
SERVICE LEARNING STUDENT HANDBOOK



Email

Service.Learning@smu.ca

Call

Microsoft Teams Call
(By appointment)

Location

Student Centre
4th Floor, Room 410

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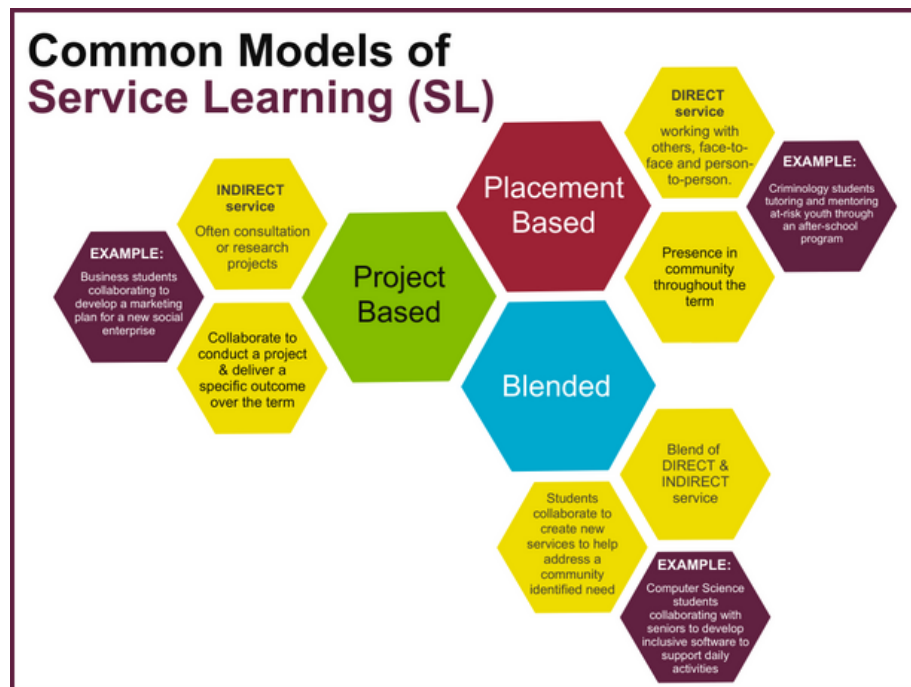
What is Service Learning?

Definition

Course-Based **Service Learning (SL)** is an experiential learning approach which links community-based experience with course content.

SL involves a range of activities intended to benefit the service provider (the student) and the recipient (the Community Partner), while maintaining a focus on learning.

Students participate in unpaid service experiences, in addition to regular class hours, and complete assignments which incorporate reflection about their experiences. Sometimes **Service Learning** is an optional assignment, but it may also be a required element of a course.



What Service Learning is Not

- An add-on to an otherwise unaltered academic course
- Logging a certain # of hours in order to get a credit
- A volunteer or community service program where critical reflection is absent
- A practicum, internship, or co-op program intended to provide students with employment related experience only

What Are the Benefits of SL?

Benefits for Students

- Make curriculum relevant through exploring and applying theory/concepts outside of the classroom
- Offer opportunities to broaden knowledge, practice and deepen skills such critical thinking, problem-solving, research, communication, and leadership
- Allow space for students to reflect on the experience and on issues of social responsibility
- Enhance social awareness and civic responsibility
- Allow students to reflect on their own personal values, as well as challenge their presumptions about certain populations and social issues in the community
- Give students an opportunity to contribute to and build relationships in the community

Benefits for Faculty Members

- Incorporate theory/concepts taught in class with community identified opportunities
- Encourage students to be more engaged in class by reflecting on their experiences and drawing connections to course content and objectives
- Enrich the teaching and learning process
- Encourage innovation, collaboration, and partnership building with community organizations that can potentially lead to university-community research partnerships
- Promote experiential learning

Benefits for Community Partners

- Provide additional human resources, which in turn allows Community Partners to increase services and accomplish goals that may otherwise not have been possible
- Recognize and values the community and organizations as co-educators that have knowledge to share
- Extend academic knowledge and skills that students have gained through their university studies to the community
- Foster collaboration between the university and the community
- Create space for a youth perspective in the delivery of social programs

Expectations of **SL** Students

How Can I Contribute to a Successful **SL** experience?

