

Ethics in Service Learning Syllabus

SIS 596-008 (open to graduate students and undergraduates who have completed 75 or more credits)

American University, Spring 2008

Professor Julie Mertus

Course Description

This course is designed to provide students with an opportunity to reflect on ethics in one's service learning experience. Students study ethical issues that they will face during this semester when they participate in a service learning experience. They choose their own placements with the aid of the instructor. All sponsoring organizations and participating students sign service contracts that communicate clear expectations for the semester's work. Seminar meetings and writing assignments provide opportunities to share their experiences and enhance students' awareness of the ethical issues that await careers as policymakers, political analysts, human rights and humanitarian aid workers, and other professional posts, both in the public and private sector, at home and abroad.

The Benefit for Students: The requirements for this course are in line with all other well-supervised and well-structured internships in SIS. The advantage of service learning over traditional internships is that:

- (a) Excellent placements have been set up for participating students, should they choose to apply to them (students may also make their own arrangements);
- (b) By signing a "service learning" agreement, the "employer" agrees to a mentoring program that serves both employer and student interests;
- (c) Expectations for students are clearer at the outset;
- (d) Faculty support is "built in";
- (e) The overall experience of students is enhanced by built-in opportunities for sharing experiences and analyzing ethical issues.

Course Requirements/Methods of Assessment:

(1) **SERVICE LEARNING PLACEMENT HOURS:** Students are expected to meet the minimum number of hours set by university policy. Generally, all of the hours will be spent on-location, that is, at the site of the placement. However, if the placement requires that students to do additional preparation or outside research, this time may count toward the minimum hour requirement. Students must keep a log of the time spent in the placement, which will serve as evidence of participation and the accumulation of experience.

(2) **REFLECTIVE PAPERS:** Students must post on Blackboard a journal entry reflecting on their experience according to the schedule noted below (four entries), plus one final assessment. The journal will be considered evidence of their own reflection on their experience. Student should **REFER TO ASSIGNED readings in their journal entries. Each time a student posts a journal entry he/she must respond to at least one other student's posting.**

(3) **MEETINGS;** Students must meet with the professor before the second week of classes to select their placement and to prepare and sign service contract. Throughout the semester, students remain regular contact with the professor, and the entire class meets four times during the semester according to the schedule set out below. (Note: Although the registrar automatically sets a room and meeting time for the class, the class will set its own best meeting time.

The purpose of these meetings is to provide the professor with an opportunity to assess the progress that students are making in their service learning placements and to give students an opportunity to share experiences and to obtain feedback. Class meetings will be structured around specific ethical questions that may arise in the service learning placement. Students will be expected to have read the assigned readings for each meeting **IN ADVANCE OF CLASS**. Readings will be available on Blackboard or under electronic reserve.

(4) REQUIRED FORMS:

A. To be submitted by student: At the beginning of the course, students complete the standard SIS or CSC papers on liability as well as a service learning contract. At the end of the course, students also must complete and submit the evaluation form included at the end of this syllabus along with one piece of work from placement.

B. To be submitted by the service learning placement: A specific mentor at the service learning placement must agree to and sign the service learning contract at the start of the semester, At the conclusion of the semester, the placement must complete and submit an evaluation form. This document will become part

of the student's file for the course and will form the basis of the Service Learning Placement grade, in line with university policies governing placements.

Course Grade:

Course grade will be determined according to the following breakdown, each assignment being assessed according to how it meets the stated learning objectives above:

Service Learning Placement (supervisor evaluation and work product); 70%

Class attendance and participation 15%

Journal responses: 15%

IMPORTANT NOTE ON CHANGING PLACEMENTS: If your placement is not meeting your expectations or if there is any other problem with the placement, see our instructor as soon as possible. Also, when it is possible to do so, see your supervisor to try to work out the problem.

Course Readings:

The focus is on the placement, not on reading. However, the course uses some carefully targeted readings to stimulate reflection on the placement. All readings will be available on Blackboard or under electronic reserve.

Course Calendar:

By Jan. 25: Individual meetings with instructor to make placement and hand in forms. (Note: Jan. 28 is last day to withdraw without a "W" and with 100% refund).

**The week of February 5th (exact date to be determined by class)
CLASS MEETING ONE**

Post Journal Assignment #1 (plus post reply to at least one student)

Topic: Advocacy vs. Service Delivery -- A consideration of the factors driving both advocacy and service delivery and a consideration of who wins and who loses under both approaches. What kind of work does your organization do?

What are the ethical and operational challenges that may arise that are common to both service delivery and advocacy? That are unique to either advocacy or service delivery? What about other kinds of work? How do you stay “alive, sane and happy” doing both kinds of work?

