Quick Reference of Good Practices in Service Learning

The following good practices are recommended practices throughout the field and apply to all the parties involved in service-learning experiences: faculty members, service-learning staff, learning sites, risk managers and service-learning students. This quick reference guide is not intended to be all encompassing however, these good practices apply to most situations. (If you feel something included here is prohibitive to the service-learning experience you hope to offer to your students, please have a discussion that includes the faculty member, the service-learning office, and the university risk manager.)

The intent of these guidelines is not to prohibit service-learning experiences, but rather, to provide recommended practices that allow for safe and positive service environments where the risk and liability have been minimized for all parties.

For Service-Learning Staff and Faculty

- Provide, or have the learning site provide, campus- and community-based organization orientations to familiarize students with policies, procedures and risks involved in the specific service activities they will be providing and with the populations they serve. (See Orientation Checklist, pages XX.)

- Discuss Learning Plans with students so they fully understand their responsibilities, learning objectives and service objectives, and are informed of the potential risks associated with their service-learning placements. Both students and faculty should review and sign the Learning Plan. At a minimum, it is also recommended that the site supervisor review the Learning Plan. (See Learning Plan, pages XX.)

- Build a working relationship with your risk manager as well as your contracts and procurement officer.

- Be aware that special insurance policies, SAFECLIP (i.e., service learning) and SPLIP (i.e. nursing, social work, for liability and professional coverage are available for specific students and programs.).

- Complete a risk assessment analysis in order to determine site approval, rejection and/or the need for an immediate site visit, before a service-learning course is offered. (See Developing a Comprehensive Risk Assessment Plan, pages XX.)

- Complete an on-line (web research) “site visit” to compliment the pre-placement risk assessment.

- Understand that faculty members can be individually named in lawsuits and should play an active role in ensuring safe and positive service-learning experiences for their students.

- Know that faculty members will be indemnified and protected by the university in the case of a lawsuit, so long as the faculty member was acting within the scope of his or her work.
• Offer alternative placements and/or opportunities for students in service-learning courses when the learning site/location is not approved via the risk assessment to avoid potential risks.

• Meet the special safety needs of any student.

• Offer alternative placements and/or opportunities for students in service-learning courses who upon their first visit to the placement location decide against participating because of safety concerns.

• Be aware that there are state and federal regulations regarding background checks for those students whose service-learning placements are at learning sites that work with children, the elderly, or persons with disabilities. (See Background Checks, pages XX.)

• Know when each student is scheduled to provide service and be able to verify that the student did provide the service at the learning site. This will help to determine who holds liability for student behavior or student injury at any given time. (See Service Logs, pages XX.)

• Know where emergency contact information for students is kept, and what the procedures are at the university and at the learning site if an emergency occurs. If the learning site asks the student for emergency contact information, a copy should be kept at the university for the duration of the service-learning experience.

• Don’t assume that campus and site orientations are consistent; they vary among courses, campuses, departments and learning sites. Both campus and site orientations are necessary to familiarize students with any potential risks involved with service-learning activities. (See Orientation Checklist, pages XX.)

• Don’t assume individual faculty members or departments are aware of the students’ whereabouts or activities while performing their service learning. (See Service Logs, pages XX.)

• Don’t assume that students are aware of such issues as liability or sexual harassment policies.

• Don’t assume that student fees will automatically absorb incidental costs for background checks, or that the learning site will pay these fees. They can be an additional financial burden for a particular placement. (See Background Checks, pages XX.)

• Don’t arrange travel for students. Liability is greatly reduced if students are responsible for their own transportation to and from the service site.

For Service-Learning Syllabi or Class Discussions

• Include a description of the service as an expressed goal.

• Include a description of the nature of the service placement and/or project.

• Specify the roles and responsibilities of students in the placement and/or service project.
• Include whether or not the service project/experience is mandatory. If it is mandatory, offer an alternative for students who cannot do, for any reason, the specific type of service you have identified.

• Include time requirements (how many hours total/per week/per term).

• Include contact information for the Learning Site(s).

• Identify the needs of the community that will be met through this service placement.