There are many factors that will determine the success of your **SL** experience. Some of these factors are out of your control (i.e. the weather, program cancellations/closures, illness of clients, etc.). However, the one factor you can control is **YOU** and how much you give to the **SL** experience will affect how much you get out of it. **SL** experiences involve working with other professionals and it is expected that **SL** students' work ethic will be similar to those of competent full-time staff in a similar service.

Service Learning Students Are Expected To:

1. Demonstrate a commitment to the course and to the Community Partner

- Recognize that others are depending on your attendance and participation.
- Attend and complete the Saint Mary's **SL** Student Orientation and any necessary training/orientation with your Community Partner.
- Complete any organizational requirements (e.g. record checks, immunizations, etc.) before the start of your **SL** placement/project
- Acknowledge that you are representing Saint Mary's University by acting in a professional manner and adhering to the Student Code of Conduct throughout the **SL** placement/project.
- Know your rights and responsibilities and adhere to Saint Mary's policies regarding violence in the workplace, sexual assault, harassment and discrimination, and reporting incidents and injuries.
- Inform the course instructor and **Service Learning** Office if any accommodations are required before the start of your **SL** placement/project
- Advise the **Service Learning** Office promptly (as early as possible) of any concerns or issues with respect to the **SL** placement/project.
- Complete and submit all required **SL** forms by the deadlines

Expectations of **SL** Students Cont'd

How Can I Contribute to a Successful **SL** experience?

2. Accept feedback & be willing to learn

SL is collaborative, and therefore, it is important that you are prepared to accept feedback from your site-supervisor and other members of the Community Partner organization.

- Observe others and offer to help out when you are able.
- Patience is important, as community work does not always have a consistent pace.
- Be open to unexpected learning and learn from both the positive and challenging experiences.
- Accepting feedback can be challenging. Maintain a professional attitude when receiving feedback and constructive criticism, take the suggestions into consideration, ask questions to clarify, and incorporate the feedback into your service.
- Recognize that the Community Partner and community members have knowledge and experiences to share with you that may differ from your own but can contribute to the learning experience.

3. Communicate!

- Be polite and professional when speaking with your site-supervisor (phone, email, & in person).
- Know your role within the organization and the boundaries for your **SL** placement/project. Ask for clarification when needed.
- Ask about the history and the mission of the organization to help put your **SL** experience into context.
- Be aware of your site-supervisor's schedule.
- Do's and don't for effective communication will be shown in the following page

Expectations of **SL** Students Cont'd

How Can I Contribute to a Successful SL experience?

Things to avoid unprofessional communication

- Negative attitude, being rude/short tempered, unclear or confusing messages
- Using an unprofessional or outdated personal email (ex: soccerman69@yahoo.com; prettygirl4U@hotmail.ca)
- Expecting the organization to ONLY accommodate your schedule
- Expecting an immediate reply and/or not acknowledging the organizations' hours of operation (ex: emailing at 11:00pm and expecting a reply the following morning)
- Not asking for help; waiting until the end of term to raise concerns

Tips for Communicating With Your Community Partner

- Once you are assigned your Community Partner, connect with the site-supervisor within 2 business days.
- Be polite and professional.
- Be clear with your questions and needs.
- Use a professional email account and check it regularly!
- Use common language (not language that is specific to your discipline).
- Allow at least 2 business days for your Community Partner to reply to an email or phone call.
- If you would like so, **SL** Orientation & Safety Checklist to your first meeting.

Remember!

If you are experiencing difficulty with contacting your Community Partner, notify the Service Learning Office immediately.

Expectations of **SL** Students Cont'd

How Can I Contribute to a Successful SL experience?

4. Maintain confidentiality & be respectful of everyone you are working with

- Respect and maintain the confidentiality of personal and organizational information obtained during your **SL** placement/project.
- Treat organizational files and personal stories as privileged information. **DO NOT** remove organizational files or documents from the organization unless given permission to do so.
- Be conscious and avoid criticizing or complaining about how an organization does something when speaking with staff, clients, volunteers, etc. If you have an issue or complaint about a process, speak with your site-supervisor. If they cannot resolve it, contact the **Service Learning** Office and your professor.

