What is a Community Engaged Scholarship Course?

Community Engaged Scholarship describes collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

– Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Community engagement makes student learning more relevant and challenges students to use their knowledge and skills to address real, complex, community concerns. Assigned community engagement activities facilitate learning of course objectives and drive deeper reflection on one's sense of purpose and civic responsibility.

Some Community Engaged Scholarship courses involve direct, in-person service with individuals in the community, for example, tutoring a child or preparing tax forms with low-income clients. Community Engaged Scholarship can also be indirect, in which students help build capacity of local community serving organizations by leveraging their acadmic skills: creating communication strategies, designing websites, writing grants, or conducting research.

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This Student Guide to Community Engaged Scholarship addresses the following topics:

Frequently Asked Questions about Community Engaged Scholarship Courses

How is a Community Engaged Scholarship course different from volunteering or an internship?

Community Engaged Scholarship links a community-based service initiative to the intended educational outcomes of a course. The course also includes a reflective component in which students think critically about issues related to active citizenship, equity, and contributing to a just community. Volunteers may commit to addressing community needs, but their work isn't intentionally tied to academic learning outcomes. Interns may be required to demonstrate mastery of learning through their applied experience, but this development of workplace skills may or may not be focused on issues of citizenship, equity, and community wellbeing.

What other community service opportunities are there at GW?

The Honey W. Nashman Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service provides far too many opportunities for community engagement to list here. Visit https://serve.gwu.edu for more information about service programs like engageDC and GW Art Reach, earning Federal Work-Study through service, service trips during spring break, and grants available to support your social innovation project ideas.

Are background checks required by community partners in order to serve?

When you will be interacting directly with community members, such as children, senior citizens, or people who are incarcerated, it is quite common for these organizations to require a background check. Be sure to ask your community partner for information about background checks and allow time to complete the process.

Some community partners require *DCPS Clearance*, which means they align their background checks with the DC Public School process. This clearance is valid for two years and includes a background check and fingerprinting. The Nashman Center provides step-by-step instructions for the DCPS Clearance process.

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Checklist for Community Engaged Scholarship Courses

Planning Phase

☐ **Familiarize yourself with the goal of the community engagement assignment in your course.**
Review the objectives and requirements of your service assignment in the course syllabus to be sure about the outcomes intended for the community and the learning outcomes for students.

☐ **Identify one or more community partner organizations to work with.**
Occasionally, the instructor will have pre-identified the community partner you will work with. In this case, you will be able to experience being part of an on-going partnership between that organization and your instructor.

In most cases, the instructor will provide a list of community partner organizations for you to choose from. These opportunities have been identified as good a fit for the course and usually represent a long-standing relationship between GW and these community organizations that your instructor would like to continue to honor. This is the first place to look for opportunities to serve because the organizations are well-familiar with GW students, with your course, and will be ready for your outreach.

This list will appear on the course page of GWServes. Log in with your GW Single Sign-on password (use the short-form of your GW email). Then under the **My Activity** menu, choose **Classes**. From there you will see links to the community engaged courses you are enrolled in.

If you would like to explore options outside of the list provided by your instructor, use the **Explore** tab on GWServes and search by social issue, location, or keywords. If you have decided to find your own community partner to serve with, be certain you are clear about your instructor's intentions for the service project and for your learning. You will need to communicate the course objectives to your community partner organization when setting up your project.

☐ **Contact the Community Partner.**
Starting reaching out to community organizations as soon as possible. The staff of these organizations are busy. You may need to contact several organizations to find a project quickly.

Follow the organization instructions. Some have an online volunteer sign-up process. Some ask that you email the volunteer coordinator. If you are writing the volunteer coordinator, include the kind of experience you're looking for, what you hope to learn from it, and what skills you can contribute.

☐ **Complete any necessary training or background checks.**
Follow instructions from your community partner in a timely way. This may include completing forms and attending orientation. Some organizations may require additional steps such as a police background check, or special training. Follow their instructions.

☐ **Complete the Online Waiver and Release Agreement Form (shared with you on GWserves).**
If you will be travelling off-campus for service, complete this form before you begin service.

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Action Phase

It is important to remember that you are representing not only yourself, but also George Washington University. These guidelines are a minimum of how you can best do that.

