Community Partner Handbook

Dear Community Partners,

Today's UCA students are fortunate to attend a university with service-learning courses offered every semester in a wide variety of disciplines. These courses give students the opportunity to study an academic discipline from a new perspective, applying their skills and knowledge in the world outside of the classroom. Students who find that they have a passion for service also have many opportunities to volunteer in their free time, whether they sign up for a one-time event or volunteer weekly at the same organization. Our students would have none of these opportunities without all of the work you do to grow the nonprofits in our community and your willingness to open your doors to college students.

My goal as Service-Learning Program Coordinator is always to ensure that our campus-community partnerships are truly reciprocal and that the breadth and depth of university resources are available to our community. I hope that this handbook will provide you with some support and practical resources for working with UCA and our students, and I invite your input into the work that we do together so that we can continuously improve and grow.

Yours in Service,

Lesley Graybeal

Service-Learning Program Coordinator

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Introduction

UCA's Vision, Mission, and Core Values

According to the UCA website, the vision of the university is the following (emphasis added):

> The University of Central Arkansas aspires to be a premier learner-focused public comprehensive university, a nationally recognized leader for its continuous record of excellence in undergraduate and graduate education, scholarly and creative endeavors, and **engagement with local, national, and global communities**.

In support of this vision, the University of Central Arkansas has adopted the following mission:

> The University of Central Arkansas, a leader in 21st-century higher education, is committed to excellence through the delivery of outstanding undergraduate and graduate education that remains current and responsive to the diverse needs of those it serves. The university's faculty and staff promote the intellectual, professional, social, and personal development of its students through innovations in learning, scholarship, and creative endeavors. **Students, faculty, and staff partner to create strong engagement with the local, national, and global communities.** The University of Central Arkansas dedicates itself to academic vitality, integrity, and diversity.

UCA has furthermore adopted four core values: intellectual excellence, community, diversity, and integrity. The UCA website provides the following description of community:

> We value and respect as our greatest asset the people who make up our community–students, faculty, and staff, as well as the people connected to us through ties to our local community and region, the state of Arkansas, our nation, and the world. That is, we believe people are the focus of our institution.

Who is Involved in Service-Learning at UCA?

The Service-Learning Program at UCA is supported by three key individuals. First and foremost, the Service-Learning Program Coordinator, housed in the Division of Outreach & Community Engagement, is dedicated full-time to developing and maintaining service-learning at UCA. Second, the Service-Learning Faculty Liaison is the first point of contact for many faculty members who are interested in starting a service-learning project or learning more about service-learning pedagogy. Finally, the Director of the Center for Teaching Excellence consults with faculty and ensures that they have access to faculty development opportunities related to service-learning.

What is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities. Faculty members can choose to use service-

learning as one way of engaging their students with course material and applying what they learning in class in the "real world".

Individual service-learning projects may vary in their duration, the number of hours that students serve, and the type of service that students provide. Most, but not all, projects involve a community partner. All service-learning experiences **must** include some type of meaningful service and an opportunity for students to reflect on the service in order to connect it to the course.

Types of Service-Learning

Direct Service-Learning: person-to-person, face-to-face service projects in which the students' service directly impacts individuals who receive the service from the students. Examples include
- o Tutoring other students and adults
- o Conducting art/music/dance lessons for youth
- o Giving presentations on violence and drug prevention
- o Helping in a homeless shelter
- o Creating life reviews for Hospice patients

Indirect Service-Learning: working on broad issues, environmental projects, or community development–projects that have clear benefits to the community or environment, but not necessarily to individually identified people with whom the students are working. Examples include
- o Compiling a town history
- o Restoring historic structures or building low-income housing
- o Removing invasive plants and restoring ecosystems in preserve areas for public use

Research-Based Service-Learning: gathering and presenting information on areas of interest and need–projects that find, gather, and report on information that is needed. Examples include
- o Writing a guide on available community services and translating it into Spanish and other languages of new residents
- o Conducting longitudinal studies of local bodies of water; water testing for local residents
- o Gathering information and creating brochures or videos for non-profit or government agencies
- o Mapping state lands and monitoring flora and fauna

