What is Service-Learning?

- Service-learning is another way of learning course content—not from a textbook or a lab but through community-based projects or research.
- The service you do in the community isn’t extra work or an “add-on” to the course. Rather, it is a hands-on vehicle for learning that your instructor feels is essential to the goals of your course—just as essential as a text or a lab. In fact, you can think of your service-learning as a text or lab.
- You will receive a grade for your service-learning, and that grade is based on your learning, not simply on your showing up at a community site. Being present and ready to work is a pre-requisite for service-learning but it is not the learning itself. Your instructor will make assignments that ask you to integrate your service-learning experiences with your course’s content.
- Sometimes the community partners you work with will think of you as a volunteer. You’re not. You’re a student. That means you should treat your community work with the same sense of responsibility and seriousness that you do your coursework in your non-service-learning classes. Be prepared. Arrive on time. Have a respectful and positive attitude. Ask questions if you need to. Your instructor will give you more instructions specific to your particular service-learning project, but go into service-learning with a clear understanding that you are a student, not simply a volunteer. Also remember that to the community, you represent Mercer, not just yourself.

- If you’ve never had a service-learning course before, you may be surprised that your instructor may ask you to write an analytical journal or field notes that include personal reflections such as “What assumptions, expectations, or even prejudices did I bring to the situation?” or “How did this situation challenge or reinforce my personal values, beliefs, convictions?” You may not be used to the personal nature of these analytical reflections in an academic course, but questions such as these are often an essential element of helping you understand your relationship to the community and vice versa.
- Service-learning offers you the chance to exercise the knowledge you are gaining in the classroom, to test theory against practice, to accomplish goals that are meaningful to the community, and to develop as much personally as intellectually.
**The Benefits of a Service-Learning Course**

- Introduces a multi-faceted, hands-on way of learning academic content
- Increases your opportunity to think independently and solve problems
- Provides you with an opportunity for meaningful interaction with individuals off campus, with diverse cultures and concerns
- Increases your sense of agency and self-confidence
- Increases your sense of civic responsibility
- Gives you a competitive edge in applying for national scholarships, graduate or professional schools and jobs

**Different Types of Service**

- **Direct service:** This is the most common type of service-learning at Mercer. It requires direct contact with community agencies or community members.
  
  Examples: Working with senior citizens to create oral histories, tutoring younger students, delivering meals through an agency like Meals on Wheels, screening citizens for diabetes at a health fair.

- **Indirect service or community-based research:** In this type of service you are not providing direct service to community members or clients, but becoming part of a community effort to address a need, problem, or issue.
  
  Examples of indirect service: Fund raising to benefit a local civic agency, surveying or polling members of the campus on a topic, creating a database for a community agency.

  Examples of community-based research: Performing a needs assessment for an organization, conducting environmental quality tests, researching an issue in order to make recommendations to a relevant community group.

- **Civic Action or Advocacy:** You will work toward informing the public about community problems and help develop solutions in this type of service-learning.

  Examples: Making a presentation to the city council in support of a specific policy, launching a public relations campaign about health issue and mobilizing public participation, organizing a conference about a significant community topic, creating a survey instrument to measure citizen reactions to a community problem.

**At Mercer, everyone majors in changing the world...**

Service-learning is a hallmark of Mercer University, setting students apart from their peers and providing them with a value-added education and real-world experience. With the number of service-learning courses offered increasing every semester, consider adding one to your schedule today. Any course with a “V” distinction is considered a service-learning course.

*I’ve come to believe that each of us has a personal calling that’s as unique as a fingerprint - and that the best way to succeed is to discover what you love and then find a way to offer it to others in the form of service, working hard, and also allowing the energy of the universe to lead you.”*  
Oprah Winfrey