☐ **Be professional.** Treat your service as you would treat paid employment. Perform the responsibilities assigned to you in a complete and professional manner.

☐ **Maintain confidentiality** of clients and employees at your community site. Anything you share about your experience there should not reveal any identifying information of the people there.

☐ **Be punctual.** Arrive on time. Tardiness is unprofessional and inconvenient to the site supervisor who is counting on your help. Set a schedule with your supervisor for your service and stick to it. If you must make changes, communicate well in advance.

☐ **Be presentable, even if serving virtually.** Clothing should be neat, professional and appropriate for the duties required. Ask whether the organization has a specific dress code and meet it.

☐ **Communicate.** Ask questions if you aren't clear about how to do your tasks. If you have any concerns, communicate them before the situation becomes unmanageable.

☐ **Build relationships.** Try to get to know the people around you. This is a great opportunity to learn to build relationships with many kinds of people, the organizations executive director, the program staff, other volunteers, client of the organization, and local community members. Maintain professional boundaries. If anyone at the organization makes you feel uncomfortable, talk privately with the organization staff or with the Nashman Center at GW (gwserves@gwu.edu).

☐ **Be observant and mindful** of how you can link your service experience to your course topics. Ask questions of those around you to learn, but exercise empathy and respect in how you ask. Avoid giving the impression that you are negatively judging another's experience or decisions.

☐ **Transportation.** Use your Upass to take Metro and buses. You will be glad to get to know DC well enough to use the same public transportation options that its residents do. Smartphone apps like Citymapper are available to help plan trips and predict bus/train arrival times. In special circumstances, when arranged in advance, the Nashman Center can arrange for students to use Lyft.

☐ **Keep track of your service activities**, including the amount of time served and what was accomplished and report it to your instructor and community partner. At GW we use the Nashman Center's GWserves platform for this reporting, described below under the heading, *Reporting Service Activities.*

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Finishing Phase

As you wrap-up the semester, there are a wealth of opportunities for you to keep in mind.

☐ **Complete course assignments, weaving together your service experience with your academic learning.**

It is helpful to think of your service with the community as being more similar to a text than an assignment. You do not receive points or grades for reading your textbook or for completing service hours, but for completing exams or papers that demonstrate what you have learned from them. Reflection activities and course assignments will be assigned by your instructor to help meet the objectives of your particular course. You will do well if you are able to demonstrate an ability to articulate how your service experiences and the topics discussed in your course integrate and inform each other.

☐ **Continue to Serve Beyond the Course**

Many students may find that their ability to make a positive difference in the community is helpful for their own well-being. If you would like to continue to serve, you have several options:
- Continue to serve in the same capacity. Communicate with your community partner about continuing to serve with them beyond the timeframe of the course.
- Apply to serve through a Nashman Center Program. SMARTDC, engageDC, and Jumpstart are three examples of Nashman Center programs that engage students in the community, either voluntarily or earning Federal Work Study funding.
- If you would like to serve on your own, but with a new partner, use the "explore" tab in GWserves to look for new opportunities.

☐ **Propose a Project for GWupstart Funding**

As you learned about the important service your community partner organization provides, you may have developed ideas for new ways to support them. Students can submit proposals requesting funding support for new social innovation initiatives through the Nashman Center's GW Upstart program. Students with relatively small projects can consider the Public Service Grant Commission. Students with larger-scale initiatives might consider the Eco-Equity Challenge, Projects for Peace, or even the Knapp Fellowship for Entrepreneurial Service-Learning.

☐ **Consider your eligibility for a service award**

The Honey W. Nashman Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service recognizes students for their community engagement work through service awards and graduation cords.

All service work toward these recognitions must be reported through the GWserves platform, so we encourage you to also use GWserves to report community engagement you do outside of your course expectations, either with a student group or on your own. These reports do not need to be shared with your course instructors. For example, report activities such as:

- Direct volunteer service like mentoring or doing yard work for senior citizens
- Advocacy and activism activities like attending marches, creating multi-media campaigns to educate the public, or giving testimony to a local government agency
- Participating in political processes like registering people to vote, canvasing for a political party, or helping organizers do research

The GWserves platform lets you view a record of all your reported community engagement activities you have submitted, click the drop-down menu at the top right under "Hi your name" and choose "summary."

