

West Chester University of PA
Office of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs
610/436-3379

Risk Management: A Guide for WCU Faculty Using Service-Learning

To help ensure a successful service-learning experience for you and your students, the Office of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs recommends that you review these guidelines. The best way to manage any potential risks is to ***think through your design, prepare well, and maintain open communication.***

Think through your design.....

How will students be placed? There are generally three ways that faculty arrange for students to be placed in community sites:

1. Students will be placed in various agencies through the Office of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs;
2. Students select various alternative sites on their own that are not listed with the office;
3. You, the faculty member, establish a relationship with an agency for your course.

No matter how students are placed, community sites should meet the following criteria:

- ~Agency has non-profit status. (If students are to be placed in private home settings for service activities, there should be a coordinating agent with non-profit status, such as community organization, church, school, etc.);
- ~Agency has trained staff, responsive to you and to volunteers;
- ~Agency has adequate policies for volunteers.

Please note:

- ~If students are placed through the Office of Service-Learning (#1 above), agencies should already be meeting the criteria listed above.
- ~If you are allowing some or all of your students to select agencies not listed with the Office of Service-Learning (#2 above), we recommend requiring that students provide you, at minimum, with some verification of the three criteria above. (Incorporate that step not as “busy work” but as part of the learning process for students.)
- ~If you are establishing an individual relationship with an agency (#3 above), you as the faculty member should verify that the agency meets the criteria above. We recommend that you also ask if the agency has a risk management policy, obtain a copy, and read it. Discuss it with your community site contact, including any questions it raises for you. If the agency does not have a risk management policy, that does not preclude working with them, but do have a more detailed conversation with your Department Chairperson concerning the project and any potential risks.

Prepare well.....

- ~Arrange for the University Catalog, course registration listings, and/or departmental information to note that “some (or all) sections of this course provide a service-learning experiential component.
- ~Include an explicit description of the experiential component of the course in your syllabus, including whether the service is required or optional; try to make your syllabus available in advance of course registration, and provide it upon student request.
- ~Devote class time to an overview of what you and the agency are expecting students to do, how you are expecting them to act, and how they should be treated during the service experience. Any potential risks should be discussed in class, along with the benefits of participating in the project (the Director/Graduate Assistant for the Office of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs are available to attend your class and help facilitate this discussion). The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse recommends considering the following questions:
 - What are the potential risks to service-learners of having contact with agency clients?
 - What are the potential risks to service-learners of traveling to and from their homes, the campus and the agency?
 - What are the potential risks to agency staff and clients of having student service-learners on-site, and how might they be minimized?
 - How is confidentiality of students, agency staff, and clients assured?”
- ~Service-learners should sign an informed consent document; generic documents and local samples of these forms are available in the Office of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs or on the website at:
<http://www.wcupa.edu/services/stu.slv/default.asp#forms>

Maintain open communication.....

- ~It is essential to build time into your semester and your class meetings to check in with students and community partners throughout the semester, not just at the outset.
- ~Whenever possible, design on-site community visits.
- ~When direct visits are not possible, and even when they are, be sure that service-learners know who the “go-to” person is at their sites.
- ~Establish a protocol for reporting difficulties, so small challenges do not grow into larger problems.

If you would like to discuss risk-management and liability, as well as other issues related to service-learning, please contact:

Maggie Tripp, Director of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs

**Hannah Ashley, Service-Learning Faculty Associate, Associate Professor
Department of English**

**Office of Service-Learning and Volunteer Programs
B - 19 Killinger Hall 610-436-**