

# ***COMMUNITY PARTNER SERVICE-LEARNING HANDBOOK***

**A Guide for Working with Student Service-Learners**



## ***Enhancing Classroom Learning Fostering Civic Responsibility Meeting Community Needs***

*"I was taught that the world had a lot of problems; that I could struggle and change them; that intellectual and material gifts brought the privilege and responsibility of sharing with others less fortunate; and that service is the rent each of us pays for living--the very purpose of life and not something you do in your spare time or after you have reached your personal goals."*

**-Marian Wright Edelman**



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## ***WHY THIS HANDBOOK?***

Service-learning is receiving unprecedented recognition for its value to students, higher education, and community. Service-learning programs consist of four main roles: the student, the college instructor, the service-learning program staff, and the community. The importance of the community service site cannot be underestimated. In fact, successful service-learning is largely dependent on the level of partnership and collaboration between community partner and educational institution. This handbook is about understanding and developing this critical partnership. This requires a considerable commitment of time, resources, and effort on your part; however, the results for your agency/school, the service-learning students, and our community can be dramatic and transformational. Please review this handbook carefully as it is the first step in the process of becoming a service-learning partner and placement site.

## **WHAT IS SERVICE-LEARNING?**

***Service-learning is a teaching strategy that combines course-related service projects with guided reflection (processing the service experience) to 1) enrich and enhance student learning of course material, 2) help meet community needs, and 3) foster civic responsibility and a sense of caring for others.***

### **GOALS:**

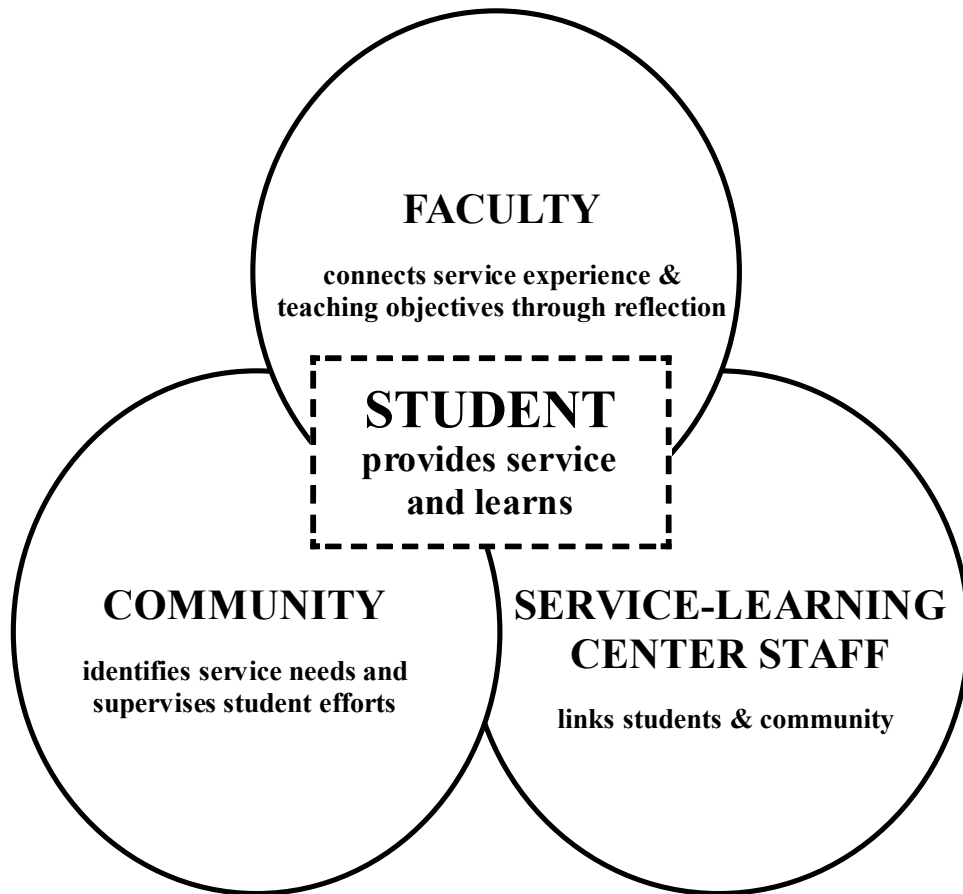
- T Enhance Classroom Learning**
- T Meet Community Needs**
- T Foster Civic Responsibility and a Sense of Caring for Others**