Advocacy Service-Learning: educating others about topics of public interest–projects that aim to create awareness and action on some issue that impacts the community. Examples include
- o Planning and putting on public forums on topics of interest in the community
- o Conducting public information campaigns on topics of interest or local needs
- o Working with elected officials to draft legislation to improve communities

Examples of Service-Learning Projects at UCA

When you think about how service-learning students might work with your organization, consider how they might apply the stills they are learning in class in direct, indirect, research, or advocacy work with your organization. Here are just a few examples of projects UCA students have done:

- Graphic Design students created app concepts to meet the specific needs of various community partners
- Literature for Adolescents students selected and purchased books for youth served by the Children's Advocacy Alliance
- Political Science students conducted a survey of Conway residents
- Spanish students taught a class to fourth grade students at Julia Lee Moore Elementary
- Exercise Science students led a fitness club for residents at College Square Retirement Community
- History students hosted activities at the Faulkner County Museum open house
- Public Relations Cases and Campaigns students create a PR campaign for a different nonprofit every spring
- Physics students led a LEGO robotics unit for Glenhaven Sparks Out of School program

Service-Learning vs. Volunteerism and Internships

Service-learning can be different from volunteering or internships in that it deliberately links community engagement to educational outcomes of a particular course or educational program. Learning is assessed and measured through student reflections and other assignments, like essays, group discussion, projects, or portfolios.

Volunteers may commit to addressing community needs, but their work does not have to be explicitly tied to academic learning and reflection.

Interns may be required to demonstrate mastery of learning through their work experiences, but their experiences may or may not be focused around meeting a need identified by the community.
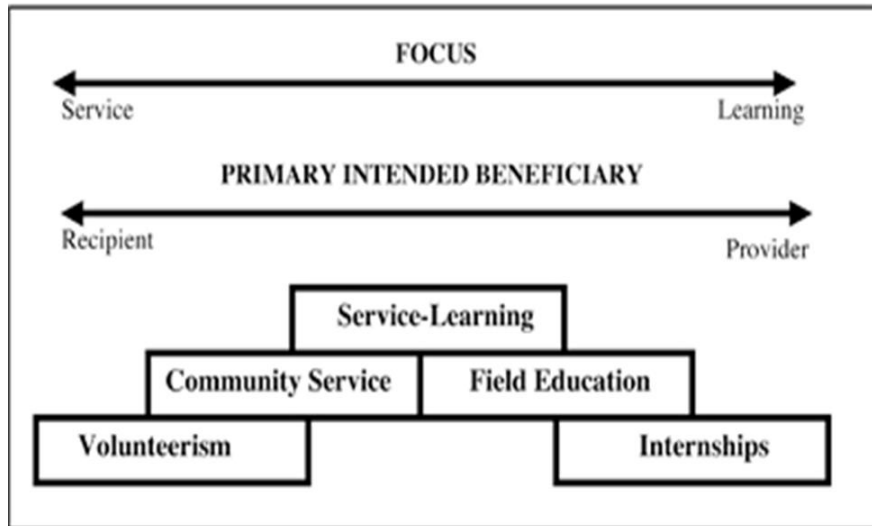
Benefits of Service-Learning

Service-learning research shows that it is an effective strategy for helping students learn academic content, but it also has many other benefits for the stakeholders involved:

Benefits for Community Partners
- o Useful service from student volunteers
- o Enhanced organizational capacity to achieve mission
- o Exposure of students to mission and purpose, possibility crating a lasting interest in volunteering with the organization
- o Enhanced relationships with the university
- o Foundation for continuing partnerships with the university

Benefits for Students
- o Positive effect on interpersonal development, the ability to work well with others, leadership and communications skills
- o Positive effect on sense of social responsibility and citizenship skills
- o Enhanced academic learning, when compared to similar courses that are not integrating service-learning
- o Stronger relationships with faculty, when compared to students who are not involved in service-learning
- o Improved satisfaction with college experience
- o More likely to graduate, when compared to students who did not participate in service-learning
- o Propensity to continue service and practice active citizenship following graduation

Benefits for Faculty
- o   Satisfaction with enhanced quality of student learning
- o   Connections with community organizations
- o   Efficacy and impact of course in the community
- o   Opportunities to develop scholarship related to community engagement
- o   Ability to demonstrate real world application of student learning
- o   Personal satisfaction
- o   Contribution to the university's strategic plan and mission

Getting Started

How to Share a Service-Learning Opportunity

If you would like to become a community partner, the first step is to contact the Service-Learning Program Coordinator at lgraybeal@uca.edu or submit the online Community Partner Information Form.

