ced.uga.edu/pso

Top Ten Best Practices
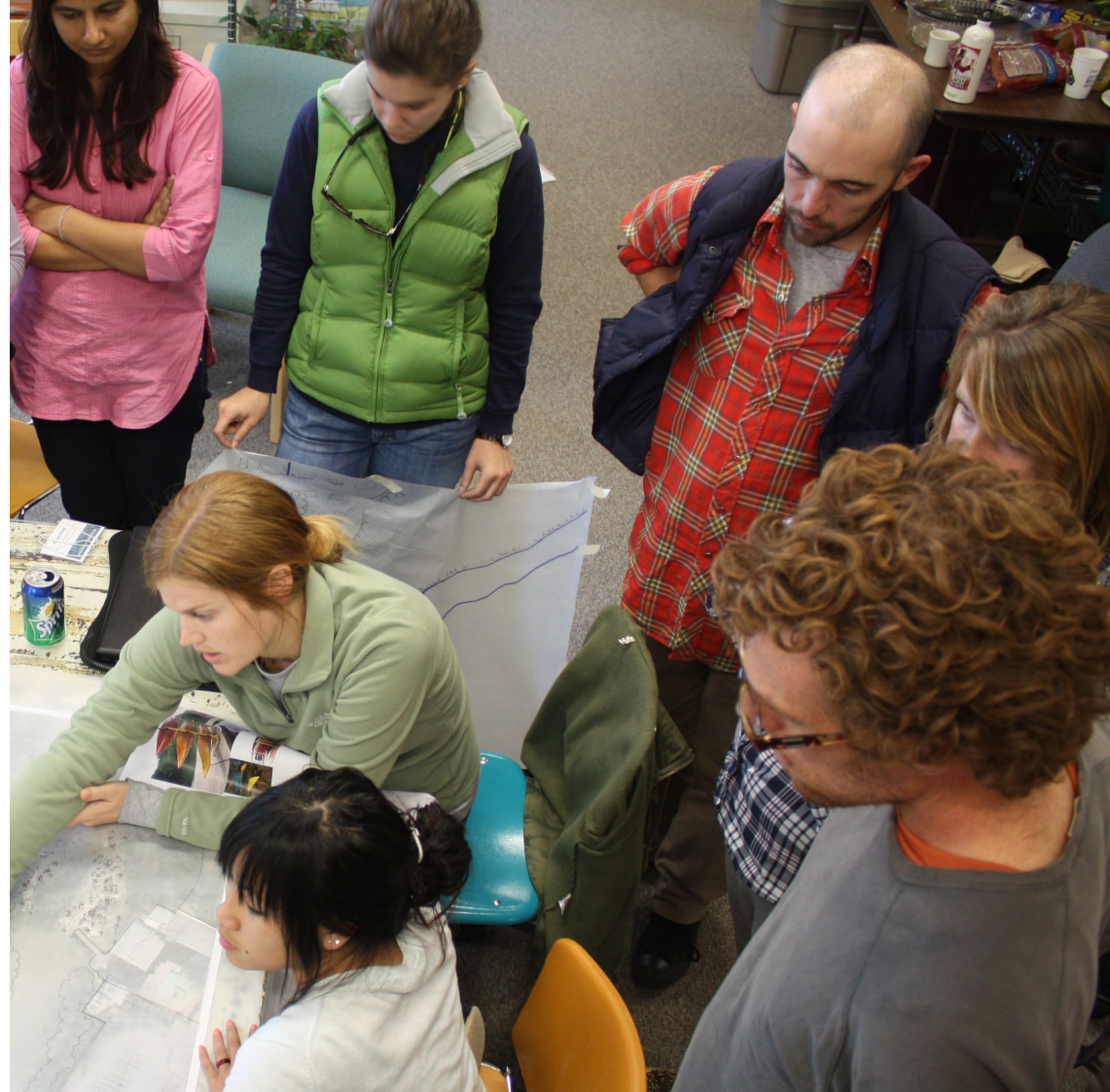# for Service-Learning

Center for Community Design and Preservation
College of Environment + Design
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

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Service-learning integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection in order to enrich students' learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen our communities.

By teaching through active participation, these experiences allow students to use their skills in real-world situations and foster a sense of caring for others.

CED has been a campus leader in developing service-learning programs that concentrate on issues of environmental sustainability, heritage tourism, outdoor recreation, downtown revitalization, and underserved communities.

