University Syllabi: Service Learning (SL) Course Designation Section

Purpose

The purpose of this template is to highlight key components and best practices for Designated Service Learning course. Faculty members wishing to apply for UTRGV's Service Learning designation, are asked to review and consider the best practices outlined below, submit a timely application for designation, and to engage with key campus offices before, during, and after the designation process.

Background

UTRGV's Strategic Priorities and Signature Initiatives

UTRGV's strategic plan identifies five focused and two cross-cutting strategic priorities that will enable us to enhance our impact on our students and the Rio Grande Valley community and become the leading Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in the United States. Our focused priorities – Academic Excellence, Student Access & Success, Campus Life, Research & Scholarship, and Health Education & Patient Care – highlight discrete areas of focus that will advance our vision over the next five years and beyond, while our cross-cutting priorities – People and Community Engagement & Integration – highlight critical foundations of the University that will be fundamental in supporting each of our focused priorities.

In alignment with our cross-cutting priorities and to enhance student learning, UTRGV has an official process for designating community engaged courses. UTRGV requires that officially designated courses meet defined criteria in course design. However, course content, readings, and activities remain at the sole discretion of the faculty member teaching the course. These criteria are based on nationally recognized standards and have been established to enable the institution to document and assess Service Learning activities in a consistent fashion and to tie institutionally recognized community engagement activities to the agreed-upon practices and definitions. Learn more here.

In 2020, UTRGV earned the Carnegie Foundation Elective Classification for Community Engagement for its collaboration with our larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. This elective classification is currently held by 357 institutions and is a classification that we actively seek to be recognized for in the upcoming 2026 reclassification cycle.

Service Learning Designation Process

UTRGV defines, “Service Learning is a thoughtfully organized service experience that addresses a need in the community in a reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationship and integrates a reflective component that relates the service experience to academic course objectives and the students learning.”

Faculty members that wish to integrate community engaged learning into their courses are asked to:

1: Connect with the Center for Teaching Excellence about how you can best implement effective pedagogy and assessment criteria into your course. 2: Contact the Office of Engaged Scholarship & Learning to learn about how Service Learning can be presented in the classroom, connect with community partners, obtain logistical support, and learn how to track engagement using Engagement Zone. 3: Apply for the Service Learning course designation via Submittable prior to the semester deadlines. Our Service Learning toolkit might be helpful as you consider import questions outlined below.

Need some inspiration? Check out some helpful sample syllabi.

University Syllabi: Service Learning (SL) Syllabi Criteria

Faculty will integrate the Service Learning course designation criteria into the University Syllabi if a course(s) is designated as a Service-Learning course.

The Service Learning course designation criteria helps illustrate and explain to students the purpose of the Service Learning experience, its connection with the course student learning outcomes, relevance to academic content, and assignment expectations.

Description of the Service Learning experience and its connection to the course and academic content

Explain what is Service Learning and its role in course student learning outcomes and academic content.

- What are faculty’s own views and beliefs of Service Learning? How is service learning integrated into the faculty’s teaching philosophy? Why is service learning important? What service learning experience does the faculty bring?
- What is Service Learning?
- What relevance does Service Learning have in course student learning outcomes?
- What connection does Service Learning have to course readings, lectures, assignments?
- What are the Service Learning objectives?

- What benefits does the work provided to the community partner/agency have on students? (Knowledge, skills, attitudes)
- What benefits does the work provided by students to the community partner/agency have on the community?
- What does the community partner/agency contribute and how does it enhance the student learning outcomes/SL objectives in the course?

Course Student Learning Outcomes and Service Learning Objectives
Describe student learning outcomes for the course and Service Learning objectives.

- What are the student learning outcomes for the course?
- What are the Service Learning objectives for the Service Learning experience?
- How do the course learning outcomes intersect with the Service Learning objectives?

Service Learning Requirements
Define the Service Learning requirements that students are expected to fulfill.

- What is the Service Learning experience integrated into the course?
- How many hours-of-service learning will students be expected to fulfill? How should those hours be used?
- What specific Service Learning assignments will students be expected to complete? (Journal entries, portfolios, artifacts, reflections, presentations)
- Will students be completing the Service Learning experience as a team or individually? How will the purpose and intentions behind the SL Team or individual/project assignment be communicated to students?
- How will the student's Service Learning experience contribute to the course overall grade?
- How will the student's Service Learning experience link to students' aspirations and career and professional goals?
- Are there student photos/testimonies/quotes from previous Service Learning activities that students can benefit from reading to showcase work to be fulfilled?

Information about placement of Service Learning experience/project type
Describe the community partner/agency that the course is partnering with and the type of work that students will be asked to fulfill.

- Will the course have one designated community partner/agency that the students will be working with as a class? Provide a description of the community partner(s)/agency if students will be working with one community partner as part of the course.

- Is the criterion for community agency placement selection outlined, as it relates to the student learning outcomes, if the student will be finding their own placement? Will the selection process require Faculty approval prior to community partner/agency placement?
- What resources will students have access to help them navigate placement of the Service Learning experience?
- What type of work will students be participating in? Or expected to fulfill?
- What skills will students be acquiring or practicing during the service learning experience?
- How much time will students have to initiate the Service Learning requirements assignment and complete assignments?
- What benchmarks or timeline are established for students when contacting the agency (if applicable), meeting with agency contact, beginning, and completing the service? Consider integrating these benchmarks into your course calendar.

Assessment of the Service Learning Experience

Explain how the intended Service Learning objectives will be evaluated.

- How will Service Learning objectives be evaluated?
- What assignments will be used to support the evaluation of the Service Learning objectives?
- How will reflection be integrated into the Service Learning assignments?
- How will Service Learning assignments be scored? Will there be points associated with each assignment? What will be the assignment breakdown and contribution to the student's overall grade? Will a rubric be provided? Will a checklist of activities be provided?
- To what extent will students be evaluating themselves as they reflect on the role they provided to the community partner/agency? Will the students evaluate each other's contribution to the team and community partner/agency, if they fulfilled activities as a team?

Collecting feedback from students and community partner/agency

Continuous feedback is critical in mutually beneficial partnerships to assess student impact, goals met, areas for improvement, and future implications.

- How will feedback be collected from students about the Service Learning experience at the community agency? What purpose will this feedback serve and

who will benefit from this feedback? What process will exist for feedback collection?

- To what extent will the community partner/agency contribute to the feedback or evaluation of Service Learning activities fulfilled by students at the community agency? What can students expect from feedback provided?
- How will feedback from the community partner/agency be collected or used?
- Service Learning beyond the course: How can students continue to engage in Service Learning activities and link future opportunities with career goals?

Resource List

Community Engagement - CARNEGIE CLASSIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION (acenet.edu)

Community Engagement | UTRGV

Homepage | Campus Compact

Strategic Priorities and Signature Initiatives | UTRGV

Support for Service Learning Designated Courses | UTRGV

UTRGV Center for Teaching Excellence | UTRGV

UTRGV Engaged Scholarship & Learning | UTRGV