



Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning
l'Alliance canadienne pour l'apprentissage par le service communautaire

Communicating with your Community Supervisor

Once a student has made a commitment to a community service-learning project, it is essential to establish a good pattern of communication with both her/his academic instructor and community placement supervisor.

First, students should meet with community placement and academic supervisors to discuss their expectations of each other. This exchange should involve a mutually respecting, open dialogue among the partners—students, the academy and the community, one where all voices are heard and validated. With respect to communication between students and community supervisors, it is important for students to articulate what their learning objectives are, what you have to offer the community, and what you hope to accomplish during the community experience. Similarly, community partners need to be clear on what is expected from the student while she/he is involved in the agency or community. The student also needs to be reminded that the community partner is committed to facilitating learning opportunities for the student. A service-learning contract is a means for formalizing the responsibilities of the various partners (for examples of contracts see www.humboldt.edu/~slee/html/faculty.shtml#forms).

It is important for a student to develop a sense of connectedness with his/her community supervisor and the agency or neighbourhood in which he/she is involved in a service experience. The first step for the student is to get oriented and trained. Specifically, it is critical that you learn about the community, the issues it is facing and the specific agency or community group with whom you will be involved. (Mintz and Hesser 1986:30) This can be done in a structured way through research, or, informally through conversations and dialogue with the people with whom the student will be working.

The more informal way of "getting connected" (Visano 1987) requires genuine collaboration and interaction. Students are encouraged to be humble, active listeners and learners, and respectful of diverse voices and perspectives. While it is important for students to recognize and acknowledge the strengths that they will bring to community service-learning experiences, it is also important for students to appreciate that they have much to learn from the people with whom they will be working.

Once one is connected to the community and service begins, it is the responsibility of the student to:

- Accept supervision graciously.
- Keep the lines of communication open.
- Inform community supervisors if they are having difficulties fulfilling their placement responsibilities.
- Always be punctual, courteous and professional, respecting the rules governing the agency in which you are working (e.g. confidentiality).
- Always be safe. Be sure to bring to the attention of both community and faculty supervisors, any problems, emergencies or, safety issues that arise.

Finally, an important part of ongoing communication is periodic evaluations. Specifically, students should evaluate the effectiveness of their learning experiences and community partners should evaluate the effectiveness of the student's service. Through honest and constructive evaluation comes improvement, growth and change (Campus Outreach Opportunity League 1993).

WORKS CITED

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