Readings:

Bolton, Matthew and Emily Welty (SIS Grad), “Surviving as an Aid Worker: How to Stay Alive, Sane and Happy on Humanitarian Assignments,” www.transitionsabroad.com, September/October 2006

Clark, John, “Policy Influence, Lobbying and Advocacy,” pp. 191-202 in *Making a Difference: NGOs and Development in a Changing World* (London: Save the Children, 1992)(Edwards and Hulme, eds.)

Lindenberg, Marc and Coralie Bryant, *Going Global: Transforming Relief and Development NGOs* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian, 2002)(ch 7, “The Evolving Role of Advocacy”).

Week of February 19th (exact date to be determined by class):

CLASS MEETING TWO

Post Journal Assignment #2 (plus post reply to at least one student)

Topic: “Voice Accountability” - How does your organization make sure that it is responsive to the concerns of its target community? What methods exist for analyzing accountability and are they adequate in your case? What are the challenges that organizational growth pose to maintaining voice accountability while improving developmental impact?

Readings:

Edwards, Michael and David Hulme, “Scaling up the developmental impact of NGOs: Concepts and Experiences,” pp. 13-27 in *Making a Difference: NGOs and Development in a Changing World* (London: Save the Children, 1992)(Edwards and Hulme, eds.)

Hall, Anthony, “From victims to victors: NGOs and the Politics of the Empowerment of the Itaparica,” pp 148-158 in *Making a Difference: NGOs and Development in a Changing World* (London: Save the Children, 1992)(Edwards and Hulme, eds.)

Hodson, Roland, "Small, medium or large: The rocky road to NGO growth," pp. 127-136 in *Making a Difference: NGOs and Development in a Changing World* (London: Save the Children, 1992)(Edwards and Hulme, eds.)

Week of March 3 (exact date to be determined by class):

CLASS MEETING THREE

Post Journal Assignment #3 (plus post reply to at least one student)

Topic: Living Ethics -- Assessing the degree to which an organization and the people within it practice what they preach. What criteria exist for measuring the extent to which an organization "walks the walk" and doesn't just "talk the talk"? What does your organization do to promote ethical institutional learning? Ethical relations with donors? Ethical reporting practices? Ethical personnel practices within its headquarters and in the field?

Readings:

Ebrahim, Alnoor, *NGOs and Organizational Change: Discourse, Reporting, Learning* (New York: Cambridge, 2003)(chapter 4, "Interdependence and Power: Tensions over Money and Reputation" and chapter 5, "Information Struggles")

Lindenberg, Marc and Coralie Bryant, *Going Global: Transforming Relief and Development NGOs* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian, 2002)(chapter 9, "Accountability, Evaluation and Organizational Learning").

Week of April 1 (exact date to be determined by class)

CLASS MEETING FOUR

Post Journal Assignment #4 (plus post reply to at least one student)

Topic: Building Positive Peace: Analyzing possibilities for transformative social change in rights-based approaches to humanitarian assistance, post-conflict reconstruction, and poverty reduction programs. How do you assess who wins and who loses? What ethical considerations should guide research on advocacy and service organizations?

Readings:

Lindenberg, Marc and Coralie Bryant, *Going Global: Transforming Relief and Development NGOs* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian, 2002)(chapter 4, "Building Positive Peace: Reducing Poverty and Social Exclusion")

Mertus, Julie and Tazreena Sajjad (SIS grad), "When Civil Society Promotion Fails State-Building: The Inevitable Fault-lines in Post-Conflict Reconstruction," in *Subcontracting Peace; The Challenge of NGO Peacemaking* (Ashgate 2005)(Richmond and Carrey, eds.)

Strand, Kerry et. al, "Research Practices in Community-Based Research," pp. 96-118 in *Community Based Research in Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2003)(Kerry et. al., eds..)

Any time between April 7-April 28: Post Journal Assignment #5(evaluation)

STUDENT EVALUATION OF PLACEMENT

Student Name:

Name of Sponsoring Organization:

Date(s) of Volunteering:

Beginning Date:

Ending Date:

No. of Hours:

1. What were the duties you performed during service?
2. What have you enjoyed the most? Why?
3. What were the most frustrating aspects of your placement?
4. What skills, training, and knowledge did you use as a placement at this organization?
5. What further skills, training, and knowledge would have been useful to you?
6. Do the employees you work with:

 Give clear instructions and answer your questions? Always Usually Seldom Never

 Express appreciation to you for what you do? Always Usually Seldom Never
7. Do you feel that you made a worthwhile contribution to the ORGANIZATION? to the community?
8. How would you rate the quality of your placement? Excellent Good Fair Poor
9. Would you recommend this agency to the other students? Explain:
- 10 Anything else you would like to add?