

Guiding Principles to Reduce Risk in Service Learning for Faculty

DO provide campus and community orientations to familiarize students with policies, procedures and risks involved in the specific service activities they will be providing and with the populations they serve.

DO discuss the service-learning project 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. Students should complete a Service-Learning Contract, and have their site supervisor(s) and faculty member review and sign it as well.

DO understand 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.

DO know that faculty members will be indemnified and protected by the university in the case of a lawsuit, so long as the faculty member was acting within the scope of his or her work.

DO offer alternative placements and /or opportunities for students in service-learning courses to avoid potential risks.

DO be aware that there are state and federal regulations regarding fingerprinting and background checks for those students whose service-learning placements are in organizations that work with children, the elderly, or persons with disabilities. The cost of these backgrounds checks can be an additional financial burden for a particular placement – in some cases students may be asked to pay for these checks.

DO know when each student is scheduled to provide service and be able to verify that the student did provide the service at the community-based organization site. This will help to determine who holds liability for student behavior or student injury at any given time.

DON'T assume that campus and site orientations are consistent; they vary among courses, campuses, departments and community-based organizations.

DON'T assume that students are 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.

DON'T arrange travel for students. Liability is greatly reduced if students are responsible for their own transportation to and from the service site.

Source: California Polytechnic State University
(<http://www.calpoly.edu/~civic/docs/GuidingPrinciples.pdf>)