Remember!

As part of your SL placement/project, you will discuss and reflect on your experience (e.g. paper, journal, class discussions, etc.).

- **DO NOT** reveal names, personal information, and/or identifying descriptions (such as the girl with pink hair).
- **DO NOT** provide, share, distribute, or discuss any information obtained during the SL placement/project on social media, the internet, television, radio, or any other medium.

5. Understand your own personal biases & avoid imposing these on others

Everyone has personal opinions and biases, but they should be stated with personal ownership and without pressuring or convincing others to accept them.

These might include:

- Criticism of others or organizations/institutions
- Disenchantment (no longer believing in something, especially having learned the problems of it)
- Strong value judgements that ask someone to deal with your own personal agenda

Expectations of **SL** Students Cont'd

How Can I Contribute to a Successful SL experience?

6. Know the rules of your SL placement/project and follow them

- Understand the need for criminal record checks, references, and confidentiality pledges.
- Adhere to the Community Partners' policies regarding the use of electronics, the dress code, etc.
- Don't report to your Community Partner site under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Remember!

Don't expose others to illness

If you are experiencing any of the COVID-19 symptoms, you should follow Nova Scotia Public Health directives, and inform your Community Partner if you will be absent from a scheduled session.

Wear a mask, stay six feet apart, and practice good hygiene.

Please use your judgement when it comes to your personal health.

Consider the populations and clients that you are interacting with during your SL placement/project and minimize the spread of disease and illness, especially if working in nursing homes, hospitals, daycares, and schools.

How can I prepare for **Service Learning**?

Learn About the Community Partner

- Research your Community Partner and the Community setting before you begin your placement/project.
- Visit their website, social media accounts, etc. and read about their mission, goals, and clientele.
- Take initiative to learn about existing strengths, as well as needs, in the community.
- Take time to listen and observe.

Be Punctual & Dependable

- Show up when you are scheduled to be at your placement.
- Ensure that you have a reliable means of getting to your placement/project on time.
- If possible, provide your site-supervisor with notice if you are ill or unable to make it.

Be Flexible, Open-Minded, & Realistic

- Understand that you should be prepared to offer a degree of flexibility and openness in response to the changing demand of your Community Partner.
- Be open-minded, listen, and try to understand. Remember that this is a learning experience and that no one expects you to be perfect or have all of the answers.
- Expect uncertainty at first. Your level of comfort and responsibility will increase as the semester progresses.

Discomforts in Service Learning

Service Learning Should Bring You Out of Your Comfort Zone!

Examples of BAD discomfort:

- Unsafe working conditions
- Harassment
- Assault
- Bullying
- Violence in the workplace

Examples of GOOD discomfort:

- Nervousness
- Being challenged
- Uncertainty
- New experiences
- New ideas

When in Doubt, Ask for Help!

If, at any time, you are not sure if a particular activity is safe, ethical, or appropriate, do not try to resolve the issue alone. Immediately stop the work and report your concerns to your Community Partner. If you have addressed the situation with your Community Partner, and still feel unsafe, please notify the **Service Learning Office**, who will assist you in navigating the work refusal.

How will SMU & my Community Partner prepare me for **SL**?

1. In Class Preparation:

Faculty members prepare students in class through discussions about course expectations, learning objectives/outcomes. With the SL Office you will discuss professionalism, policies, and the dual commitment to the course and the **SL** experience.

2. Service Learning Orientation:

- An overview of SMU Policies, Procedures, and the Student Code of Conduct
- Understanding the dual commitment (to their course & community partner)
- The importance of Confidentiality and Respect
- Discipline specific knowledge about the populations served (e.g. working with youth)
- Work ethic: professionalism, communication, punctuality, attitude, flexibility, dress code, accepting feedback, use of electronics, teamwork, etc.
- Examples of unacceptable behaviour

3. SL Student Agreement Form & Informed Consent:

After the **SL** Orientation session, students sign the **SL** agreement form and the **SL** Informed Consent, which is an acknowledgment that they understand their responsibilities for their **SL** project/placement and accept responsibilities for their own actions.

4. SL Orientation & Safety Checklist:

This document encourages students to orient themselves to their Community Partner programs and the clientele. It include prompts to questions that students need to understand and should be able to answer after their first meeting with their Community Partner.