The CED Center for Community Design and Preservation has compiled the following Best Practices to logistically support CED faculty in service-learning project development.

Here are Ten Tips for including a service-learning experience in your course:

1. Get out of town

We have a lot of kids at UGA from metro Atlanta that need to see "the other Georgia". Get them out to see places, from the bucolic to the obscure and the underserved. (Here's a list of current Project Opportunities.)

Great communities to start with are Archway Partnership counties because they are prepared to work with students, and they have stated goals the communities are focused on. Other good contacts are County Extension agents ––

there is one in every Georgia county! However, to make sure that your community engagement work is mutually beneficial and doesn't financially burden your students, it is a good idea to develop an MOU and a project budget so that expectations are clear and related project costs are not passed on to students.

Here's a Service-Learning Proposal Guide with templates and examples you can use.

2. Travel together

Use the UGA Automotive Services motor pool and arrange for vans for transporting your students together. $500 transportation mini-grants are available from the UGA Office of Service-Learning, but community partners might be able to cover those costs, too.

Not only does traveling together save your students money (and we should not assume that all students have the capability of driving), but it allows for great faculty-student bonding time and fantastic group reflection on the way home from the experience.

Pro Tip: Be sure to schedule trips more than 3 weeks in advance to allow students to adjust their personal schedules and other obligations. (Most service industry shifts get scheduled 2 weeks in advance.)

See How to Reserve a UGA Vehicle

3. Share a meal

Ask your community partner to feed your team while you are in town. This not only alleviates a financial burden on your students, but great fellowship happens around food, and your team will learn things that perhaps would not be shared in a public meeting.

If you have set up project funds, faculty can also take students out for a meal while travelling and get reimbursed from your project funds.

Here's info on how to file for these expenses: Group Meal Reimbursements

4. Take the tour

Let the locals show you around and explore the community you are serving. It will put your work in context and give the locals a boost by seeing UGA students in town.

If you are visiting a project site in a neighborhood, it is a good idea to let residents know in advance that students will be around. This can be done via Facebook post to neighborhood groups, municipal neighborhood listservs, or the Sheriff's office. (Another good reason to travel in UGA branded cars!) Work with your community partner on the best avenues of communication.

Examples: Neighborhood Notifications.

Pro Tip: When you wrap up a project in downtown Macon and you see a sign that says "It is an 11-minute walk to a giant slide at Coleman Hill" – you do it!

Text on sign in photo:

IT IS AN
11 MINUTE
WALK TO
A GIANT SLIDE AT
COLEMAN HILL

5. Have fun!

Service-learning projects take extra work, but the reward is worth it. Choose work that is meaningful and enjoy being a part of it! Plus, fun projects are great recruitment tools.

Make sure to infuse an opportunity for fun into your site visits and remember to take pictures! (see #7!)

...Speaking of fun, this is a good time to link you to the UGA Waiver and photo release template ... You'll want to customize this and run it by Legal Affairs before any *voluntary* trips.

(If a trip is part of a *course*, then a waiver is not needed, but do communicate travel plans in your syllabus.)

6. Use your students

Engage your students in planning the visit, asking questions, leading discussions, and presenting results. Choose folks that are confident presenters and give them space to shine. Communities want to hear from bright, young minds!

Creating a discussion guide is a great way to prep them for leading small group discussions, especially for those who aren't confident speakers.

Examples: [Public Input Exercises](#)

Pro Tip: If you need the public to participate in your project, provide for kiddos that might be in tow so that their parents can participate. Include them in your sessions or provide an activity area for them.

Shown is the perspective of the entrance with an arch gateway.
SPECIAL TO THE T&D

7. Share the experience

Tell the story of your work through social media and press releases and great photographs. UGA and CED are always looking for stories, and local newspapers need stories practically written for them. Recognize that your community partner could benefit from your visit and help cross-promote each other on social media with Posts and Likes. Tag @ugaced and @ccdp_uga [Instagram] and mention @UGA College of Environment and Design [Facebook] in your posts.

Pro Tip: Tag our CED student organizations so they can easily repost and amplify your stories. They are @planningdawgs, @uga_mhp, and @gsla_uga. Frequent outreach-related hashtags are #UGAserves and #CEDserves.

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8. Give back

Your community partner will benefit from the research/project you are involved in there, so always share your students' work with them. Ask clients, "How can you best use the results from this class?" A written narrative in addition to graphic plans is always helpful. Perhaps a pre-written newspaper article, website posting, executive summary, or public presentation would be ideal? Ask in advance and plan this into your work program.