The information that you include in the form about your volunteer needs and partnership interests will be added to a database of community partners and shared with the UCA community. When faculty contact the Service-Learning Program Coordinator for help finding a community partner organization for a specific course, the information in this database helps us to match faculty interests with community needs. Any specific events that you include in the form will also be placed on the calendar of volunteer opportunities for the general student body.

In order to be considered a formal community partner of the university, you will also be asked to sign a letter of agreement. More information is provided in the section of this handbook on understanding the letter of agreement.

Timeline for Developing a Service-Learning Project

If a faculty member is interested in partnering with your organization on a specific project or course, he or she will likely contact you at least one or two semesters in advance to begin planning. The planning process for most courses, especially service-learning courses, is long and time consuming, but when done well, this planning pays off with meaningful, substantive partnerships! To facilitate this process, the Service-Learning Program updates the community partner database every summer and will contact you to renew your partnership and update your information.

The UCA Academic Calendar can be a useful tool when planning a partnership or when seeking UCA student volunteers.

Understanding the Letter of Agreement

A Letter of Agreement is the document that formalizes the relationship between your organization and the university through Outreach & Community Engagement, where the Service-Learning Program is housed. The Letter of Agreement will outline certain responsibilities that you have as a community partner (such as providing up-to-date information about your organization's needs and interests, providing UCA students with necessary training and a safe workplace, and communicating with the

Service-Learning Program Coordinator promptly if any problems with UCA student placements arise). The Letter of Agreement also outlines responsibilities that UCA Outreach & Community Engagement has to you as a community partner. Please read the Letter of Agreement when it is sent to you and be sure to ask any questions or seek clarification where needed.

Risk Management

Both community partners and service-learning faculty can take some steps to manage the risk involved in service-learning projects that take place off campus. Some recommended practices are listed here, but always have a conversation with your partner faculty member or the Service-Learning Program Coordinator if you have concerns.

- Ask the faculty member to visit the site where students will be working (if applicable) before the project begins.
- Provide the faculty member and students with an orientation to your organization and training, including procedures for working with any special populations you serve.
- Communicate with the faculty member and the Service-Learning Program Coordinator about any additional requirements for students, such as background checks or health insurance, in advance. Avoid asking students to be alone with a staff member or a client.
- If you will not be supervising students directly, know who from your organization will be supervising, as well as where the students will be and when in case an emergency occurs.
- Have a phone number where you can reach the faculty member in case of emergency, as well as emergency contacts for any students working on site with you.
- Be aware that community partners must also abide by the university's Title IX regulations regarding sex discrimination and sexual harassment. More information about university policies and procedures for Title IX violations is available on the [UCA website](#).

Building Effective Partnerships

Setting Expectations

The National Youth Leadership Council has a worksheet for [Planning Effective Partnerships](#) that we recommend faculty use when partnering with community organizations. You may wish to create your own list of questions or topics to discuss with the faculty member you are partnering with on a service-learning project. Consider the following issues as a starting point:

- What goals do you each wish to accomplish? What goals do you share?
- What type of work will students be doing, and what preparation will they need from the faculty member and from you?
- What costs will be involved with the project, and who is responsible for those costs?
- What timeline will you follow for planning and implementing the project?
- How will you communicate with one another and the students throughout the project? Will you check in at certain times during the project, and when? With whom?
- How will you assess the impact or outcomes of the project?

- What role will you have in assessing student performance?
- How will you evaluate the success of the partnership overall?

Communicating with Faculty & Students

We recommend establishing clear ground rules for communication early in your partnership. These ground rules will vary depending on the nature of the project. For instance, if students are providing one-time direct service with your organization, you may wish to meet with them in person once prior to the direct service experience and once afterwards, but no other communication may be needed. On the other hand, students who are working on an indirect or research-based service for your organization may have questions for you throughout the semester to guide them in their work. Discuss with the faculty member whether you would like all the students to be able to contact you directly or only a few designated representatives, as well as any restrictions on when and how students contact you.

