



Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning



Facilitating Successful Community-Based
& Engaged Experiences

Policies & Procedures

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning plays a major role in facilitating successful community-based and engaged experiences for students, as well as faculty and staff, at Western Carolina University. The Center has developed a Risk Management Plan for this purpose.

Risk management is “the formal process by which an organization establishes its risk management goals and objectives, identifies and analyzes its risks, and selects and implements measures to address its risks in an organized fashion.” It includes an ongoing and complex process of evaluating and minimizing inherent, enduring organizational risks—in this case, those of the academic institution, students, community agencies, community members, and others involved in the service learning project.²

The Center organizes, coordinates, and supports community-based engagement experiences involving students, faculty, and staff. The Center creates, develops, and manages reciprocal partnerships with community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, human and social service agencies, educational institutions, service clubs, small businesses, and local governments.

The Center has taken a systematic approach to determining that the community settings in which WCU students, faculty, and staff members participate in curriculum-based and volunteer service projects are relatively risk-free and generally safe for all stakeholders involved. The Center’s work focuses primarily on liability prevention through the avoidance or reduction of risks.

The guidelines for risk management included in this document have been developed in consultation with the University’s Office of the Legal Counsel. We urge campus and community stakeholders to adhere to the guidelines and to demonstrate renewed commitment to facilitating successful community-based experiences for our students.

¹ Mihalynuk, T. V., & Seifer, S. D. (2003) [Revised by P. Mutascio, 2008]. Risk management and liability in higher education service-learning. Scotts Valley, CA: National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.

² Young, P. C., & Tomski, M. (2002). An introduction to risk management. *Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Clinics of North America*, 13 (2), 225-246.

RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN

MISSION OF THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE LEARNING

The Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning's mission focuses on the development, promotion, and measurement of programs and initiatives that engage all partners in the mutually beneficial process of community development, with the intention of fostering a sustainable campus culture and the personal habit of community engagement in our students.

Here's how we do it:

- We **collaboratively engage** students, faculty, staff, and community partners in curricular and co-curricular approaches to learning designed to enhance understanding of course content and self, intentionally address community issues, develop career-related skills, and promote responsible citizenship.
- We **develop** and **guide** faculty on how to engage students with the community in order to address relevant issues affecting our region.
- We primarily **serve** the needs of our region by identifying the issues most relevant to our region's well-being and WCU's integrated curricular focus areas.
- We **support, recognize, and reward** exemplary community engagement efforts demonstrated by our students, faculty, and staff.
- We **monitor** and **measure** the impact of our programs and initiatives.

What guides and inspires us, and what we strive for:

- A clear understanding of what we do
- Excellence and respectful approaches in all we do
- Collaboration with and respect for our region and partners
- Creative solutions to complex problems
- Informed and timely responses
- Measurement of success and knowing what it looks like

Who we want to be:

By establishing a reputation that is founded on mutual respect, responsiveness, intentionality, and a 'starting from yes attitude' in all matters of community engagement and development, the Center will be a primary contact for WCU and the region and by so doing foster a campus culture and personal habit of engagement in those we serve.

Simplified Vision:

To be a national model for community engagement that embraces its responsibilities as a center serving the needs of a regionally engaged university.

GOALS OF THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE LEARNING

- **Goal 1.1:** Intentionally engage students with structured community-based projects in curricular and co-curricular capacities that respect an order of increasing intensity of experiences.
- **Goal 1.2:** Foster active citizenship among WCU students.
- **Goal 2.1:** Prepare and develop interested faculty on teaching methods associated with community-based learning (e.g., service-learning, service internships, study abroad experiences, etc.).
- **Goal 2.2:** With faculty, create a campus culture that recognizes the value and advocates for the use of community-based learning approaches in classrooms.
- **Goal 2.3:** Identify research and scholarly outputs (tenure-worthy) associated with the scholarship of teaching and learning and service-learning/community engagement, and increase the awareness of these avenues for faculty who facilitate community-based experiences.
- **Goal 3.1:** Assess and better understand the current state of our formal community partnerships.
- **Goal 3.2:** Identify and invite the university and community representatives to address regional needs/issues in a formalized way.
- **Goal 4.1:** Align internal processes and reward systems to foster external engagement amongst faculty.
- **Goal 4.2:** Develop and where appropriate align internal recognition systems to inspire and incentivize exemplary external engagement amongst students.
- **Goal 4.3:** Align internal processes and reward systems to foster external engagement amongst staff.
- **Goal 5.1:** To build systems that effectively and efficiently measure and monitor our students, faculty, and staff's community engagement and community-based learning on our campus and to determine the impact of these activities.

COMMUNITY-BASED EXPERIENCES

The Center manages several community-based experiences. The main ones are listed below.

- Days of Service
- Alternative Breaks (Fall, Spring, and weekend)
- Course-Based Service Learning
- Community-Based/Engaged Research
- Service Learning Internships

RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Center recognizes that various risks are associated with community-based projects in which students participate. Risks include physical injury to volunteers; inappropriate relationships formed between students and community members; unmanaged social discomfort for students; overload on community organizations' volunteer management resources; and negative publicity that could damage the reputation of the student, faculty/staff, University, or community.

The Center uses reasonable care in providing community-based educational experiences for students. University personnel are advised to exercise due diligence in the planning and implementation of their community-based projects to minimize project-related risks or hazards.

