

# ***Service-Learning Supervisors' Handbook***

A guide for those supervising service-learning students

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**This Handbook is available from the  
Center for Community-Based Learning**

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## **Introduction**

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**About this Manual** This handbook is intended to provide general information about the Montclair State University Service Learning Program and some guidelines for community partners, and the site supervisors of the MSU students.

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**Definition of Service-Learning** Service-learning is a form of experiential education provided to college students that links academic study to real world experiences. It is a credit bearing program that enhances academic learning, builds maturity and insight, and prepares students for active citizenship and lifelong learning. In addition, fosters civic responsibility by focusing on critical, reflective thinking and an appreciation of larger social issues inherent in a democracy.

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**Purpose of Service-Learning Program** Service learning at MSU is a course-based bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized community-based service activity. This activity meets identified community needs, and provides a student with sufficient time to reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain a greater understanding of course content and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

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**Benefits to Community Partners** The Community Partner benefits from the program in several ways. The implicit benefit is working in collaboration with others to achieve together what cannot be done alone. The unmet needs of the community are addressed through our long-term collaborations.

Other more tangible benefits include:

- Assistance with the delivery of existing community services.
  - Task force participation with individuals who have shared purposes, goals, and values, and who serve the same segments of the community.
  - Access to University resources, faculty expertise and energetic students.
  - Enhanced agency visibility through campus and community publications.
  - Identifying students who may become future employees.
  - Contributing to the quality of higher education by sharing knowledge and skills with students and faculty.
  - Opportunity to participate in the teaching and learning process.
  - Participating in workshops, conferences and training activities.
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## **Program Purpose and Goals**

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As a Program of the Center for Community-Based Learning, Service-Learning seeks to foster the development of informed and involved citizens through the integration of service to the community with academic course work (see Appendix A).

To achieve this we will continue to:

- Provide support systems for faculty to create and offer academic courses that foster student learning through direct experience and reflection on issues of public concern.
- Establish and sustain community partnerships that are based on reciprocity and rely on long term commitments between the University and the community.
- Encourage the use of course appropriate reflection strategies that stimulate new insights and greater awareness of issues of social concern.
- Maintain a Service-Learning Faculty Fellows Program to insure that there is a cadre of faculty who have mastered the pedagogy and practices of Service-Learning.
- Offer training and development activities to meet the needs of students, faculty, and community partners.
- Build an institutional infrastructure that supports faculty, community partners and students.
- Encourage the recognition of student contributions to the community.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

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The same person often fills the role of the community partner and supervisor. For this reason, it is sometimes difficult to separate the responsibilities of the two positions, though they may be different. The section that follows provides a description of the responsibilities assumed by each of these roles.

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**Community Partner** Community Partners work with the University to develop projects that engage students in service to the community. Projects are established to address identified community needs, as well as to enhance student learning. The community partner, as the primary contact with the University, is responsible for developing the position description to make the students' service activities explicit. The Service-Learning Coordinator and faculty aligned with the organization are available to assist the Community Partner.

Community Partners will also participate in Campus-community task forces to further address identified community needs. These collaborations have resulted in grant writing efforts, website development, orientation activities, research, and resource identification.

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**Supervisors** Supervisors guide MSU students through the service experience on a day to day basis. This means primarily:

- Providing day to day guidance and feedback for each student.
  - Orienting the students to the organization and new environment.
  - Ensuring that the staff is aware of the student's responsibilities.
  - Providing the student access to the resources they need.
  - Providing a safe environment.
  - Providing an environment, which supports student learning and problem solving.
  - Maintaining contact with the Service-Learning Program and the faculty member teaching the course the student is enrolled in.
  - Informing the Service-Learning Program Coordinator and faculty member of any concerns.
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## **Expectations: What can supervisors expect?**

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*What can supervisors expect from students?*

### **Students**

#### **Will:**

- Attend orientation and training sessions.
  - Complete the required service responsibilities.
  - Be on time and appropriately dressed.
  - Comply with all safety, legal and confidentiality policies supplied to them.
  - Notify their supervisors and faculty member if they are unable to meet their service responsibilities.
  - Immediately notify their supervisor, faculty member and/or Service Learning Coordinator of any problems.
  - Accept and respond to appropriate feedback from their supervisors.
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*What can supervisors expect from faculty?*

### **Faculty will:**

- Meet with the supervisors and the Service-Learning Coordinator to plan service experience.
  - Provide supervisors with a copy of their course syllabus.
  - Be available throughout the semester for consultation with the supervisor.
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*What can supervisors and Community Partners expect from the Service Learning Program Staff?*

### **Staff will:**

- Serve as the primary point of contact for the development of new service projects.
- Explain program policies and procedures to new community partners.
- Assist with identifying new service-learning positions.
- Assist with clarifying position descriptions, posting them in Service-Learning Office, and filling the service-learning positions.
- Set-up meetings between students, supervisors and faculty as needed.
- Provide feedback from program evaluations.