☐ Submit a Paper for the Julian Clement Chase Prize
If your course assignments included a scholarly paper that is about Washington, DC, or how a social issue is affecting the DC community, we encourage you to submit it to the Julian Clement Chase Prize (submissions due annually at the end of May).

☐ Submit a Paper for Publication
Several undergraduate journals, like the Undergraduate Journal for Service-learning, Leadership and Social Change focus on community engaged scholarship and accept papers that are project descriptions, case studies, research, and reflections. Link here for a list of journals and their submission information.

Tips for Reaching Out to Community Partner Organizations

Increasingly, service organizations in the community have online platforms for you to sign-up to work with them. Some of GW's partner organizations use the GWserves platform to register students to serve with them. In some cases however, you may still need to have a phone or email conversation with the organization's program manager or volunteer coordinator in order to confirm the details of your project. The following are frequently asked questions for navigating these conversations.

Who do I talk to?
When calling a community organization, ask to speak with the contact person identified by your instructor or ask for the Volunteer Coordinator.

When should I call?
Try to call the contact person during the times they have identified as the best time to reach them. If you must leave a message, identify yourself, why you are calling, your phone number and the best time the contact person can reach you. Be persistent in your efforts, as non-profit organizations and government agencies may be very busy providing services to the community. You might have to make SEVERAL attempts before you are able to reach your contact.

What do I say?
Hi. My name is____ and I am a student at George Washington University. As part of my involvement in (*name of course*), I have been asked to complete a service-learning project. As part of this project, my instructor wants me to learn: (*give the main learning objective of the project*). I would need to complete (*scope of project/number of hours/visits required*) by (*state your deadline*). I would like to know if you have any service-learning opportunities where I might be able to help your organization while also meeting my project's requirements.

What do I ask?

How can people serve there?	What times can I come?
What location will I be working at?	Are background checks required?
Will I be trained?	How do I get there?
What should I wear?	When can I start?

What do we discuss at my first meeting on-site?
Collect the information needed to report your project plan to your instructor (e.g. contact person's name, title, email, and phone).
Communicate your learning objectives. Do the activities help you meet your objectives?
Determine a schedule.
Complete background checks if required by the organization.
Find out when your orientation and training will be (if applicable).
Complete required paperwork for the partner organization.
Confirm your next steps (when do you start, who do you meet, where do you go, etc.).
Confirm how to communicate moving forward
Who do you notify if you are ill and can't serve? Who do you turn to with a question about a task?

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Reporting Service Activities: GWserves

For your course instructor and community partner organization to confirm that you have met the agreed-upon community engagement expectations for the course, you will need to document the time spent working on your community engaged scholarship project.

GWserves is the online platform GW uses to report community engagement activities. It uses the same log-in and password as your GW email account. A guide to using the platform to report your community engagement activities is available as well.

We strongly recommend that you report all activities related to your project as you do them, rather than submitting one record at the end of the semester. This helps your instructor know that you are making steady progress and provides an opportunity for you to share any encouraging or concerning experiences with your community partner organization. Having this on-going record will also help you remember more details about your activities and experiences, which is helpful for completing your end-of-semester reflection assignments.

DO report the following activities
- Performing any activity assigned to you by a community partner
- Attending training or orientation activities hosted by a community partner or related organization, e.g. CPR training by the Red Cross for an assisted living center
- Meetings with a community partner to discuss your project, plan, give updates, or present results
- Planning, doing research, or preparing for activities when necessary to complete assigned tasks. In other words, you should report not only time spent presenting a report to a community partner, but also all the time spent preparing that report.
- Activities related to creating products for the community partner, e.g. grants, brochures, websites

DO NOT report the following activities
- Traveling to/from a service site, unless the travel is part of the related activity, e.g. a tour that is part of an orientation, or supervising school children on a bus to the service site
- Time spent contacting community organizations when seeking a service project
- Reflection activities, assigned or otherwise, e.g. writing field notes or reflective journal entries
- Time spent learning the course-based skills used to complete the project.
  - For example, if you are conducting interviews for a program evaluation, the time you spend in class learning how to conduct an interview SHOULD NOT be reported. The time spent preparing to conduct the actual interviews, like preparing the interview questions, SHOULD be reported as time toward your service project.