Going to the community to present results is always best, but also offer them an opportunity to visit campus for a discussion, come to a related lecture, or participate in a critique for their feedback.

Pro Tip: If you are inviting folks to campus, make getting to our buildings and parking as easy as possible! Andra has parking passes for the North Deck.

9. Say thank you

Just as your mother told you, a hand-written thank you note is always worth your time. There are CED-branded thank you notecards in the JSB Admin Suite hall cabinets. In addition, why not send your community partners a group picture, offer to be interviewed for the local radio station or newspaper, and write a community Thank You via a Letter to the Editor?

10. Reflect and follow up

At the conclusion of a project, engage your students in a reflection exercise. Reflection – or critically thinking about/sharing your assessment of an experience – is a key component of service-learning, as it helps us all learn and be better practitioners. Here are some examples: Reflection folder.

Our students have great experiences on off-campus community engagement projects and always ask, "Have they done any of our ideas yet?" and we have to say, "Well, it's only been 3 months...!" Students are anxious to know that the hard work that felt good made a difference. Keep up with your local partners and share updates via social media or the college's website. A regularized schedule of 3-month, 12-month, and 3-year reminders to check in with your partners would be ideal!
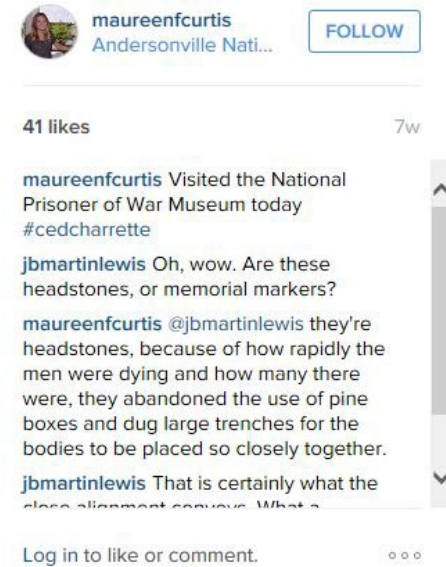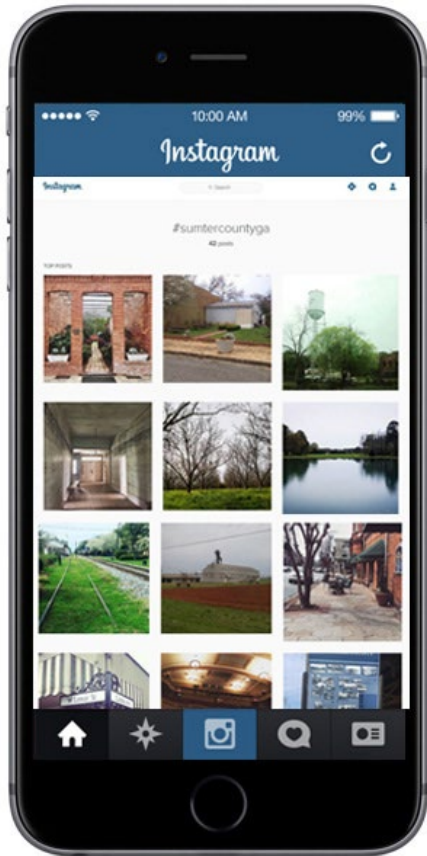
<u>Pro Tip:</u> You can use Instagram for reflection! Request a certain number of individual posts/stories and comments on fellow students' posts. You can use a distinctive hashtag [like #LAND4050-22] to filter and track responses. It's a creative way to get student insights and generate good content!

Final Thoughts

**Explore the UGA Office of Service-Learning (OSL) [website](). ** The mission of the OSL is to promote and support the development of quality academic service-learning experiences in response to critical community needs through a range of faculty and instructional development programs, services, and funding opportunities.

Load the S-suffix version of your course number.
Let your Program Coordinator know to load the –S version if one is available. The OSL sends students in S-suffix courses a separate end-of-course evaluation to collect data on campus-wide service-learning experiences, which helps advocate for support and funding. Also, share your project with the Center for Community Design & Preservation so they can keep track of our good work across Georgia.

Reach out to the Center for Community Design & Preservation.
We can support your community engagement work by finding collaborative partners, refining your project, and providing logistics support.