• Explain how students will be expected to demonstrate what they have learned in the placement, such as journals, term papers, and in-class presentations.

• Include an explanation of what will be evaluated and how it will be evaluated. (In terms of the course grade).

• Explain how the course assignments link the service-learning placement to the course content.

• Require a *Learning Plan* for each student that defines the scope of service to ensure the faculty member, student and site supervisor meet educational objectives, create measurable outcomes, and understand the risks inherent in the particular placement (See *Learning Plan*, pages XX.)

• Explain, if appropriate, the expectations for the public dissemination of the students’ work.

• Distribute a syllabus that clearly explains or defines the service-learning goals, objectives, criteria and requirements.

• Plan in advance. Don’t wait until the beginning of the quarter/semester to determine with which Learning Site to partner. Meet with staff from the service-learning/community engagement office on your campus if you need help identifying a community partner for your course.

• Students should not be allowed to randomly select their sites for service-learning placements.

• Students should not be allowed to complete their service in only one or two sessions, but rather distribute the service over a consistent period of time.

• Don’t wait until the end of the term to clarify the reflective process for student evaluation and learning outcomes.
For Service Learners (University Students)

- Participate in orientation for your service-learning experience.

- Make sure you know whom to contact at the Learning Site and at the university in case of an emergency.

- Make sure you know how to exit your Learning Site in case of an emergency.

- Ask for help from your supervisor or another staff member at your Learning Site when in doubt.

- Be punctual and responsible in completing your commitment to the service site.

- Call your site supervisor if you know you will be late or not able to come in at all.

- Keep all information about clients you work with confidential.

- Show respect for your Learning Site, its staff, and its clients.

- Be aware that you are representing your university.

- Know that if you are having trouble or feel unsafe at your Learning Site, you can talk with your faculty member about it. In some instances an alternative placement or opportunity will be afforded to you.

- Sign-in at your Learning Site every time you are there, and record your service hours on your student service log. This will ensure you receive credit for the hours you have served.

- Don’t report to your Learning Site under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

- Don’t give or loan a client money or other personal belongings.

- Don’t make promises or commitments to a client that you cannot keep.

- Don’t give a client or community-based organization representative a ride in a personal vehicle.

- Verbal exchanges of a sexual nature are not to be tolerated and don’t engage in behavior that might be perceived as sexual with a client or community-based organization representative.

- Don’t tolerate verbal exchanges or engage in behavior that might be perceived as discriminating against an individual on the basis of his/her age, race, gender, sexual orientation, ability, or ethnicity.

- Don’t engage in any type of business with clients during the term of your service.

- Don’t enter into personal relationships with a client or community-based organization representative during the term of your service.
For Learning Sites

- Thoroughly review the *Service-Learning Agreement* to understand the roles and responsibilities of all parties. (See *Service-Learning Agreement*, pages XX.)

- Ensure that service learners comply with any legal requirements for background checks.

- Assign a supervisor for service learners at your site.

- Orient all service learners to your organization and its policies, procedures, clientele profile, and emergency procedures. This will ensure that service learners act in safe, positive, and productive ways during their placements.

- Require that service learners complete a sign-in/out sheet each time they serve, so that you are aware of who is at your organization at all times. (See *Service Logs*, pages XX.)

- Communicate with university representatives if your organization is experiencing a difficult time with a service learner.

- Ensure that you have contact information for a representative at the university, in case problems arise, or accidents happen.

- Ensure that you have emergency contact information for service learners.

- Ask for a copy of the syllabus that a faculty member gives to the service learners.

- Review each student’s *Learning Plan* to ensure that you can help the students meet their service-learning objectives. (See *Learning Plan*, pages XX.)

- Don’t share the results of any background check with university representatives.

- Don’t assume that any final products produced by students are the sole property of the community-based organization. The final products are the property of the student, but more often than not, the student can grant rights to use the product to the community-based organization.

- Don’t request that service learners do tasks that are beyond their capabilities, or beyond their scope of work, as outlined in the *Learning Plan* (See *Learning Plan*, pages XX.)