

SPRING 2004: 21W.731: Exploring Self in Society

What Is Service Learning?

Service Learning is an approach that combines some service to the community with academic learning--i.e., the **service** is what you provide while the **learning** is what happens through practicing your writing skills in pieces that draw upon your community service experience. For **21W.731: Exploring Self in Society**, you may reflect on your experience in community service in creative nonfiction essays and draw upon that experience to create short fiction. It is optional but recommended for this course.

How Does Service Learning Fit into 21W.731:Exploring Self in Society? In our readings and discussions, we explore the topic of the individual's responsibility to the community and society and engage with social issues such as poverty, racism and educational inequality. Service Learning is thus a natural fit for this course.

In the words of Confucius, "I read and I forget; I see and I remember; I do and I understand." Service Learning is a way of engaging with the question of social responsibility on a more profound and practical level. Many non-profit organizations exist to help deal with social problems. This semester you may select a non-profit organization to work with/for (e.g., working at a shelter for the homeless, tutoring a high school student, volunteering at a clinic). You should dedicate 2-3 hours/week for 10 weeks to the project. During this time, as you do your volunteer work, you should carefully observe the interactions at your site and do some freewriting about your experience to generate ideas for essays or fiction. In addition, you may wish to interview staff members or volunteers about their experiences. To find non-profits who want volunteers and/or help, you may

- Consult the volunteer Web site for ideas:
<<http://www.volunteersolutions.org/mit/volunteer/index.tcl>> and click on "volunteer" link on the right side, then contact the non-profit directly.
- Or consult MIT's **Public Service Center** (PSC) located in 4-104 (<<http://web.mit.edu/mitpsc>>); the PSC has contacts with non-profit organizations—this is a great resource.
- Or you may continue a service project with which you are already involved.

Does Service Learning Add to the Amount of Work I Do for 21W.731:Exploring Self in Society? Obviously SL has a time commitment of 20-30 hours during the semester of working at a site or for the non-profit. To make up for that commitment,

- You can draw upon that experience for your last two major writing assignments (essays or short fiction); the SL experience will count as your outside research.
- So the answer to the question is " It will not add significantly to the amount on work that you do for the course, but the workload will include some out-of-class experience that you would not otherwise have."

How Do I Select the SL Option? Consult the staff at Public Service Center to find an appropriate nonprofit. Then contact that nonprofit to set up your project.

Then submit a **Proposal for Service Learning Option by Tues. 2/24.**

What's a Service Learning Proposal?

Your proposal (due by **2/24**) should be in a **list format** and must include the following information:

- **Organization:** Name of the non-profit organization you will work for.
- **Contact:** Name of your contact person and his/her phone number and email address.
- **What You'll Do:** Details of what you will do for the non-profit organization (your contribution should be 2-3/hours per week for 10 weeks or a 20-30 hour time equivalent).
- **Schedule:** Include here the date you will start and finish.
- **Connection to class:** How do you think this work will deepen your experience as a writer in the course? How do you hope the experience will connect with the writing (essays or essay/fiction) that you will do?