## *Defining Characteristics of Service-Learning*

- **THE COMBINATION OF FOCUSING ON MEETING COMMUNITY NEEDS, IDENTIFYING LEARNING OBJECTIVES, AND INTENTIONALLY REFLECTING ON WHAT IS BEING LEARNED MAKES SERVICE-LEARNING UNIQUE AND FUNDAMENTALLY DIFFERENT FROM COMMUNITY SERVICE, VOLUNTEERISM, AND EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION.**
  - Community service helps meet community needs through volunteer efforts. Service-learning also meets those needs, but students use the service experience as a foundation to examine themselves, their society, and their future.
  - The goal of service-learning is to empower those being served and those who serve. This is not necessarily the goal of volunteerism, community service, or experiential education.
- Service-learning uses community service as the vehicle for students to reach their academic goals and objectives by integrating teaching objectives with community needs.
- Service-learning is based on a reciprocal relationship in which the service reinforces and strengthens the learning, and the learning reinforces and strengthens the service.
- Service-learning is integrated into the academic curriculum and provides structured opportunities for students to reflect critically on their experience through a mix of writing, reading, speaking, listening, and group discussions.
- Service-learning identifies and tracks specific learning objectives and goals.
- Service-learning provides students with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities.
- Service-learning fosters a sense of caring for others and a commitment to civic responsibility.
- Service-learning gives academic credit for demonstrating learning achieved through the service, not just for putting in hours.

# SERVICE-LEARNING ROLES

All Service-Learning Programs Are Composed Of The Following Roles



# ***THE MECHANICS OF SERVICE-LEARNING***

## **FACULTY BUILD SERVICE INTO THEIR COURSE**

Typically, faculty members incorporate a service-learning component within their class curriculum, either as an option or as a requirement. Service-learning offers a continuum of possibilities ranging from a one-time service experience (e.g., a half day beach clean-up), to working with the same community partner for 1-4 hours a week over the course of a semester (e.g., tutoring at-risk youth one afternoon a week for 12-13 weeks). The range of appropriate placements is circumscribed by the specific content of the particular course. Helping a YMCA increase the number of children served would be a very appropriate placement for a marketing class, while tutoring at-risk youth would not.

The faculty member works with the Center for Community Involvement to carefully choose a limited number of agencies/schools whose needs are related to his or her teaching objectives. The faculty member also sets a minimum number of hours to be completed and develops a reflective component that may include assignments such as journals, readings, class discussions, writing assignments, and class presentations about the service experience.

At the beginning of each semester, the faculty member introduces the service-learning component to his or her class. Students fill out an application and are given information about placement options by the Center for Community Involvement. Students choose one of these "approved" placements based on their interests, schedule, and location. The student then calls the community partner contact to set up an interview.

## **ADJUSTING TO THE ACADEMIC CALENDAR**

Because the service is integrated into the class structure, students must be able to complete their placement within the semester time frame (12-14 weeks, maximum). Although the Fall and Spring semesters are 16 weeks long, it takes a couple of weeks to get students assigned, oriented, and started. In addition, the last week is devoted to exams. Agencies/Schools are asked to adjust by scheduling orientations and trainings at the beginning of each semester and by developing placements that can be completed in one semester. Below is an overview of the MDC academic calendar indicating when classes begin and end. (Remember, student placements generally begin during the second and third weeks of the semester, and end one week prior to the completion of the semester.)

**Fall Semester:**                      **3RD WEEK OF AUGUST - MID-DECEMBER**

**Spring Semester:**                      **1ST WEEK OF JANUARY - END OF APRIL**

**Summer A & B Semester:**                      **1ST WEEK OF MAY - END OF JULY**

# ***PRACTICAL TIPS FOR COMMUNITY PARTNER SUCCESS***

## **1. REMEMBER, SERVICE-LEARNERS ARE STUDENTS, FIRST AND FOREMOST!**

Supervisors must always keep in mind that not only do service-learning students want to help meet important community needs, but they are also using the experience as the basis for understanding their college course. Students are receiving academic credit for learning through their service efforts. Help students think about what the experience means to them, the organizational context, and overall societal issues and impacts.

