

Service-Learning Requirement

Guidelines for Subject Development

1. Definition of Service-Learning at PolyU

Service-Learning is an experiential learning pedagogy that integrates community service with academic study and reflections to enrich students' learning experience, in order to achieve the intended institutional or programme learning outcomes. It enhances students' sense of civic responsibility and engagement on the one hand, and benefits the community at large on the other. It emphasizes *learning through engagement in services*. Participating in voluntary service activities alone does not qualify as service-learning.

In the context of subject development and approval for meeting the Service-Learning Requirement, PolyU adopts a broader definition of service-learning which entails both:

- a. Activities that directly serve people in need (e.g. health education for under-developed communities, providing scientific literacy classes for children in underperforming schools, building bridges for remote villages)
- b. Civic engagement activities that indirectly serve the community or an underprivileged group (e.g. community-based research on sustainable development, consultancy service for NGOs or underprivileged groups, advocacy for social justice, etc.).

Please note, however, that for service projects, direct or indirect, to be counted as service-learning, they must:

- a. Be coherent within itself and with the academic content of the subject, and require students to apply what they learn at university to serve the community
- b. Provide ample opportunities for students to interact with the people in need so as to enable them to develop an increased understanding of, and empathy for, the underprivileged group they purport to serve
- c. Require students to reflect deeply on their service experience, particularly on the linkage between service-learning and the academic content of the subject, as well as their role and responsibilities as a professional and a responsible citizen
- d. Deploy purposively the deliverables and outcomes of the projects to bring about real and significant benefits to the community or the target underprivileged group to be served
- e. Ensure that students will be able to acquire substantive learning gains from the service experience rather than merely providing manual labour for other agencies.

Both local and offshore service activities can be included.

2. Types of Service-Learning Subjects that can be Offered

Interested departments or staff can propose subjects that fulfil the Service-Learning Requirement. These subjects may take the following forms:

- a. An open-for-all GUR subject (e.g. on a generic topic such as globalisation, inter-cultural issues, poverty) that is appropriate and contributes to the general education for students from any discipline
- b. A GUR subject targeted for students with certain background (e.g. subjects that address interdisciplinary issues/concepts such as health care for the elderly, engineering solutions for poverty relief, etc. that require more in-depth background specific to particular disciplines.)

- c. A DSR subject that fulfils the requirements of the Service-Learning Requirement as well as the Discipline-Specific Requirements.¹

Prior approval from the Head of the offering Department must be obtained for all subject proposals.

Individual programmes are strongly encouraged to give students maximal flexibility in choosing from the range of service-learning subjects available across the University to fulfil the Service-Learning Requirement, wherever possible.

3. Criteria for a Service-Learning Subject

To qualify as a subject meeting the Service-Learning Requirement of PolyU, the proposed subject:

- a. Must carry a minimum of 3 credits
- b. Must be a Level 2 or above subject
- c. Can last for one or two semesters. A single-semester subject is one in which all teaching activities (including all services and assignments) end before the next semester starts. A two-semester subject has teaching activities in both semesters.
- d. Must include in its “Intended Learning Outcomes”, in addition to the outcomes associated with the academic content of the subject, the following learning outcomes common to all service-learning subjects:

[On completing the subject, students will be able to:]

- Apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired to deal with complex issues in the service setting
 - Reflect on their role and responsibilities both as a professional in their chosen discipline and as a responsible citizen
 - Demonstrate empathy for people in need and a strong sense of civic responsibility
 - Demonstrate an understanding of the linkage between service-learning and the academic content of the subject
- e. Must include in its “Teaching/Learning Methodology” a requirement for all students to participate in community service or engagement activities that:
 - Support the academic focus of the subject
 - Address identified community needs in a meaningful way
 - Create opportunities for students to interact directly with the service users or community members, and
 - Benefit both the students and the service users/the community at large

For a 3-credit subject, students are normally expected to spend a minimum of 40 hours in rendering the service. The expected hours of student effort in planning, preparing for and executing the service, etc. must be spelt out clearly in its “Student Study Effort Expected”

- f. Must include in its “Subject Synopsis/Indicative Syllabus” coverage on moral and ethical consideration relevant to the discipline and the service recipients
- g. Must include in its “Teaching/Learning Methodology” structured opportunities for reflection to enable students to connect their learning with the service, and to reflect on their role and social responsibilities both as a professional and a responsible citizen

¹ Departments can, but are NOT required to, offer DSR subjects that fulfil the Service-Learning Requirement.

- h. Must include in its “Assessment Methods” a rigorous and systematic process in which students’ performance in and their learning from the required service activities are assessed, using a Letter-Grading system.

4. Subject Proposers and Instructors

Subject proposers are expected to have a good understanding of the concepts, theories and practices pertaining to service-learning. Hence they are required to have either:

- a. prior experience or expertise in service-learning, such as teaching or co-teaching relevant subjects, supervising or co-supervising relevant projects, etc; or
- b. passed the e-Learning module “Service-Learning Pedagogy and Practice” developed by the Service-Learning and Leadership Office

Colleagues proposing subjects with offshore service-learning projects/activities are additionally required to demonstrate evidence of prior experience in leading similar offshore curricular or extracurricular project/activities, e.g. offshore study tours, offshore service-learning projects, etc within the teaching team.

Subject instructors without prior experience in service-learning will be required to pass the eLearning module “Service-Learning Pedagogy and Practice”, developed by the Service-Learning and Leadership Office, before teaching the SL subject.