Preparing Students to Serve

If students will be serving on site with your organization, you probably already have an orientation that you provide to volunteers. Be sure to discuss with your faculty partner what type of orientation, training, background checks, confidentiality agreements, or other volunteer preparation will be required before students can serve.

If you do not already have an orientation prepared, consider sharing the following information with students, either by visiting the class or on the students' first visit to your organization:

- Your organization's mission, history, and day-to-day operations
- The population your organization serves and any special considerations
- How the students' project fits into the organization's work more broadly
- The role of community volunteers in the organization
- Logistical information for volunteers, such as parking, check-in, dress code, conduct, and safety information

Learning from Service

Helping Students Reflect

A key ingredient of service-learning is critical reflection on the service experience. Reflection is what makes service-learning different from volunteerism. The faculty member will be responsible for encouraging students to reflect on their service, but you can start the wheels turning on site by asking students thoughtful questions. A good, basic approach to reflection is to use a "What? So What? Now What?" model.

- What did you do today? Who did you work with?
- How did you feel about the experience? What surprised you? What upset or frustrated you? What made you feel good? What do you think you accomplished? What were you unable to accomplish?
- What can you do with your education and skills to further address the root cause of this social issue?

Evaluating Your Experience

Through the Service-Learning Program assessment plan, we have several ways for community partners to reflect on and evaluate their own experiences with service-learning. At the end of every semester, organizations that partnered with service-learning courses that semester will receive an email with a link to an evaluation survey. We also invite community partners to participate in focus groups annually every spring. If you are interested in providing additional feedback on the program, please contact Lesley Graybeal at lgraybeal@uca.edu or (501) 852-7416. Your thoughts and ideas are always appreciated!

Other Ways to Get Involved

Internships

College student interns can be a valuable asset to a nonprofit organization that simply needs one or two committed, ongoing volunteers to assist with program administration. UCA Career Services advertises both paid and unpaid internship opportunities to students through their cooperative education program. If you have an internship opportunity that you believe might be eligible for academic credit, you can also share that opportunity with the relevant academic discipline (PR, public administration, sociology, etc.). The Service-Learning Program does not coordinate internship opportunities, but we are happy to help by referring you to the appropriate department contacts if you have an internship to advertise. Keep in mind that internships for academic credit are typically set up a few months in advance when students are registering for classes.

Volunteers

In addition to providing support for faculty partnering with community organizations for a course-based service-learning project, the Service-Learning Program also advertises co-curricular volunteer opportunities to the student body and advocates for individual students and student groups to get involved in the community. If you are seeking general volunteers for an ongoing need or a specific event, you can note these needs in the online Community Partner Information Form as well.

Nonprofit Workshops

The UCA Service-Learning Program hosts various networking events and workshops for nonprofits in partnership with nonprofit support organizations such as United Way of Central Arkansas and the Arkansas Community Foundation. Information about upcoming events and links to register online are available on the UCA Outreach & Community Engagement website.

Campus Facilities

UCA Service-Learning Community Partners who have a current, signed Letter of Agreement on file are considered affiliated groups and are eligible to use UCA Downtown and certain other on-campus facilities for meetings and training events. For information about facilities booking, contact Conference Services.

Service-Learning Advisory Committee

Two members of the community are invited to serve one-year terms on the Service-Learning Advisory Committee. UCA Service-Learning Community Partners who are interested in serving should contact Dr. Peter Mehl, committee chair, at peterm@uca.edu.

Links and Resources

Service-Learning Program Information

UCA Service-Learning Program: www.uca.edu/servicelearning

UCA Service-Learning Program Partner Information: http://uca.edu/servicelearning/partners/

UCA Service-Learning Program Nonprofit Workshop Series: www.uca.edu/outreach/nonprofits

Community Partner Information Form: http://fluidsurveys.com/s/communitypartnerinfo/

Community Partner Database: https://www.obvibase.com/p/WHDAbKhixtFk#table/WHDAbKhixtFk/*

University Information

UCA Academic Calendar: https://uca.edu/registrar/academic-calendar/

UCA Career Services: www.uca.edu/career

UCA Conference Services: http://uca.edu/brewerhegeman/reservations/

UCA Title IX Information: http://uca.edu/titleix/