## **2. PLAN AHEAD!**

Clear, well thought-out service-learning placement descriptions outlining tasks, responsibilities, and skills needed must be prepared and given to the Center for Community Involvement and student. Often a fresh needs assessment with key staff will allow you to more effectively and creatively use service-learners within the framework of your agency/school. Are there tasks that you and your staff are now doing that could be divided up and given to one or several students? Is there a project that you've always wanted to do but never had the time to organize? Positions that carry some degree of responsibility and involve client contact are ideal.

## **3. BE AWARE THAT SOME STUDENTS MAY NOT MATCH YOUR NEEDS. BE SELECTIVE!**

Although the Center for Community Involvement will refer student service-learning candidates to your agency/school, **the final selection will be made by you.** If a student's qualifications and/or motivations are not in harmony with your needs, it is your right and obligation to not accept this student.

## **4. ORIENT . . . . TRAIN . . . . SUPERVISE!**

**Students require carefully structured orientation to your agency/school, staff, and clients.** This should answer such questions as "Where do I fit in? How do I get things done? What do I need to be aware of? What is expected of me? How do I get information/support if my supervisor is not available? What do I have to learn?" Introduce them to other staff, give them a tour of the facility, and make sure they feel comfortable and welcome. Students should also be familiarized with your mission and key community and societal issues facing your agency/school (i.e., "the bigger picture"--why you do what you do, and how the student can contribute to this end).

## **5. BE REALISTIC WITH YOUR TIME COMMITMENT EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS. THINK SEMESTER!**

Remember that you will have to be aware of the semester schedule and adapt accordingly (offer training sessions during the early part of the semester and expect students for only 12-14 weeks at the most).

## **6. BE AN INVOLVED TEACHER AND MENTOR FOR OUR STUDENTS !**

Throughout the assignment the supervisor should help the student interpret the experience and the relationship between what he/she is doing and the work of the agency/school and others. The student-supervisor relationship is one of the most significant parts of the student's experience and often determines the success of the placement. The supervisor is truly a partner in the student's education and should view him or herself as an "educator."

## **7. SAY THANKS!**

Like everyone, students want to be welcomed and appreciated. This may take many forms from letters of recognition, to a thank you note, to a simple acknowledgment of a job well done. Students also need to see how their work is important to your agency/school's mission. Ask the students how they're doing and what can be improved upon.

## **8. TALK TO US!**

Keep the Center for Community Involvement staff informed of any concerns, problems, successes, or other pertinent issues related to the placement and/or student. We are here to facilitate the entire process and ensure that all parties are satisfied.

## ***STEPS TO BECOMING AN MDC SERVICE-LEARNING PLACEMENT SITE***

### **SERVICE-LEARNING SITES SHOULD BE WILLING TO DO THE FOLLOWING:**

1. Become familiar with this MDC Service-Learning Community Partner Handbook.
2. Arrange a site visit by a member of the Center for Community Involvement staff to discuss service-learning opportunities.
3. Attend a Community Partner Service-Learning Workshop.
4. Complete the *Letter Of Understanding* and return it to the Center for Community Involvement (see Page 12).
5. Prepare a "Service-Learning Opportunities Description" that includes your agency/school's mission, specific service-learning opportunities and hours, orientation/training procedures, and any special conditions or requirements (see Center staff for a sample write-up).
6. Review the opportunities you have developed to **ensure that you have a plan in place to foster student learning at your agency/school** (how thorough is your orientation, are you providing any training, what type of "on-going support" do you offer to the student, do you meet regularly with the student to process and debrief the experience, what are you doing to recognize and say thank you to the student, etc.?)
7. Interview service-learning student candidates to clarify the responsibilities of the placement and to evaluate the students' abilities and appropriateness with respect to these responsibilities. Ask them who their MDC instructor is and make a note of this (this will prove helpful if you have to call our office about a student).
8. Authorize the placement by signing the "Site Placement Confirmation Form" which will be brought in by the student. The student will then return this form to the Center as notification of your acceptance.
9. Provide the service-learning student with appropriate orientation, training, on-going supervision, and recognition.
10. Report any problems, concerns, or issues to the Center for Community Involvement:  
    < Main office: 305-237-3848      (Fax: 305-237-7580)
11. Sign off on the student's hour log and complete a brief evaluation of the student (the student will bring you both of these forms).