5. Target Students and Selection

Subject-offering department/staff should indicate clearly whether the subject is open to all students or is targeted only for students with certain background.

If necessary, subject-offering department/staff can set up mechanisms and processes for selecting the most qualified/appropriate students for enrolling in the subject. In these cases, the criteria for selection should be transparent to the students.

It is understood that since the service beneficiaries in Hong Kong are mostly Cantonese-speaking people and those in Chinese mainland Putonghua-speaking, students who speak Cantonese and/or Putonghua will have an advantage during service delivery. However, departments are advised not to set any language requirement on the target students, unless it is absolutely necessary that this requirement applies to 100% of the students in the class. If the proposed subject really can only accept Cantonese- or Putonghua-speaking students, please give strong justifications for consideration.

6. Operational and Funding Models for Service-Learning Subjects

The teaching and operations of service-learning subjects are different from those of other general subjects as they include a community service component as part of the course requirement. It is important that the community service component is properly implemented to ensure quality learning outcomes. The provision of regular project supervision and good communication with the collaborating agency partners or service users are two key factors for success. There are some possible operational models that can be considered by departments when planning their Service-Learning subjects:

- a. Full involvement by department staff
- b. Cross-department collaboration
- c. Department in collaboration with the Service-Learning and Leadership Office
- d. Department in collaboration with agency partners

Service-Learning subjects are funded by the University on per credit per student basis to the one-line budget of the department, and the related funding covers both the teaching and project components of the subject. The funding for Service-Learning subjects is higher than that

for a normal GUR subject, taking into account that extra costs may be required in carrying out the community service project.

For subjects involving more than one department, e.g. those operated by models (b), (c) and (d) mentioned above, funding in proportion to the work involved should be given to all the parties involved to recognize their respective manpower input. Subject proposers please indicate the distribution of workload and funding amongst departments in the subject proposal form.

7. Subject Schedule

Subject proposers are required to provide a tentative subject schedule in Part F of the Subject Proposal Form to enable the Sub-committee on Service-Learning Subjects to review the proposed subject design and schedule.

8. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

All staff members involved in the subject proposal are required to declare any actual, potential or perceived conflict of interest in the proposed subject, including but not limited to the selection of collaborating partner(s) or beneficiaries for the subject.

9. Risk Management

Service-Learning subjects/projects involve out-of-classroom activities in different settings and places. PolyU staff, students and related parties such as the service recipients may be exposed to risky situations that warrant special attention. The subject/project leader and the subject offering department have the responsibility to follow the risk management policies developed by the Service-Learning and Leadership Office, draw up and update the risk management plan, and monitor and review the implementation of the risk control measures of their own Service-Learning subject/project.

At the subject proposal stage, the subject proposers must conduct a preliminary risk assessment and draw up a risk management plan for the subject proposed. The information provided will assist the Sub-committee on Service-Learning Subjects to consider the subject proposal's suitability. It is the responsibility of the subject proposer(s) to ensure the accuracy of the information provided. The Sub-committee may ask the subject proposer to provide further information for clarification.

10. Advice and Support

Please contact the Secretary of the Sub-committee on Service-Learning Subjects via email at sllo.scsls@polyu.edu.hk.

11. Subject Proposal and Approval Process

Departments or colleagues interested in proposing a service-learning subject should follow the steps below:

- a. Complete the Service-Learning Subject Proposal Form
- b. Obtain endorsement from the Head of the offering Department using the approval record form (submit a copy in MS Word format and a scanned copy, signed by the HoD, in pdf)
- c. Attach a duly completed Form AR140 Subject Description Form (**refer to the enclosed Notes for Completion of Form AR140 for Service-Learning Subjects**)
- d. Attach an abbreviated CV of the subject proposer/instructor(s) (incorporated into one file in MS Word Format)
- e. Attach a duly completed Preliminary Risk Management Plan

- f. Submit all documents to the Secretary of the Sub-committee on Service-Learning Subjects at sllo.scsls@polyu.edu.hk before the deadline.

Subject proposals will be initially reviewed by the Sub-committee on Service-Learning Subjects. The Committee on General University Requirements will then review the proposals and recommend them to the Academic Planning and Regulations Committee and the Senate for implementation approval.

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Notes for Completion of Form AR140 for Service-Learning Subjects

- 1) Under the Section “Subject Synopsis/Indicative Syllabus”, please include coverage of moral and ethical considerations relevant to the discipline and the service recipients.
- 2) Under the Section “Teaching/Learning Methodology”, please include a section that explicitly spells out the details of the service component, including its nature, activities involved, students’ engagement expected, etc. Information given should align with that given in Part C of the Subject Proposal Form.
- 3) Under the Section “Student Study Effort Expected”, please include all the information that students need to know about the time period, location and frequency for the discharge of service delivery. Information given should align with that given in Part C of the Subject Proposal Form.
- 4) Also, under the Section “Student Study Effort Expected”, please spell out clearly the expected hours of student effort for various parts of the service component, e.g. planning, preparation, execution, etc. Information given should align with that given in Part C of the Subject Proposal Form.
- 5) Information given under the Section “Assessment Methods” of the Subject Description Form should align with that given in Part E of the Subject Proposal Form.
- 6) Also, under the Section “Assessment Methods”, please indicate which assessment methods are individual-based and which are group-based.