

Service-Learning Courses during COVID-19

from APPLES Service-Learning and the Carolina Center for Public Service

Created by [Becca Bender](#)

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Overview and university guidance

As the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill continues to respond to COVID-19, APPLES Service-Learning and the Carolina Center for Public Service are prepared to offer resources and consultations for faculty and instructors teaching service-learning courses. Over 2020-2021, we have been pleased with the resiliency and creativity of faculty and students to continue engaging in academic service-learning. Service opportunities have taken place remotely or in-person, as well as more creative, non-traditional service projects were offered, to allow students to engage with communities during this unique and challenging time.

Whether your service-learning course is offered remote, in-person, or a hybrid of both, you may want to consider continuing to offer virtual service opportunities to accommodate both students and partners who may not be quite ready to go full-force back into the community yet. As always, all service should prioritize the health and safety of our communities.

In collaboration with the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Undergraduate Curricula, APPLES requested a revision to service-learning criteria as of fall 2020:

- Flexibility to reduce the required amount of service hours completed by students from 30 to 20.
- Remove the restriction that service placements must be with off-campus organizations.

This will stay in affect through fall semester 2021. Students may do more than 20 hours, but that is the expectation of service courses. We will reassess at the end of fall semester.

Service-learning during a pandemic

Please keep these tips and topics in mind as your plan your service-learning activities for this semester. There will be many challenges, but our current situation also could provide many opportunities for students to learn and engage differently:

- Communication is key! It will be important to communicate your expectations for the service component with your students. Additionally, **please plan regular communication directly with the partners you have selected, or been assigned, for your course.** Community organizations are dealing with a lot right now, and we have to all work together to ensure this is a mutually beneficial experience for all.
 - Remember to communicate necessary information or changes to community partners as well, or consider shared language, such as an email template, that students can use in their communication, if preferred.

- As always, service-learning should be with **the full support and cooperation of our community partners**. Our focus should be on meeting community needs before forcing service to ensure completion of hours for a course. If service is interrupted or significantly changed, consider offering students a different assignment or opportunity to make up for it.
- **Use reflection as a helpful tool through this experience!** Please continue to include reflection and education on service as a component of your course. The delivery of that information might look different, but students will need an outlet to discuss what they are experiencing and learning through this course and the service component.
- **Be creative and flexible.** Conditions could change and evolve throughout this semester. But there are many resources to assist you in adapting your course to meet the current conditions. Do not feel like you have to recreate training tools, workshops, projects, etc. Below is a list of alternative service projects, and Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis’ Center for Service and Learning has also compiled [a list of creative ideas](#).
- Consider including discussions and reflections on the **intersections of power and privilege** within communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Additionally, consider connecting your course to important and relevant topics of **systemic racism in America and the fight for racial equity and justice**.
- **Adhere to [UNC Standards for Community Care](#) and [CCPS program guidelines](#)**, along with any other county or state level policies, when seeking out service opportunities for students.

What kinds of service can students do?

As you are connecting with partners and organizing your semester, you may consider both traditional forms of service, as well as alternatives. We encourage you to consider still offering a virtual or remote service opportunity, in addition to in-person work as we transition back to fully in-person. Please offer a variety of options to be inclusive of the needs and limitations of your students. Additionally, any in-person service should adhere to UNC’s Standards for Community Care (if applicable) and prioritize health and safety of students and the community. Here are some potential service options to think about in consultation with community partners:

Research

- Identify research projects
- Assist with program assessment
- Identify grant opportunities for a partner organization
- Interview current or past clients about their experiences and the impact of the organization
- Conduct program evaluations and analyze data for partner organizations
- Examine the impact of COVID-19 of the partner organization

Content / Product Creation

- Create marketing or social media content
- Create brochures or other materials for information-sharing
- Create smart-guide tours of a museum or gallery
- Develop a map of where kids and adults can get free meals
- Translate materials for a community partner
- Assist with webpage updates or redesign

Virtual Connecting

- Provide phone, web-based, or video conferencing support to clients of an organization
- Provide virtual or phone-based educational supports for youth and adults
- Explore opportunities for Google Hangout/Facetime conversations to counteract the physical social isolation. Quarantine Chat has emerged as one free option
- Host virtual book club or online art classes
- Participate in a virtual training around a course topic, or other relevant topics such as racial equity, healthcare, reflection, civic engagement etc.

Other:

- Provide an alternate assignment if service activities with an organization does not seem possible

[List adapted](#) from University of Kentucky's Center for Service-Learning and Civic Engagement

What do community organizations need during this time?

Based on the [summary of needs from the NC Nonprofits and COVID-19 Survey](#), coordinated by the NC Center for Nonprofits in summer 2020, nonprofit organizations are in need of funding, both for general operations and supporting assets, and technology support. Consider how your course may engage in service to support those needs.

What are other universities/organizations doing to keep service-learning efforts moving forward at this time?

[GivePulse Guide to Community Based Learning During a Public Health Crisis](#)
[Reflection questions around COVID from Loyola University Chicago](#)
[Asset-Based Community Building during COVID-19](#)
[Community Engagement and Remote Teaching](#)
[Nonprofit Pandemic Resources, NC Center for Nonprofits](#)

Feedback from 2020-21 APPLES instructors:

What worked well:

- Offering mix of in-person and remote service
- Using weekly/biweekly journals as a reflection opportunity helped keep instructors informed
- Mid-semester check-in with community partner
- Having community members as speakers for class, students conducted interviews
- Creating videos/flyers/materials for communities; collaborative project that could be given to partners

What did not work well:

- More small assignments in place of service hours was very stressful for students
- Not encouraging more students to turn their cameras on
- Students who selected virtual service ended up unhappy they weren't doing in-person work
- Depending too much on readings and discussion over Zoom