## **TURNING SERVICE INTO LEARNING – HELPING STUDENTS GET THE MOST OUT OF THEIR SERVICE EXPERIENCE!!**

### **How Can I Really Help Students Learn at My Agency/School?**

There are countless benefits that can result for students, community, and community partners when service-learning is successful. To name just a few, students learn the value of service and their ability to make a difference, classroom learning is enhanced, they become lifelong volunteers, and they are better prepared to lead lives of engaged, democratic citizenship. Agencies/Schools gain invaluable people-power, fresh ideas and energy, and client needs are met. Our communities gain a more involved, engaged citizenry who are more informed and more likely to work collaboratively to solve community problems.

However, we also know that community service in and of itself won't necessarily result in student learning or the benefits that we mentioned above. In fact, without conscious attention to the issues addressed and the learning strategies employed when engaging in service-learning, students merely engaging in service may come away as civically disengaged as they were when they started participating in service-learning. As John Dewey (1938) understood it, the "discipline of experience" by itself may even be "miseducative," and therefore must always be subjected "to the tests of intelligent development and direction."

### **Reflection – The Key to Helping Students Gain the Most from Their Service-Learning Experience**

In order for your agency/school to most effectively foster student learning, reflection activities should be included in the service experience. Reflection means the process of thinking about what we do and processing it to draw meaning from our experiences. Reflection is an intentional endeavor to discover specific connections between something we do and the consequences which result. Reflection translates experiences into knowledge.

In your role as a community partner supervisor, it is essential that you help students reflect on their experiences – in short, help them think critically about what they are doing, why it is important, and what it means. The following page provides a few examples of how you can help students reflect.

## REFLECTION – Continued

### *A Short List of Reflection Activities for Community Partner Supervisors*

1. **Thorough Orientation** – make sure that your orientation is comprehensive and informs the student about your mission, your goals, and the work you do in the community, the organizational structure of the agency/school, etc. Talk to them about why they have chosen your agency/school? What interests them about it?, etc.
2. **Learning Objectives** – work with students to set objectives related to their learning. Have them put several objectives in writing and help them develop a plan to meet those objectives (what do they want to learn...about the agency/school, about the clients, about our community, about the profession, about the work you do, etc.).
3. **Regular “Processing” Meetings** – gather your students weekly or bi-weekly and ask them open-ended questions about their experience (What are you learning? What has surprised you? What is the most challenging thing that has happened and how did you handle it? What can we do to better serve our clients? Why do you think this problem (homelessness, etc) exists? How can you incorporate what you are learning into your everyday life? .....etc.
4. **Readings** – give your students a short article from time to time related to your agency/school, your clients, your community issue, and ask them to read it. Later on, gather them together and process it with them (What were your reactions to this article? Do you agree or disagree? What did you learn? How can you incorporate this into your everyday life? etc.,)
5. **Mini-Research Project** – ask students to find and read a short article related to the work your agency/school does (on the Internet, from a magazine, etc...), and then bring it in to discuss with you and the other students/staff/clients, etc.
6. **Critical Thinking Questions** – give students a list of questions that challenge them to explore and think critically about your agency/school and the issues it addresses. Ask them to find answers to these questions during the course of their service and process what they discover with them periodically. (Why does this problem exist [homelessness, children who can’t read, etc.]...interview at least two staff members to get their opinions? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a career in this field? Make a list of all the different types of jobs that exist at this agency/school and the skills and education required. etc...).
7. Be creative...develop your own reflection exercises...!

