

John W. Alford Center for Service-Learning Training Manual

The purpose of this Training Manual is to prepare students for safe, productive and satisfying service experiences in the community. Although we have tried to cover a wide range of topics, the dynamic nature of our community makes it likely that our volunteers will discover issues and concerns that should be included in this manual. Please help us keep the manual current by raising concerns that are not addressed here. If you have questions about anything that is the manual, or have new ideas to contribute, contact the Alford Center at 740/587-6639.

Understanding Community Needs

- Suspend your own expectations
- Familiarize yourself with community history, especially prior outreach efforts
- Remain flexible and patient

Every community has its own history, culture, and practices. When you are entering community for the first time, it is very important to recognize that expectations based on experiences in other communities may get in the way of understanding how the new community functions. Beyond taking the time to learn about the community's needs, it is important simply to remain flexible in terms of your expectations. Always remember that the work you are doing serves community needs. These needs exist independently from your own expectations, and from the expectations of your class, group or committee.

This means that you might arrive at a site and be asked to wait for a task to present itself, or be asked to stay late to finish a project. You also could be asked to do work that is not exactly what you expected, but that serves the needs of the community you are working with. This is all part of working within the changing dynamic of a community. It is the nature of community engagement that opportunities to serve will often arise unexpectedly, and not at the time or in the manner you would anticipate.

Student Volunteer Rights & Responsibilities

- All student volunteers have rights and responsibilities
- It is important that you have a positive experience

All student volunteers have rights as well as responsibilities to the agencies and communities they serve. If you have concerns about your experience, please contact the Alford Center for Service-Learning. It is important that you have a positive student volunteer experience, and it is also important too identify and address any concerns with an agency so that future students can also have a positive experience.

Student Volunteer Rights

As a student volunteer you have the right to:

- To be oriented to the agency and its mission

- To receive supervision and guidance
- To have your service hours documented
- To say “no” to tasks that put you at risk or to situations that make you uncomfortable

In order to work productively in any setting, we need to know where we are, what goals we are trying to achieve, and what resources are available to us to get the job done. In general, social service agencies and organizations are very interested in having you know as much about their programs as possible. In some instances, you will receive a formal orientation and training, while in others this may happen on an informal and on-going basis. In some instances, the staff of an agency may be spread very thin and your training and on-going supervision may be less coherent than you might wish. Patience, diplomacy and compassion are all helpful in these situations, but always ask for the information you need to succeed in your task. And, while we have had only rare instances where volunteers felt uncomfortable with something they were asked to do, it can happen; you have the right to decline to participate in situations that put you at risk in any way. The Alford Center’s Director of Community Service, Susie Kalinoski, can talk with you about how to handle such situations.

Student Volunteer Responsibilities

Your responsibilities as a student volunteer include:

- Participating with enthusiasm
- Being honest with the agency about your abilities
- Not accepting or giving gifts to clients
- Representing Denison in a positive way in the community

As a student volunteer you are expected to participate in projects with enthusiasm and commitment. You are responsible for being open and honest with the agency about your abilities. You should not agree to do anything you cannot competently handle. A student volunteer is expected to participate in any orientation process, which could include a background check. Also, it is your responsibility to fulfill any time or task commitment the agency gives you, within the bounds of what you, in turn, have committed to the agency. Please note that student volunteers should never accept gifts from clients, nor should they make any type of gift to an agency’s clients. Lastly, please remember you represent Denison, and that the impression you leave will reflect upon the college for years to come.

Risk Management: What is it?

Going into a community which is new to you, working with unfamiliar organizations and with clients who may be experiencing distress can put you at risk in a variety of ways. Of greatest concern are your physical injury and protecting you from any form of harassment. Risk management involves analyzing your exposure to risk, and determining how best to handle that exposure. Anyone involved in community service work needs to develop the ability to conduct on-going, automatic personal risk assessment and risk management. You are your own best resource for remaining safe and healthy.

Why does it matter?

Like many other small, private colleges, our campus is generally a safe place to live and study; we work hard to keep the risk of harm as low as possible. When risk analysis appraise college students’ lives, they note that participation in service activities is actually one of the most common ways that students put themselves in the path of potential danger. Some analysts say that only attendance at parties has a higher risk factor. As a consequence, it’s

good to recognize the risks that exist. Failing to take proper risk management precautions can put you and/or your committee or group in harm's way. Failing to consider risk can also put the people you are working with or for in danger. The precautions we urge you to take are generally nothing more than common sense and being alert to potential dangers.

Physical Injury

The first step to preventing injury to yourself or members of your group or committee is making sure everyone undergoes proper training before using equipment, even when it appears to be "self-explanatory." A machine that has been in use by an organization may have operating quirks that you need to know about, so always ask whether there is anything special you need to know before operating any machinery—every copy machines.

Second, wear appropriate protective gear—gloves, eye protection, vests, etc. In some instances, you will be required to wear protective gear. In other settings, it may not be a requirement, but you may wish to have protection. For example, if you have an illness or allergy, you may need to advocate for your own needs.

