

Guiding Principles to Reduce Risk in Service Learning

For Staff and Faculty

- DO provide campus and community 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.
- DO discuss Learning Plans with students so they fully understand their responsibilities, learning objectives and service objectives, and are informed of the risks associated with their service-learning placements. Students should sign in Learning Plan, and have their site supervisor(s) and faculty members review and sign it as well.
- DO build a working relationship with your risk manager and contracts and procurement officer.
- DO be aware that special insurance policies for professional coverage are available for specific students and programs. (i.e. nursing, social work).
- DO conduct site reviews before, during and after a service-learning course is offered.
- DO 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.
- DO 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.
- DO offer alternative placements and /or opportunities for students in service-learning courses to avoid potential risks. DO meet the special safety needs of any student.
- DO be aware that there are state and federal regulations regarding fingerprinting and background checks for those students whose service-learning placements are in organizations that works with children, the elderly, or persons with disabilities.
- DO know when each student is scheduled to provide service and be able to verify that the student did provide the service at the community-based organization site. This will help to determine who holds liability for student behavior or student injury at any given time.
- DO know where emergency contact information for students is kept, and what the procedures are at the university and at the community-based organization site if an emergency occurs. If the community-based organization 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 students are automatically covered for liability through the university or community-based organization when they enroll in courses and participate in service-learning activities.
- DON'T assume that campus and site orientations are consistent; they vary among courses, campuses, departments and community-based organizations.
- DON'T assume individual and faculty members or departments are aware of the students' whereabouts or activities while performing their service learning.
- DON'T assume that students are aware of such issues as liability or sexual harassment policies. Both campus and site orientations are necessary to familiarize students with any potential risks involved with service-learning activities.
- DON'T assume that student fees will automatically absorb incidental costs for fingerprinting and background checks, or that the community-based organization will pay these fees. They can be an additional financial burden for a particular placement.
- DON'T arrange travel for students. Liability is greatly reduced if students are responsible for their own transportation to and from the service site.