

# Service Designation Overview

## Institutional Definitions

**Service-Learning:** A teaching and learning strategy by which students learn through intentional and structured *community service* tied to specific learning outcomes and integrated through reflection.

**Community Service:** The practice of volunteering one's time and talents to promote the common good and personal growth, while meeting actual community needs.

**Academic Community Engagement:** The collaborative integration of purposeful academic activities with community goals that lead to a fuller understanding of complex societal issues while advancing a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

**Experiential Learning:** A “learning through action” philosophy that informs methodology which educators utilize to engage learners in intentional direct experience and focused reflection outside the traditional classroom setting to increase knowledge, develop skills and strategies, clarify values, and apply prior learning. ([Adapted from the Association of Experiential Education](#)).

*\*While service-learning is always experiential, not all experiential learning is service-learning.*

## Service-Learning and Service Designations

Courses that engage students in the community through volunteering, public service, campaigning, outreach, etc. are encouraged to be evaluated for an "S" designation. This distinction allows for all courses with a service component to be recognized and accounted for during relevant assessments. Service-learning has been identified as a high impact teaching practice and involves teaching specific learning outcomes through service and then reflecting upon that experience. Community engagement becomes a method of teaching, just as reading, lectures and other assignments. This allows students the opportunity to learn through experience, before reflecting upon this experience in the classroom and solidify their understanding. Courses that use this pedagogy of service-learning can be designated as service courses.

There are some courses that ask students to participate in community service but do not necessarily incorporate reflection into the course or connect the service to the discipline. These courses are not utilizing the high impact service-learning pedagogy but are still relevant in the assessment of university engagement and are encouraged to apply for S designation.

While service-learning pedagogy is recognized as a high impact teaching practice and is encouraged as an effective way to engage students in the community, all courses utilizing service should be submitted for designation. To capture the most academic community engagement, all courses submitted will be evaluated at two benchmarks and internally categorized as service courses (S) or service-learning courses (SL).

**Service courses (S) must meet the following criteria:**

- Course could range from 1-6 credit hours and includes 4 or more hours of service related activities.
- Service has a goal of educating students about societal needs and challenges in addition to fulfilling learning outcome(s).
- Course options ensure that no student is required to participate in a service placement that creates a religious, political, and/or moral conflict for the student.  
Example statement below:
  - Choices for service assignments will be set up so as not to require any student to participate in a service placement that creates a religious, political and/or moral conflict for the student. Students who feel that their service placement may create this type of conflict should speak to the instructor about alternative placement options.

**Service-learning (SL) courses must meet the above criteria as well as the following:**

- Service to the community is reciprocal, meeting needs determined by the community as well as student learning goals.
- Academic material is clearly linked to the service experience.
- Explicit reflection activities are utilized to assess the learning outcomes tied to the service activity.

## Examples

- **“S”** – An Animal and Veterinary Science course with a goal of helping students become more engaged citizens and future professionals, requires students to complete 15 hours of community service of their choosing throughout the semester.
- **“SL”** – A Strategic Communications course pairs students with local nonprofit organization to develop press releases, web content and promotional materials as they learn and practice these skills throughout the semester. The students have an opportunity to see their work utilized to impact a local cause, get real feedback from a ‘client’ and have an opportunity to practice what they are learning in the classroom while reflecting and getting feedback from their professor.

## Designation Process

All courses that incorporate community engagement are encouraged to apply for designation. This improves the ability to assess community engagement at both a university and department level. WVU holds the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification and this designation is one of the processes that allows us to maintain this status.

1. Submit an electronic version of the syllabus to the Center for Community Engagement (CCE) at [serveandlearn@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:serveandlearn@mail.wvu.edu)
2. The CCE will review to determine if the course meets the criteria and follow up for any additional information needed
3. The course will be reviewed and approved by the Service-Learning Faculty Advisory Committee
4. You will be notified about the designation decision
5. If your course meets the criteria, the CCE will notify the registrar's office to add the service attribute to your course

## CCE Tools and Resources Available

The Center for Community Engagement provides resources to support academic community engagement from planning, through implementation and assessment. Below is a summary of resources available. You can [request assistance here](#).

- CCE promotes all service-learning courses
- CCE can recommend community partners with needs that will meet specific learning objectives
- iServe as a tool for students to find and/or log service hours
  - Course page on iServe for your students, giving you an at a glance view of their progress
- CCE can provide initial presentation to students to cover:
  - Why service-learning as a pedagogy?
  - Introduction to iServe
  - Explanation of best practices for communication with community partner
- CCE can showcase final presentations and help to highlight impact of course
- Available tools
  - Exploration questions to help match students to a partner organization
  - Service-Learning contract to help students and community partner map out expectations
  - Evaluation for students and community partners
  - Impact reports to highlight outcome
- Service-Learning Teaching Assistants
  - Choose an undergraduate student to be an SLTA who will take a course with the CCE, learn more about service-learning as a pedagogy and devote 1-4 hours a week to coordinate service activities for your S designated course.

## FAQs

- What if I am planning to do service in my course but something falls through?
  - Service-learning is flexible so even if your course is designated as a service course, it is acceptable if modifications were made. Notify the CCE so that records can be updated for reporting purposes.
- What if my course is the only service section and other faculty teach the same course without service?
  - Courses are designated by course section.
- What if I am doing service this semester but not in the future?
  - Once your course is designated, the CCE will contact you each semester to ask if you are facilitating a service-learning course.

If you or your department would like to meet with a representative from the CCE to discuss academic community engagement and resources available through the center, please contact:

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WVU Center for Community Engagement  
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