Third, always be aware of your environment: watch out for loose or unsteady floors, poorly-attached handrails on stairs, leaking ceilings and other potential hazards. Some of the places where volunteers work are old or poorly maintained.

If an injury does occur at your worksite, it is important that you follow any policies and procedures your organization or agency has in place. In the case of a serious injury, immediately call 9-1-1.

Prepare

As obvious as it may seem; please remember to dress appropriately for the job at hand. Do not wear high heels unless you're volunteering for a runway show! T-shirts and closed toed shoes are your best choice for most of our sites. Punctuality is always valued, and eliminates the need to hurry to catch up in any way.

If it is your first time with an agency it would be wise to look up directions prior to the day of your project. Leaving home with the agency's phone number is a good idea just in case you get lost. Please leave items of high value such as purses, jewelry, iPods or laptops at home.

Impairment

Impairment occurs when any combination of psychosocial distress, substance use, or substance abuse interferes with your ability to perform service activities. Psychosocial distress could be a pressing legal issue, major stress from a relationship or work situation. Substances that could impair your ability to perform service include alcohol, illegal drugs or prescription drugs with strong side effects.

If you find yourself impaired as a consequence of any of these causes, you should not try to continue the service activity. Attempting to do so can be very damaging, both to you and the individuals you are working with. These types of problems can become very serious, and it is in your best interest to seek professional help.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is defined as any range of persistent unwanted sexual language or behavior. Such behavior can be obvious or quite subtle. Sexual harassment is illegal. It is

important to remember that behavior you perceive as innocent or joking can represent something very different to the person towards whom the behavior is directed, or to an observer. It is also important to remember that the victim of sexual harassment does not have to be the person directly harassed. Rather, anyone who is offended or otherwise affected by the behavior is considered a victim.

If you feel you are being sexually harassed, you should tell the harasser to stop. This may be difficult, but it sends an important message that the behavior is unwelcome. It is also important that you immediately speak to a program coordinator about the situation. You can also contact the Counseling and Mental Health Center at 740-471-3515.

Transportation of Clients

Never take a client in your car, unless it is specifically a part of your program and you have cleared it with all the parties involved, including the Alford Center for Service-Learning or Campus Safety and Security. This is especially important when dealing with minors, elderly individuals, or the disabled. In the event of any type of accident or incident you are likely to be held liable. If you have any questions about this, make sure you check with your supervisor or program coordinator.

Confidentiality & Personal Information

Confidentiality concerns run in two directions: You need to protect your own privacy, and you need to protect the clients with whom you work.

One of the most common ways that students put themselves at risk is by using their own cell-phones to communicate with clients with whom they are working; when you make a call with your own phone, you have shared your number in a way that puts you at risk for telephone harassment. As inconvenient as it may be, use a University phone when making arrangements with clients with whom you are working. Similarly, be cautious about sharing information about where you live or spend your free time. Evaluate whether such information needs to be shared and, when in doubt, talk with over with your supervisor or project coordinator.

It is also important that you do not disclose personal information about clients to your family, friends or other contacts. Only one exception to this rule exists: if the client discloses a situation where they or another person have been harmed, or where the threat of such harm exists, you may be legally obligated to report it. This is particularly important in situations involving minors or the disabled.

If you become aware of this type of situation, speak about it with your supervisor or program coordinator and determine the appropriate response. If it is found that you were aware of such a situation and failed to report it, you may face legal repercussions.

Depending on what type of service you are involved in, you may also have access to confidential records. In this case, it is important to understand your responsibilities. Records laws are complex, so it is absolutely vital that you become comfortable with whatever regulations govern the organization you are working with. For example, if you are working in a school you will be bound by FERPA (Family Education Rights and Privacy Act) regulations. Make sure that you discuss your responsibilities with your supervisor, and always err on the side of caution with any privacy concerns.

Inappropriate Relationships

Relationships that involve any combination of dating, courtship (through gifts, love letters, etc.) and/or physical intimacy constitute sexual relationships in the eyes of the courts. As long as you are engaged in service with a group or agency, it is inappropriate to get involved in any such relationships with clients or supervisors.

If there was a pre-existing, appropriate relationship, this should be disclosed and discussed with any appropriate supervisors prior to beginning service.

Termination of Service

- Act in a respectful and professional manner
- Give two weeks notice
- Find fill-ins for any missed shifts
- Be mindful of your clients feelings

In the event that you terminate service earlier than planned, it is important to act in a respectful, professional manner. Always try to give the organization or agency two weeks notice before you leave. If for some reason you must leave a service position rapidly, take the initiative in finding people to fill in for you on any days you will be unable to work.

Make sure that you are conscious of the effect your decision to leave will have upon your clients. If appropriate, make sure to give them warning of your departure and try to minimize any distress it might cause them.

The Official Tutoring and Mentoring Training Module is coming soon!