Components of the Plan

- A. [Community Partner Recruitment and Registration](#)
- B. [Forms](#)
- C. [College of Health and Human Sciences Service Activity Policy for Students](#)
- D. [Prohibited Activities](#)
- E. [Orientation and Training](#)
- F. [Supervision and Communication](#)
- G. [Transportation: University Policy 30 Use of State-Owned Vehicles](#)
- H. [Community Service Leave \(CSL\): University Policy 76](#)
- I. [Incident Reports](#)
- J. [International Service Learning](#)
- K. [Approved Sites](#)
- L. [Contact](#)

A. Community Partner Recruitment and Registration

Prospective service learning community partners are required to indicate existing or potential risks associated with student placement at their service sites. Those from the nonprofit sector are also required to indicate whether they provide liability insurance coverage for volunteers (see [Community Agency Questionnaire](#)). Prospective community partners from the business sector are required to maintain general liability insurance and to hold the University harmless in matters related to the student and student projects with the prospective community partner (see [Affiliation Agreement](#)).

Members of the Center staff routinely visit community service sites to gain first-hand knowledge of the situations in which students are serving and learning. The Center occasionally conducts evaluations to identify existing or potential risks and hazards.

B. Forms

[Affiliation Agreement](#): The University signs Affiliation Agreements—and sometimes Memoranda of Understanding—with prospective community partners.

[Request to Resume Service Learning](#): Community partners are required to sign an agreement that both the University and the Community Partner are upholding proper CDC COVID19 response guidelines.

[Liability Waiver and General Release](#): Students are required to sign a “hold harmless” Liability Waiver or General Release form before participating in a community service or other service learning project. The Waiver is designed for course-based projects as well as required community service and the General Release for co-curricular or volunteer community service.

[Time Sheet](#): The Time Sheet made available by the Center helps students, faculty, and community partners keep track of activities at the service sites and provides some measure of accountability. This is also organized through our online registration system managed through Engage.

C. College of Health and Human Sciences Service Activity Policy for Students

This is a special policy for the College of Health and Human Sciences for their students who engage in several different types of service activities.

D. Prohibited Activities

A brief statement with a list of prohibited activities is included on the Liability Waiver and Time Sheet in the [Student Packet](#).

E. Orientation and Training

Risk management and liability issues are covered in the on-campus orientation provided by the Center. Community partners typically provide onsite orientation to the agency and the community as well as training for students participating in service learning and other community-based projects.

Agency directors and site supervisors are reminded to spend time discussing safety procedures, potential dangers, and the risk management policies with students before they begin their service. (For example, some agencies require background checks for students working with children and other vulnerable populations.)

The Center has compiled the following list of safety tips for student volunteers:

- Travel in pairs or groups as much as possible; if traveling alone, tell a classmate or friend about your service site/location and the (approximate) time you expect to return to campus.
- Drive carefully.
- Keep your cell-phone handy in case of emergencies, such as the breakdown of your car; however, do not use your cell-phone while operating a vehicle.
- Dress appropriately.

- Do not engage in activities beyond the scope of your service project.
- Do not give agency clients a ride in a private motor vehicle.
- Do not engage in or tolerate talk or behavior of a sexual nature; and if you feel harassed, tell your agency supervisor, course instructor, and/or the service learning project coordinator.
- Do not enter into an amorous or sexual relationship with a client during the term of your service.
- During the term of your service, do not engage in any type of private business activity with a client which may compete with your service learning activity.
- If you feel uncomfortable with or unsafe at your current service site, contact your course instructor, project coordinator, or the Center to request an alternate site.

F. Supervision and Communication

Students participating in community service/service learning are supervised by agency staff members, Center professional staff, and sometimes by course instructors. Such onsite supervision helps to create a safe environment for community-based projects.

Community partners are required to maintain communication with faculty and the Center. Further, community partners usually participate in the assessment of students' performance.

The Center staff members discuss risk management issues during occasional community service “debriefings” with community partners. On those occasions, stakeholders carefully consider best practices or, in the event of a negative incident, what should be done differently next time.

G. Transportation: University Policy 30 Use of State-Owned Vehicles

[University Policy 30](#) states that when University-owned/operated transportation is provided, only employees (including student employees) who have received special training are allowed to be the drivers.

The Center manages and operates [vans to support service activities](#). These vans are fully subsidized by the Center and accessible to all University employees, including student employees for the purpose of service-learning, volunteer engagement, and service.

Students are encouraged to organize car pools, and those using public transportation for service learning projects are encouraged to travel with classmates.

H. Community Service Leave (CSL): University Policy 76

The senior administration of Western Carolina University as well as the Center encourages employees to engage in volunteer services in support of schools, communities, and nonprofit

organizations. Please reach out to your supervisor or the Center for more information on how to use your [Community Service Leave](#).

I. Incident Reports

Community service/service learning participants—including students, faculty, and community partners—involved in any unusual incident (risky or hazardous situation) related to a WCU project should submit a report to the Center. The report should include the following information:

- Student's name and contact information
- Agency's and site supervisor's name
- Faculty member's name
- Date and location of incident
- Synopsis of incident

J. International Service Learning: Special Considerations

The Center collaborates with the Office of International Programs and Services (IPS) in organizing international service learning projects. IPS collects approved overseas travel application forms and orders health insurance for the participating group. That Office can provide assistance in locating suitable service project sites overseas through third-party providers.

K. Approved Sites

The Center regularly updates its [list of Community Partners and Service Sites](#).

L. Contact

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