5. Community Partner Orientation/Training:

- Introduction to the Organization/Program they will be working with
- Review the organizational policies and procedures
- Ask questions and clarify expectations
- Connect with other students working with the same organization

Reflection

Linking Service & Learning

What is Reflection?

The reflective process is what turns a volunteering position in a **SL** experience. Your professor provides reflective assignments to help evaluate your **SL** experience. This may be accomplished through various approaches and reflective assignments; it offers a space to critically analyze your **SL** experience, connect it to your course content, identify challenges/successes, and determine how you might adapt your approach in the future.

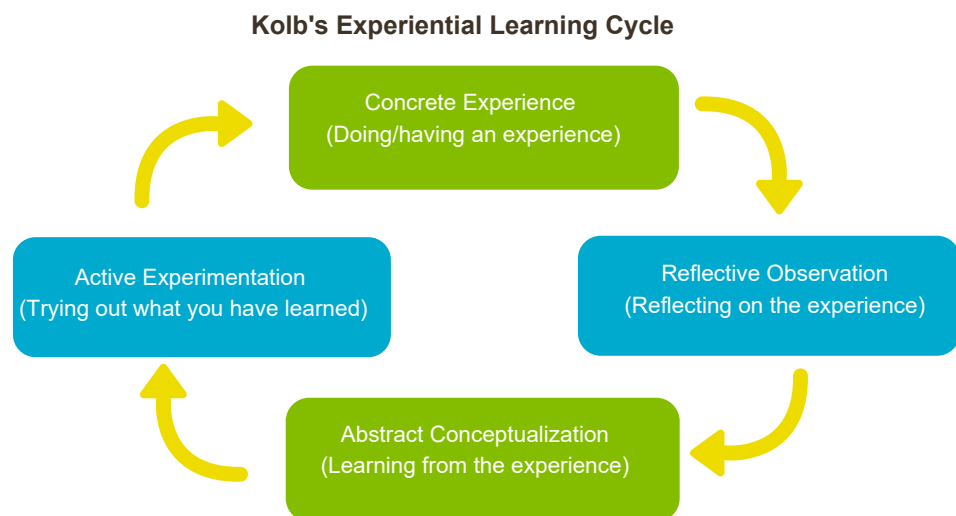
Why is Reflection Important?

Reflection is a key component of **Service Learning**; reflection activities provide the bridge between the service experience and the academic content of the course, challenging students to think critically and make meaning of their experiences.

What Does Reflection Have to Do With Service Learning?

Best practices in **Service Learning** indicate that reflection is critical to learning and it is best done before, during, and after the service.

David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle suggests that effective learning occurs when a person progresses through a cycle of four stages.



Reflection Cont'd

Linking Service & Learning

What Are Some Examples of Reflection?

With your Community Partner:

- Needs Assessment
- On-site check ins & Debriefing
- Presentation to the Board of Directors

Individual reflection:

- Reflective Journal
- Blog
- Essay
- Film/Artwork/Skit

Group reflection:

- Group Discussions
- Class Presentation
- Poster Presentation

References

Eyler, J., Giles Jr., D. E., & Schmiede, A. (1996). *A Practitioner's Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning: Student Voices and Reflections*. Vanderbilt University: Nashville, TN;

Eyler, J. (2002). Reflection: Linking Service and Learning—Linking Students and Communities. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(3), 517-534;

Mabry, J.B. (1998). Pedagogical variations in service-learning and student outcomes. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 5(1), 32–47.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development* (Vol. 1). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Facing Challenges During Your SL Experience

Who should I talk to...?

