

Principles of Risk Management For Service-Learning Faculty

Designing a safe service program begins by establishing a general understanding of the potential risks and liabilities associated with service programs. Once an understanding of liability is in place, safety practices and policies can be developed to meet the objectives of service programs and risk prevention. Risk will never be totally eliminated. Rather, risk can be managed so the likelihood for liability is reduced (Joyce & Ikeda, 2002).

The following is a template for faculty to reduce the likelihood of liability and management of risks:

- ✓ Provide an orientation to students that includes an overview of service-learning and the policies, procedures and risks involved in the specific service activities they will be providing to the community.
- ✓ Require students to sign a waiver which you can get from the Volunteer & Service-Learning Center. Discuss the waiver with students including the section that students should have medical insurance to participate.
- ✓ Discuss the course syllabus with students so they fully understand their responsibilities, learning objectives and service objectives, and are informed of the risks associated with their service-learning placements.
- ✓ Build a working relationship with the Volunteer & Service-Learning Center staff. The Volunteer & Service-Learning Center can provide your students a service-learning orientation, how to work with specific populations, and other resources to minimize the risk.
- ✓ Conduct site visits with all service sites to ensure their safety and suitability. If students are finding their placement sites instruct them to visit the Volunteer & Service-Learning website (www.uvu.edu/volunteer). This website contains community partners that have been approved through our office and have demonstrated a safe environment for students.
- ✓ Consider that faculty members can be individually named in lawsuits and should play an active role in ensuring safe and positive service-learning experiences for their students. Providing a detailed service assignment description, including the number of service hours needed, how the service experiences fit into the course requirements clarifying objectives, and information on how to select a service site all help in reducing risk.
- ✓ Note that faculty members will be represented by the State of Utah in the case of a lawsuit, so long as the faculty member was acting within the scope of his or her work and did his/her due diligence by informing the students of known risks.

California State University (2002). *Best Practices for Managing Risk in Service-Learning*.

Joyce, S. A., Ikeda, E. K. (2002). *Serving Safely: A Risk Management Resource for College Service Programs*. San Francisco, CA: *California Campus Compact*.

- ✓ Offer alternative placements and/or opportunities for students in service-learning courses to avoid potential risks and meet reasonable accommodations requests of students. This includes students who have transportation issues, language barriers, etc.
- ✓ Be aware that state and federal regulations exist regarding fingerprinting and background checks for those students whose service-learning placements place them in contact with vulnerable populations (children under 18 years of age, elderly, people with disabilities). Some community organizations will pay for background costs, while others may have policy that the students must have a staff member from the organization present during their service.
- ✓ Track each student's service schedule and be able to verify that the service was indeed performed at the site. This can be done by creating a student, community, faculty agreement. Examples are found at www.uvu.edu/volunteer.
- ✓ Know where emergency contact information for students is kept and what the emergency procedures are both at the university and the service site. This information can be gathered using the agreement form stated above.
- ✓ Assume the responsibility of training students to be aware of such issues as liability or sexual harassment policies. Both campus and site orientations are necessary to familiarize students with any potential risks involved with service-learning activities.
- ✓ **Do not arrange travel for students!** Liability is greatly reduced if students are responsible for their own transportation to and from the service site. Students who drive campus vehicles must be certified through motor pool.
- ✓ **Do not** assume that students are automatically covered for injury accident, medical or liability through Utah Valley University or the community-based organization when they enroll in service-learning courses. Community-based organizations who work with the Volunteer & Service-Learning Center must provide general liability insurance and should list UVU as additional/insured.
- ✓ **Do not** assume that the university or the service site will absorb the costs for required fingerprinting and background checks. They can be an additional financial burden for certain placements. The Volunteer & Service-Learning Center will pay for background checks associated with Center sponsored programs such as AmeriCorps and Service Council programs. Some community organizations will pay for this cost others may have a policy that the students must also have a staff member from the organization present during their service.

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