## **Prepare for Service Learning Students**

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### **Develop Service Positions**

- Decide how many service-learning positions you want to establish.
  - Develop position descriptions as well as schedule days and times for student service.\*\*
  - Submit position descriptions (see Appendix B) that include the skills and abilities necessary for the service activity.
  - It may be helpful to have the students work in teams.
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### **Inform Staff**

- Inform your staff of the decision to participate in MSU's Service Learning Program.
  - Let them know of the student's anticipated arrival date and what the student's responsibilities will be.
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### **Select Site Supervisors**

- Appoint supervisor(s) to train and evaluate students. Each student must be assigned to a supervisor.
  - Supervisors must co-sign the Service-Learning Student/Agency Contract and complete Student Progress Report (see Appendices C & D)
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### **Prepare for an Orientation**

- Identify the organizational policies and procedures that apply to the students. Consider areas such as confidentiality, dress code, agency closings, conflict resolution procedures, and attendance. Obtain written copies, if available.
  - Locate a copy of the organization's mission statement and organizational chart to discuss with students if possible.
  - Locate all personnel/volunteer documents that need to be signed by the student.
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## **At the Orientation**

- Inform students of the mission and goals of the organization.
  - Describe the student's responsibilities and how they contribute to the goals and mission of the organization.
  - Describe who the organization serves, its clients and their special needs, if any.
  - Discuss the work setting and provide a tour. Indicate what phone lines, supplies, office machines, etc. the students are expected to use.
  - Introduce students to key staff members and provide a directory if one is available.
  - Discuss all organizational policies that apply to the students and provide written copies if available.
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**\*\*Note:** Students are available for service during the fall and spring semesters. They are generally available to provide service from mid-September to mid-December (fall semester) and from early February to early May (spring semester).

## **Guidelines for the Supervisor**

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### **Prepare for your Student(s)**

Planning for your student(s) can make for a successful start:

- Make sure the organization knows about the student(s), when he or she is coming, and the projects they will be involved in.
  - Encourage other members of the organization to make the student(s) feel welcome and like part of a team.
  - Plan time to have an orientation for the student(s).
  - Have all materials ready for the student(s) the day they begin their work or project.
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### **Orient the student to your Organization**

Provide as much as training as possible to the student(s) in order to help them feel comfortable and competent in their new surroundings:

- Talk with the student(s) about the work of the organization such as the organization's mission, goals and objectives.
  - Discuss needs of the clients and the needs of the community.
  - Help the student become more familiar with the appropriate policies and procedures within your organization.
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### **Communicate Expectations**

Provide the student(s) with the information they need to be successful:

- Make student(s) aware of your expectations as the site supervisor as well as any organizational expectations (i.e. punctuality, confidentiality, self-directed work, etc.)
  - Define initial performance expectations and job duties.
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### **Discuss student(s) Progress**

Feedback is an important part of learning, be sure to:

- Discuss the student's performance and provide the student with feedback on the quality of their work and their progress. Be sure the feedback is frequent, and timely. Use examples of specific behaviors whenever possible.
  - Take the time to explore the goals of the student(s) and if it is appropriate, the possibility of continued service to your organization or the community after the semester is over.
  - Two weeks before service is scheduled to end, prepare and discuss the Student Progress Report (see Appendix) with each individual student.
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**Closure**

Help provide the student(s) with closure regarding their service experience:

- As the semester is coming to a close, prepare both the student and the client for the end of the semester and the end of their service.
  - Conduct a debriefing with the student of their experience. Solicit feedback from the student about their particular experience.
  - Acknowledge the student's contributions to the organization and the community by providing them with a letter or certificate of appreciation.
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## **Policies and Procedures for Service Learning Students**

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While agency policies prevail in many aspects of a service-learning student's experience, other factors are dictated by law or fall within University guidelines.

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### **Enrollment**

Students who come to you through the resources of Service Learning must be enrolled in a service-learning course and fulfill all academic requirements associated with the course. The Service-Learning staff coordinates and files student positions. Please do not accept MSU students for service-learning positions who contact you directly.

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### **Handling Problems with a Service-Learning Student**

If a problem with a student arises and it is not resolved, please call us immediately. The Service Learning Coordinator and faculty can often intervene to develop a satisfactory resolution without removing the student from the service assignment. While no one welcomes service-related difficulties, they sometimes provide the basis for real learning if they are handled in a timely manner.

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### **University Closings**

Students are not required to provide service on the days that the University is closed. The Service-Learning Program staff will provide a schedule of these dates at the beginning of each semester.

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### **Continuing Service**

The Service-Learning Program requires students to provide service based on the University's calendar and academic semesters. If a student would like to continue providing service beyond the end of a semester, arrangements must be made with the student and the supervisor. The University is not responsible for the student volunteers.

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### **Equal Opportunity**

Montclair State University is committed to a policy of equal opportunity and this policy is to make the benefits and services of its education programs available to students without regard to race, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, sex, sexual orientation, ability, marital status, or veteran status.

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## **Risk Management, Liability and Student Insurance**

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### **Commercial General Liability**

MSU students enrolled in a service-learning course and who are providing service to a community partner are covered under the University's Commercial General Liability Insurance. This coverage provides protection for the student if, as a result of his/her negligence they are found to be legally liable for bodily injury or property damage to another party. It does NOT provide coverage for students for any injury they would have to look to whatever accident policy they have to cover expenses related to their own injuries.

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### **Volunteer Protection Act**

The Volunteer Protection Act (VPA) is a federal law that provides limited immunity to individual volunteers of tax exempt organizations, like the University. Under the VPA, individuals are not liable for acts or omissions "if the volunteer was acting within the scope of his or her responsibilities at the time; if they are properly licensed, certified or authorized to undertake the activities in question and if the harm was not caused by willful or criminal misconduct, or a conscious, flagrant indifference to the right or safety of the individuals harmed." The law does not shield volunteers from crimes of violence, sexual offenses, hate crimes, or misconduct that violates State or Federal civil rights laws, or misconduct while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

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### **Health Insurance**

Full-time students at MSU are required to show proof of health insurance or pay for University issued health insurance.

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