My Faculty Member:

- Questions related to the academic component of your course (assignments, course content, learning objectives, etc.)
- Grading and the value of your grade
- If the problem is an ethical issue
- If you dropped the course
- If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe at your SL placement
- If you have a valid reason for not being able to complete your SL placement/project

My Community Partner:

- Any questions regarding the organization, its mandate or clientele, or the tasks assigned should be directed to the Community Partner site-supervisor
- If you have a valid reason for missing a shift (illness, weather, program cancellations, etc.) and need to re-schedule to make up the hours

The Service Learning Office:

- If you want to participate in a SL opportunity that is not on your course list
- Conflicts or concerns with your Community Partner
- If you dropped the course
- If you feel uncomfortable or unsafe at your SL placement
- If you have a valid reason for not being able to complete your SL placement/project

Facing Challenges During Your SL Experience Cont'd

Emergency, Accident or Other Incident

In an emergency situation, call 9-1-1. Please contact your site-supervisor and the **Service Learning** Office after the threat has passed to report and manage the incident:

Saint Mary's University:

- Ensure that you read and understand Saint Mary's procedure for reporting incidents and injuries.
- Regardless whether the incident or injury occurred on or off campus, an Injury/Incident Report Form will need to be completed for Saint Mary's University. Contact the **Service Learning** Office for support.

Community partner:

- Your Community Partner will have their own procedure for reporting incidents and injuries, so please be sure to adhere to that as well, and ask your site-supervisor if you are unclear about how to proceed.

Know Your Rights!

The right to refuse

You have the right to refuse work during your **SL** placement/project for which you have reasonable grounds to believe that the work is likely to endanger your health or safety or the health or the safety of someone else.

You also have the responsibility to work safely during your **SL** experience and adhere to any organizational policies and procedures at your Community Partner.

Facing Challenges During Your SL Experience Cont'd

The vast majority of students have a very positive experience at their community organization. Occasionally, a student may be unhappy with their placement. If this is the situation for you, please talk to someone. It is important to be proactive and solve the problem early on. Through communication, most issues can be resolved in a manner that is acceptable to everyone.

Student Not Meeting SL Expectations

Remember that **SL** experiences are learning experiences and that you are representing Saint Mary's University, your professor, your program, and the **Service Learning** Office. Therefore, if you are consistently not meeting expectations, this will have a negative impact on your **Service Learning** experience.

SL experiences are integrated into your course, and are a part of your academic record, thus, you are subject to the Student Code of Conduct throughout the **SL** placement/project, whether on or off campus.

Examples of Unacceptable Behaviour:

- Consistently arriving late to your **SL** placement/project
- Unexcused or unexplained absences from your **SL** placement/project
- Breaching confidentiality
- Refusal to adapt or change behavior based on feedback from your Community Partner
- Being dishonest when reporting **SL** hours/deliverables or knowingly falsifying documents
- Theft, and/or deliberate or reckless damage to Community Partner property
- Conduct that threatens or endangers the health, safety, and/or well-being of anyone in their capacity as a member of the university community, on or off campus
- Unethical behavior, such as performing research on program participants without consent from Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board

Facing Challenges During Your SL Experience Cont'd

Harassment, Discrimination, & Sexual Assault Policies

SL experiences, as a form of experiential learning, occur on and/or off campus in various workplaces and organizations. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the resources available if you feel unsafe while participating in your SL experience. Saint Mary's Policies on Sexual Assault, Violence in the Workplace, Conflict Resolution, and the Prevention and Resolution of Harassment and Discrimination apply to incidents that occur in the course of work or study, including activities held off-campus, such as SL placements/projects.

Saint Mary's Policy on Conflict Resolution, and the Prevention and Resolution of Harassment and Discrimination

It is the responsibility of all members of the University community to contribute to a respectful environment for work and study. This policy applies to incidents that occur in the course of work or study, including activities held off-campus, such as Course Based **Service Learning** placements/projects.

Violence in the Workplace: Prevention & Response

Saint Mary's University acknowledges that physical violence/threatening behaviour in the workplace is an occupational health and safety hazard that can cause physical and emotional harm. All members of the University community, including faculty, staff, students and visitors, are responsible for the creation and maintenance of a safe environment.

Saint Mary's Sexual Assault Policy and Procedure

In the following page there are some examples of internal and external supportive services for students, faculty and staff involved in cases of sexual assault. Victims/survivors of sexual assault can decide whether or not to access available services and to choose the services they feel will be most beneficial to them.

Facing Challenges During Your SL Experience Cont'd

Harassment, Discrimination, & Sexual Assault Policies

- S.A.N.E. (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners Program) 902-425-0122 or avalonsane@eastlink.ca
- Saint Mary's Sexual Violence Advisor 902-420-5215
- Avalon Centre 902-422-4240 or www.avaloncentre.ca
- Saint Mary's University Security 902-420-5000 (emergency) 902-420-5577 (non emergency)
- Halifax Regional Police 902-490-5020 (non-emergencies)
- Emergency Services 911

For more support services and resources or visit the website.

