COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY PARTNER

Nonprofit and community organizations are very often understaffed and under resourced. It is important to realize when attempting to communicate with your community partner that, while they are eager to work with you, they are also extremely busy. Plan ahead and contact your community partner early to give you plenty of time to reach them. They may not always be at their desk when you call. If you do leave a message or send an email, don't panic if you do not hear back from them immediately – unless it is an emergency, anticipating up to 48 hours for a response is acceptable and you should allow for this time in your planning.



PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOR AND DRESS CODE

Professional, appropriate behavior is also essential to gain the most out of the experience and provide the most value to your community partner. Show up with enthusiasm, ask questions, use initiative, and make the most of the experience available to you. Treating clients and community partners with respect also acknowledges the reciprocal nature of service-learning, and shows that you value what they have to offer your learning experience. Ask your supervisor about any required dress codes for on-site work, and assume business casual attire when meeting with your community partner or clients.

ORIENTATION

You will receive an orientation to introduce you to the community partner and the work they do. If you will be going to the community partner's facility, you may also receive an on-site orientation covering safety procedures, facility tour, staff introductions, and other information about the organization.

DEALING WITH CONCERNS

If you have any concerns throughout your service-learning experience, reach out to your supervisor or course instructor to discuss them. You can also discuss any concerns with the Office of Service-Learning, who will do their best to help you.

DISCLOSURE OR SUSPICION OF ABUSE

Working with the local community means coming into contact with vulnerable individuals, such as children, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly. Community organization staff are mandated by law to report abuse, and in some cases the law requires volunteers to report too. If during the course of your service-learning you suspect a client is experiencing some form of abuse, seek out your supervisor and discuss your concerns with him/her. If you feel you are unable to speak to your supervisor or a staff person at the organization, speak to your course instructor or to service-learning staff about your concerns.



SAFETY GUIDELINES

- Participate fully in orientations and make sure you are fully informed of safety procedures. If you are unsure of anything at any time—ASK!
- Make sure you have your supervisor's contact details in case of an emergency.
- Make sure you are wearing appropriate clothing for the task, or adhering to the organization's dress code.
- You are responsible for your personal belongings. Do not take anything of value with you to your service-learning site. Your partner organization may not have anywhere safe to store your belongings and is not responsible for any loss or damage that may occur to your personal property. Do not wear excessive jewelry or have expensive items, such as your cell phone or laptop, out on display or left unattended. You will not be able to leave your personal belongings on the Misericordia van.
- Keep things professional—do not engage in personal relationships with clients or organization staff. This includes avoiding romantic, friendship, business, or financial relationships.
- Do not give your personal contact information to clients or staff members – this includes your telephone number, email, or social media information. Do not accept friend requests on social media from clients or staff members.
- Do not lend money or personal items to clients or staff members.



- Do not offer to transport clients or staff in your own vehicle. Do not accept rides from clients or staff, and travel in a group with other Misericordia students where possible.
- If using Misericordia transportation, make sure you have the contact details for the Misericordia van driver, and that you alert the driver and Office of Service-Learning of any changes to your transportation plans.
- If you need to wait outside for transportation at any time, find a well-lit, public area to wait in. Be aware of your surroundings – listening to headphones or focusing intently on a mobile device can leave you unaware of what is going on around you.
- Make sure your friends or roommates know your schedule and where you are going to be. Consider downloading a personal safety app, such as Circle of 6, to contact others in emergencies.
- Do not take responsibility for opening or closing the community organization for the day and avoid one-on-one situations that isolate you away from other people.
- When in doubt, ask your supervisor or another staff person for help.

Learn to Succeed.

OFFICE OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Kevin Feifer, Director of Service-Learning
kfeifer@misericordia.edu
(570) 674-6322

Louise Keller, Service-Learning Specialist
lkeller@misericordia.edu
(570) 674-6203

Service-Learning Van Cell Phone
(570) 328-1715



MISERICORDIA
UNIVERSITY

301 Lake Street, Dallas, PA 18612-1090