## ***KEY LOCATIONS AND PHONE NUMBERS***

### **CENTER FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

Main Office: Center for Community Involvement  
300 NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave, Rm 1452  
Miami, FL 33132

Phone: 305-237-3848 Fax: 305-237-7580

**www.mdc.edu /cci**

(Call the above number for information on each campus's service-learning coordinators)

### **MDC CENTER FOR COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

#### **MANAGEMENT TEAM** (as of 7/04)

Josh Young	Director--College-wide	237-7477	jyoung@mdc.edu
Ossie Hanauer	Director, Kendall Campus	237-0631	ohanauer@mdc.edu
Miriam del Campo	Faculty Coordinator, Kendall Campus	237-0956	mdelcamp@mdc.edu
Nicolle Hickey	Kendall Campus Coordinator	237-0859	nhickey@mdc.edu
Paul Merz	Director, North Campus	237-8358	pmerz@mdc.edu
Diane Sloan	Faculty Coordinator, North Campus	237-1869	dsloan@mdc.edu
Jonquila Williams	North Campus Coordinator	237-8380	jwillial@mdc.edu
Luciano Ramos	Director, Wolfson Campus	237-3848	lramos@mdc.edu
Jerolynn Roberson	Faculty Coordinator, Wolfson Campus	237-3270	jroberso@mdc.edu
Yhelena Poyato	Wolfson Campus Coordinator	237-3848	ypoyato@mdc.edu
Carlos Gonzalez	Faculty Coordinator InterAmerican	237-6028	cgonzal3@mdc.edu
David Johnson	Faculty Consultant/Advisor	237-2255	djohnson@mdc.edu
Sharon Johnson	Faculty Consultant/Advisor	237-2276	sjohnso1@mdc.edu

## ***FACTS ABOUT MIAMI DADE COLLEGE***

MDC is a two-year, state-supported community college with six campuses and numerous outreach centers.

### **ENROLLMENT BY CAMPUS, 2000-2001 CREDIT AND NON-CREDIT STUDENTS:**

<b>North</b>	43,044
<b>Kendall</b>	60,274
<b>Wolfson</b>	20,778
<b>Medical Center</b>	6,399
<b>Homestead</b>	5,227
<b>InterAmerican</b>	11,872

**FACULTY:** There are approximately 686 full-time, and more than 2,502 part-time faculty at MDC.

### **CREDIT STUDENT PROFILE (2001):**

- 30% of Miami Dade College students are between 21-25 years of age. Average age is 27.
- More than 66 percent attend on a part-time basis.
- Ethnic mix: 12% white non-Hispanic; 22% black non-Hispanic; 65% Hispanic; & 2% other.
- 61% are female, 39% are male.

**LETTER OF UNDERSTANDING**  
**(FOR PLACEMENT OF MDC SERVICE-LEARNING STUDENTS)**

Dear Community Partner Supervisor:

On behalf of the Miami Dade College Center for Community Involvement, we would like to thank you for entering into a partnership with us to provide richer educational opportunities for our students. By accepting and supervising our service-learners, you are helping these students join classroom theory with real-life experience. Ultimately you are also contributing to education's mission of promoting civic responsibility.

As a community partner supervising Miami Dade College students involved in a service-learning project, you will ensure that these students are provided with the following:

- **Orientation, training, and supervision.**
- **An understanding that you screen and make the final decision as to which students will serve with your agency. Students who are not a suitable match should be referred back to Miami Dade College.**
- **A description of the skills needed to complete the assigned project.**
- **A clear description of the assigned service-learning project including expectations, requirements and responsibilities.**
- **A safe and appropriate working environment.**

The Center for Community Involvement at Miami Dade College will ensure that your agency/school is provided with the following:

- **Direct consultation for identifying appropriate tasks for students.**
- **Orientation for community partner supervisors regarding student needs and capabilities.**
- **Student candidates for service-learning placements.**
- **On-going follow-up and support regarding student developmental issues.**

If you wish to become a partner in education with Miami Dade College and agree to the listed provisions, complete the community partner information below and return it to: **MDC Center for Community Involvement, 300 NE 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave., Miami, FL 33132 (Ph: 305-237-3848/ Fax: 305-237-7580).**

Name of Agency/School \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
**(Community Partner Representative)**

MDC

Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
**(MDC Service-Learning Coordinator)**

## ***SERVICE-LEARNING: ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS***

**RECIPROCITY:** The service and learning must be worthwhile and valuable for both the student and the community. There must be reciprocity between the server and those served.

**REFLECTION:** Intentional, systematic reflection about the experience must take place in order to draw meaning and make connections between service and learning. Reflection within the context of the volunteer experience encourages introspection of other aspects of the student's life.