Child in Danger: Duty to Report

Since many of the SL Community Partners work with and/or support children or youth, it is important to be aware of the Duty to Report. The Children and Family Services Act is designed to protect children from abuse and neglect. The legislation outlining the "Duty to Report" highlights the legal obligation of every Nova Scotian to report concerns of abuse or neglect of a child in order to ensure that children are protected from harm.

Every individual in the province of Nova Scotia has a legal obligation to report concerns of abuse or neglect of a child under the age of 19 in order to ensure children are protected from harm. Failure to report is a criminal offence.

If a disclosure happens during your SL experience, inform your Community Partner site-supervisor of the disclosure IMMEDIATELY!

The Community Partner will have a protocol to follow in this situation and will support you with the reporting process. DO NOT ask the child any questions or pursue the discussion. Your role is to report the disclosure and let the professional organization do its job.

Facing Challenges During Your SL Experience Cont'd

Personal Safety

Whenever you enter a community setting, questions about personal safety may arise. If at any time during your SL placement/project you feel unsafe, you have the right to leave. However, if you do so, it is your responsibility to notify your site-supervisor (if you feel comfortable doing so), as well as the **Service Learning** Office and outline your reasons for leaving.

Suggestions for maintaining your personal safety:

- Plan ahead. If you are unfamiliar with your Community Partner's location, plan your route and travel times before you arrive
- Leave personal valuables at home or ask your site-supervisor for a safe place to store items.
- Do not offer rides in your personal vehicle to people from the organization.
- Do not engage in any financial exchanges with the organization's clients, participants, or residents.
- Do not give personal information (such as your address, email, phone number or social media accounts) to people from the organization unless authorized to do so.
- Immediately report any incidents, real or perceived, which make you feel unsafe. Report them to both your site-supervisor and the SMU **Service Learning** Office.
- Maintain professional relationships and boundaries with the site-supervisor, staff, clients, participants, and residents at all times.
- Do not hesitate to seek assistance if you have questions or concerns.

Student Emergency Contact Information

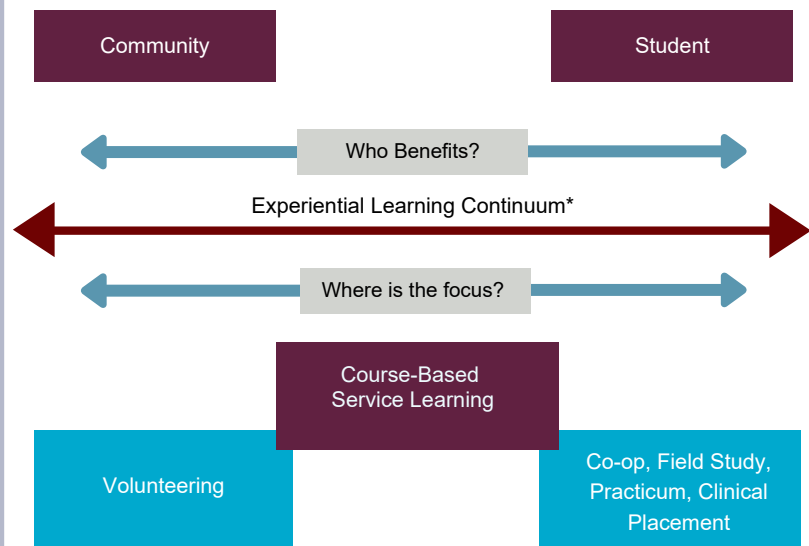
Ensure your emergency contact information is up to date:

- Log into Banner Self Service, go to the "Personal Information" tab and review/update your emergency contact information.
- Emergency contact information will be kept confidential and only accessed by the Registrar in the event of an individual emergency.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

How is Service Learning different from volunteering, a co-op, a practicum, etc.?

SL programs differ from other approaches to experiential education due to their intention to benefit both the provider and recipient of the service as well as having equal focus on both the service being provided and learning. (Furco, 1996, p. 12-14). The service to the community is integrated into the community in a way that supports or enhances existing academic standards and expectations, through readings, presentations, and assignments.