Keeping Yourself and Others Safe

These guidelines will help you have a safer and more effective experience serving with the community.

Establish a contact person and/or site supervisor. Know who will be working on the project with you and a phone number to reach them. Be prompt to your scheduled time and ready to work.

Understand the need for confidentiality and boundaries. Developing personal relationships with members of the community is rewarding, but it is important to maintain appropriate boundaries. Do not share personal information. Be prepared for others to share sensitive information. Respond respectfully. Speak with your site supervisor about their confidentiality policy. Do not share information that would reveal the identity of anyone you work with.

Follow the organization's policies and procedures. Be familiar with the specifics of your job. Gain a clear understanding of any rules you need to follow and take any training you might receive seriously. Also ask about any liability of which you need to be aware.

Be aware of your environment. The organization with which you are working has specific ways of interacting and getting things done. Be aware of these expectations and act appropriately. Do not assume you know more than the people who are there every day.

Dress appropriately and sensibly. Dress neatly, modestly, cleanly, and safely and do your best to blend in with the community. Wear clothing that affords you comfort, flexibility and is appropriate for the conditions you will be working under. When in doubt, ask your site supervisor.

Avoid carrying expensive personal items. Items such as expensive electronics, flashy jewelry and designer clothing can cause you to be identified as an outsider.

Additional Advice

- **Do not give out your home address or telephone number to the organization's clients.**
- Maintain an appropriate level of interaction with the staff and clients at the site and don't counsel clients unless you are trained to do so.
- Do not borrow from or lend money to anyone.
- Be aware of your feelings. You may feel uncomfortable sometimes, but you should never feel unsafe. Follow your instincts.
- Be sensitive to your own needs and limitations. Serving others does not require us to abandon our own needs.
- If you feel uncomfortable, discuss it with your site supervisor, your instructor, or the Nashman Center staff.
- Don't expect to know all the answers. If faced with a question you are not familiar with try to get the answers or direct someone to the proper person that can provide an answer.
- Stay informed of issues affecting the area in which you serve.
- Take extra special precautions when going to or returning from sites at night. Arrange to travel in groups rather than alone.
- Give the phone number of your agency and your schedule to a roommate or friend.

In the event of an emergency, either On-site or in Transit:
1) For some emergencies your first call may be 911
2) Contact your site supervisor/contact person and follow the organization's protocol
3) Call the University Police Department (UPD): 202-994-6111
4) Call Amy Cohen, Nashman Center Executive Director: W#202-994-9890 C# 703-850-5708

Gender-Based Harassment On-site or within the GW Community

Be aware of gender-based harassment policies and what forms it can take. This includes unsolicited and unwelcome sexual advances, either verbal or physical. It refers to behavior which is not welcome, personally offensive, and which debilitates morale. GW students' desire to develop authentic, trusting relationships with community agency staff and clients exists within boundaries of mutual respect. These relationships must be free from intimidating behavior, disrespectful comments, or unwanted flirting.

The George Washington University is committed to maintaining a positive environment free of any form of harassment and works to create a campus culture that fosters respect for all members of the community. If you have any concerns about gender-based harassment occurring in relationship to your service:

1. Notify your contact at the community organization (if the incident(s) occurred at the service site).
2. Notify Amy Cohen, the Nashman Center Executive Director if the incident(s) occurred on-campus: W#202-994-9890 C# 703-850-5708. Please note she has a responsibility to report incidents to GWU's Title IX office.

Title IX protects *any* person from sex-based discrimination, regardless of their real or perceived sex, gender identity, and/or gender expression. Female, male, and gender non-conforming students, faculty, and staff are protected from any sex-based discrimination, harassment or violence.

The Title IX office at George Washington University monitors overall compliance with Title IX requirements, implements campus wide sexual harassment/violence prevention and response programming, and ensures equitable access to University resources.

For more information about our efforts to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and violence, please visit http://haven.gwu.edu/title-ix-office

To report an incident: https://haven.gwu.edu
If you wish to remain anonymous please call the Sexual Assault Response Consultative Team (202) 994- 7222.

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