**DEVELOPMENT:** Service-learning occurs in different stages: beginning with serving, to enabling, to empowering; from observation, to experience, to leadership.

**MEANINGFUL SERVICE:** Service tasks need to be worthwhile and challenging in order to strengthen students' critical thinking.

**DIVERSITY:** A priority is placed on involving a broad cross-section of students working in diverse settings and with a diverse population within the community.

***“Meaningful service is not about doing good to someone; it is about the dignity and growth of the giver and the receiver.”***

***Harry C. Silcox***

## STUDENT TESTIMONIALS

*"Another great aspect about the program is that it doesn't only teach the children, but it also teaches the mentors as well. The program has taught me to become a responsible leader and backs up what I teach in class by modeling the way. Before I began to teach I would waste water incessantly, litter without care, put others down unconsciously (and sometimes consciously), and would pay little attention to safety. These are the exact opposites of the concepts which the program is attempting to instill. I did not want to become a hypocrite, so I've changed my ways..... For the past three months I've acted like a responsible leader and have been a contributing factor to the well being of future generations.... This experience will always be something that I treasure and that I'll never forget."*

-Service-learning student with the EnviroMentor program

*"I've volunteered before but this time I've been able to put into practice what I've learned in the classroom; making the classroom more interesting and fun."*

-Service-learning student from the Kendall Campus

*"There is nothing in the world that can compare to the deep sense of pride I feel when I leave there after a particularly productive day. I went into the school, originally, with high expectations but after seeing all the chaos and problems, I grew doubtful. Now that I've seen the difference that the kids and I make as a team, I'm ready to take on anything. I feel that I'm making a small difference in their futures and they're fulfilling a very big void in my life. I really need that sense of accomplishment almost as much as they do."*

Service-learning student from the Medical Center Campus

*"At first I looked at the syllabus with skepticism because of my earlier experiences with what was supposedly service-learning. I felt pressured into completing x number of hours which seemed to be the most important factor. Both the Listening Project and the Leadership class have since clarified and influenced me enough to change my perception of service-learning. Leadership class provided me with all the theory. The Listening Project afforded me the opportunity to put this classroom knowledge to work in the real world.... It has always been my firm belief that individuals should perform service to the community. At first it seemed like a one-sided affair, only the community benefited. I was wrong because at the same time I was helping the community, there were things that I learned that sitting in the classroom would not have taught me. It also reinforced my conviction that we should all invest in our community. The service experience definitely changed my opinion. It has enhanced my thinking and communicating skills, given me the opportunity to put what was taught to test, and it provided me with an awareness of some of the needs of the community. I sincerely recommend that everyone be given the opportunity to be exposed to service-learning and I am certain it would change the minds of many."*

-Service-learning student from the Medical Center Campus

*"When it is carefully planned, service-learning is a great success. It so easily intertwined class objectives with our service, that I often had to think to pry the two apart."*

-Service-learning student from the Medical Center Campus

*"I got to work with only one student the first day. He was obviously from a Latin American country and he did not speak much English. I had to use a lot of patience with him because he was getting frustrated. He finished all his assignments for that day, but by the time we were done I was ready to go home. At the end of class, the first thing he asked me was if I could work with him the next day. Tears came to my eyes, not only because I was touched by the gesture, but because I felt guilty. Guilty because at first the only reason I did it was because I had to, not really because I wanted to help. But this definitely changed my attitude from then on..... Most important of all, I learned a lot about the society we live in, and about myself as an individual. It contributed to my personal growth which was one of my goals as a volunteer."*

-Service-learning student at Lindsey Hopkins Adult Education Center

## ***PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN COMBINING SERVICE AND LEARNING\****

*The principles that follow are a statement of what we believe are essential components of good practice that should guide all service-learning programs.*

1. An effective program engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.
2. An effective program provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.
3. An effective program articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved. From the outset of the project, participants and service recipients alike must have a clear sense of : (1) what is to be accomplished and (2) what is to be learned.
4. An effective program allows for those with needs to define those needs.
5. An effective program clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.
6. An effective program matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.
7. An effective program expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.
8. An effective program includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.
9. An effective program insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.
10. An effective program is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.

\* from the Wingspread Special Report (1989)