Students also have ongoing opportunities for reflection, which helps deepen analysis of course objectives, make meaning, and extract learning from their experience.

What does a typical SL experience look like?

SL placements/projects cover a broad spectrum of opportunities, generally occurring at verifiable non-profit, social profit, and publicly funded institutions. Suitable placements depend on course-level and individual learning objectives. This helps ensure that the service is integrated into a course in a way that supports or enhances existing academic standards and expectations, provides students an opportunity to reflect and think critically, and brings up reciprocity between the student and community partner.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Cont'd

I have accessibility requirements. Will my Community Partner be able to accommodate me?

Saint Mary's is committed to providing accessibility in education, but not all organizations are equally accessible. Saint Mary's University provides accommodations to students with disabilities through the Fred Smithers Centre. There are a variety of services available to help students achieve their academic and career goals. If you require an accommodation to participate in **Service Learning**, please contact the **Service Learning** Office. For all accessibility concerns or inquiries, please email fredsmithers.centre@smu.ca.

Can I do Service Learning anywhere I want?

No. **SL** placements/projects can only be performed at an approved Community Partner that is on the list distributed by your course instructor and the **Service Learning** Office. If you have a suggestion that is not on the list, please consult with your course instructor and the **Service Learning** Office. Remember, you must receive approval for a new Community Partner BEFORE you start your **SL** experience there!

Do I get course credit for my SL placement/project?

Yes, you do receive course credit from your **SL** experience. Service to the community is integrated into the course in a way that supports or enhances existing academic standards and expectations through related readings, presentations, reflection, and assignments. In this sense, academic credit is awarded for your demonstration of learning as it relates to the course, not the number of service hours performed. Consult your professor regarding how you will be graded and the value of your grade.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Cont'd

What if I miss SL hours due to storms, illness, or cancellations?

If you have a legitimate reason for missing a day, please let your Community Partner site-supervisor know right away. They can help you to arrange another time to make up the hours you missed. If this is not possible, please contact your Community Partner site-supervisor and the SMU **Service Learning** Office to come up with a solution. It is important that you complete all of your **SL** hours in order to uphold your commitment and for deeper learning to occur.

What happens if I drop the course and/or cannot complete the required SL hours?

Service Learning requires a DUAL commitment to both the community partner and to the course. Therefore, a valid reason must be presented for failure to complete the **SL** experience. You must inform your professor, the site-supervisor and the **Service Learning** Office of your desire to leave the program and the reason for the departure. Your professor will determine the effect this departure will have on your course work or grade. Students who do not complete a **SL** experience, may be prohibited from participating in a future experience.

What should I do if I have emailed my Community Partner contact but have not received a response?

Remember that community organizations are busy, often understaffed, and usually underfunded. You may experience delays in response time to your emails. If you do not receive a response after two business days, call your Community Partner contact directly and leave a message. If you do not hear back from your contact after another two business days, notify the **Service Learning** Office.

Contact Information Cont'd

Conflict Resolution Advisor:

While the University has no control over organizations who host students for **SL** placements, students should report incidents of harassment, which occur outside the University during **SL** placements/projects. The Conflict Resolution Advisor is available to service learning students to discuss incidents and options.

Student Centre (Room 416)
Phone Number : (902) 420-5113

Career & Experiential Learning:

Saint Mary's Career & Experiential Learning provides all students and recent alumni with the ability to expand their understanding of self, academic direction, and career planning. This is achieved through professional career counselling, job search skill development, innovative programming, experiential opportunities, and industry and employer connectivity.

Career & Experiential Learning

Student Centre, 4th Floor
Email: cel@smu.ca
Phone Number: (902) 420-5499



Contact Information

Contact information for Service Learning Office:

- Email: Service.Learning@smu.ca
- Call: Microsoft Teams Call (By appointment)
- Location: Student Centre 4th floor, Room 410

SL (Virtual) Microsoft Teams Office Hours:

- Tuesdays: 2:00pm-4:00pm
- Thursdays: 11:00am-12:00pm

Service Learning Team:

- Novella Nichettia: **Service Learning** Placement Coordinator
- Katherine Macdonald: **Service Learning** Program Assistant

