



# Service Learning and Community Development

Risa Palm, Provost and Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs  
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## 1. WHAT IS SERVICE LEARNING?

Service learning is an educational method by which participants learn and develop through active participation in service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community.

It is integrated into and influences the lifelong learning of a participant and includes structured time for the participants to reflect on the service experience.

Service-learning as “a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on service activity as a means of gaining a deeper understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.”

## 2. EXAMPLES OF SERVICE LEARNING AT SEVEN DIFFERENT SUNY CAMPUSES

### A. SUNY Old Westbury

Service learning is *required* of all first-year students as part of the 4 credit first-year seminar. This program – just inaugurated this fall – requires all 440 freshmen to take a course on “the ethics of engagement: educating leaders for a just world”, including 30-50 hours of course-embedded community-based learning and action experience. This is administered by the Community Engagement and Partnership Center.

Students are expected to reflect on their experiences in journals and evaluation papers involving research and analysis. They also consider the relationship of community-based learning to the College’s social justice mission, the value of a liberal arts education, ethical decision-making and career development. In addition to the experience itself, there are pre-reflection and assessment components, including readings and assignments. Classes meet as a group at least once a week and students are expected to participate in mandatory workshops and campus events.

### B. SUNY Cortland

Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC)  
Accomplishments:

1. developed consolidated housing plan for city and county
2. created a children’s museum
3. offer GIS training to local government, residents and youth

SUNY Cortland recognizes participation in a service-learning class by giving four credits to students passing designated Service-Learning courses. At the present time those four credit courses are offered by the English Department in designated freshman composition courses of Academic Writing in the Community I and II (CPN 102 and CPN 103).

### C. SUNY Oswego

GST 302 is a Service Learning credit-bearing educational experience that requires students to participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs.

Course requirements include: 20 hours of service, attendance at 3 small-group discussion meetings, and written assignments including a reflective journal of their weekly visits, and three written papers, each focused on an assigned topic that asks students to react, reflect, and think about key issues encountered during service.

### D. SUNY Geneseo

Service learning is part of anthropology 325, International Fieldwork: Mexico. This course allows students to engage in research and participate in a service learning experience in a small Mayan village. Past student research has included women’s studies (cultivation of kitchen gardens, studies of sewing cooperatives, studies on female reproduction and childcare), studies focused on men (traditional agriculture, wage labor, specialized craft production), and studies focused on the tradition and modernization of peasant society. Students conduct individualized research and service projects in the community focusing on Maya family structure, economic and political organization, and religion in a traditional farming community.

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## E. SUNY College of Environmental Science & Forestry

CLL 440 - (Writing for Environmental Professionals)  
Students examine relationships between reading and writing in order to compose meaningful texts that are sensitive and responsive to audience and context. However, unlike other writing classes, students in this course gain valuable experience, while contributing to the local community, by performing volunteer work and writing about it.

The following questions are posed:

- On reciprocity and developing ethical student-community partnerships:  
How do I enter a community site and start feeling comfortable? How are expectations established? What are participants' expectations, and how do they affect the mentoring experience? How do the mentor and student build mutual trust and respect?
- On representing yourself and others:  
How do I think and write about those I'm representing? What connections exist between representations of my experience and issues around race, class, and gender? How do we locate these representations in space and time? What is the relationship between representation and power?
- On reaching a deeper understanding:  
How can I analyze an experience in a way that gives me deeper understanding about myself? About my community? About the world?

## F. SUNY Brockport

At Brockport 36.6% of undergraduate faculty and 25% of teaching staff incorporate service-learning activities in one or more of their classes. One example is Social Work 477/577: Perspectives on Older Adults and the Aging Family.

- Issues faced by older adults and their families. The student learning experience will be enhanced as they collaborate with older adults on a service learning project.
- Topics to be examined include: family caregiver/care recipient experiences, loss/resiliency, advance directives/end-of-life decision-making, the impact of substance abuse, and elder abuse.
- Content bridges theory and practice utilizing a case study methodology to reflect practice-based situations encountered by practitioners, older adults and their families.

## G. Stony Brook University

The interdisciplinary minor in community service learning is open to all undergraduates who wish to add a service learning dimension to their academic experience. The program, housed in James College, is designed to use the special educational and research opportunities available at Stony Brook to create citizens with the depth of commitment to community service that the 21st century demands. Acquisition of skills and knowledge is combined with a fostering of appreciation by students of their role as citizens both in the University and in the surrounding communities. The learning arena is extended into the community by addressing local social issues. After completion of academic course work, student interns are partnered and assigned to work in specific communities to address community concerns.

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