

Virginia Commonwealth University

EDUS 641: Independent Study in Service-Learning: The Service-Learning Graduate Teaching Assistants Program

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Margaret Mead*

EDUS 641 Instructor:

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Course Description:

EDUS 641 provides graduate students who have been selected by VCU service-learning instructors with support and instruction during the semester(s) when they are serving as teaching assistants within VCU service-learning courses. The course also allows graduate students the opportunity to work with a service-learning instructor on an individual project that meets a service-learning need at the university. EDUS 641 course requirements also include a minimum of 5 hours per week of teaching assistance within a designated service-learning course.

What is Service-Learning and What do Service-Learning Graduate Teaching Assistants do?

Service-learning courses at Virginia Commonwealth University combine a minimum of twenty hours of meaningful community service with academic instruction, focusing on critical, reflective thinking, and personal and civic responsibility. Service-learning courses involve students in activities that address community-identified needs, while developing their academic skills and commitment to their community.

Service-learning graduate teaching assistants (SLGTAs) provide a critical support function within these courses. TAs work closely with course instructors and community leaders to facilitate service projects, to assist students with understanding the links between service and academic content, help monitor student service hours and project logistics, facilitate reflection discussions, and provide feedback on reflection writing assignments. Through these roles, SLTAs hone their own personal leadership styles, grow in their understanding of civic engagement, and develop mentoring relationships with university faculty members and community leaders.

Course Objectives:

Learning objectives for EDUS 641 encompass three broad areas—objectives related to developing an advanced understanding of service-learning, objectives related to the development of ethical behaviors and leadership skills, and objectives related to improving professional/practical skills.

Objectives related to understanding service-learning:

1. Describe the historical and theoretical underpinnings of service-learning.
2. Understand the components of the definition of service-learning used at VCU.
3. Appreciate the multiple roles & responsibilities of a service-learning teaching assistant at VCU.
4. Demonstrate the ability to evaluate and facilitate service-learning reflection.
5. Understand strategies for building and fostering mutually beneficial community partnerships.

Objectives related to the development of ethical behaviors and leadership skills:

1. Build self-awareness by exploring your multiple social identities, values, and beliefs.
2. Demonstrate flexibility in problem-solving.

3. Collaborate effectively within groups, resolving conflicts.
4. Appreciate and embrace diversity in your interactions with others.
5. Understand ethical issues related to service-learning.

Objectives related to improving professional/practical:

1. Write clearly with accurate grammar, punctuation, and structure.
2. Demonstrate effective public speaking skills during presentations.
3. Articulate your opinions clearly and concisely during group discussions.

Required Readings:

All required readings for the course are provided through the 2012 January Service-Learning Mini-Institute. Students may be required to read additional materials as specified by their service-learning instructor supervisor.

Course Assignments:

Individual Project Description

EDUS 641 consists of three parts.

Part 1: Participation in the January or May VCU Service-Learning Mini-Institute (<http://wp.vcu.edu/servicelearninginstitute/>).

Part 2: An individualized project relevant to service-learning. This project must be approved by the EDUS 641 course instructor and the service-learning class instructor. Graduate students should develop a teaching, research, or service/outreach project that meets their own professional development goals.

Part 3: An average of 5 hours per week of direct TA assistance provided to the service-learning class instructor. Mid- and end-of-semester performance evaluations will be completed by the service-learning class instructor to assess this work.

Deliverables & Due Dates

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| • Participation in the SL Institute | Due _____ |
| • Mid –Semester Evaluation** | Due _____ |
| • End-of-Semester Evaluation** | Due _____ |
| • Individualized SL Project | Due _____ |

Grading

- | | | |
|------------------------------|-----|---|
| • January SL Institute | 30% | |
| • Mid-Semester Evaluation | 25% | |
| • End-of-Semester Evaluation | 25% | |
| • Individualized SL Project | 20% | : |

NOTE:

****Mid-semester Evaluation and Final Evaluation of your SLgTA services**

The SLgTA is evaluated by his/her instructor twice a semester. It is the TAs responsibility to return a completed evaluation form from the service-learning course instructor supervisor to the EDUS 641 instructor by the due date. The evaluation form is attached to the end of this syllabus. Grades will be assigned based on the mean rating across all rated items (with ‘Overall Rating’ weighted double) and the following 30 point scale: $\geq 4.8 = 30$; 4.5 to $<4.8 = 28$; 4.0 to $<4.5 = 26$; 3.5 to $<4.0 = 25$; 3.0 to $<3.5 = 24$; 2.5 to $<3.0 = 23$; and $<2.5 = 22$.

A Few Other Course Policies:

Plagiarism/Honor System Pledge: VCU's Honor System Pledge states:

*“On my honor, I have neither given nor received aid on this assignment,
and I pledge that I am in compliance with the VCU Honor System.”*

Plagiarism is the unauthorized use of the words or ideas of another person and is a violation of the Honor System. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense; and under the Honor System at Virginia Commonwealth University professors are required to take offenders before the Honor Council. Students who are judged to have plagiarized a college assignment may not only earn an “F” for the assignment/course in question, but may lose their standing as a VCU student. The Honor Council makes these determinations once the professor brings the case forward.

Accommodations for Disability. Please contact me privately as soon as possible if you feel you may need accommodations to meet the course requirements or to participate fully in the course due to a disability. You should also contact the Disability Support Services Office at 907 Floyd Ave, Room 102 (Voice/TTY: (804) 828-2253 & Fax: (804) 828-1944) to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. The goal of the VCU Disability Support Services (DSS) Office is to assist Virginia Commonwealth University in creating a learning environment where all students have equal access to every aspect of the University's programs, services and activities. The office website is <http://www.students.vcu.edu/dss/>

EDUS 641

Supervising Instructor's Evaluation of VCU Service-Learning Graduate Teaching Assistant

Dear Instructor: Please complete the evaluation questions below in reference to your current Service-Learning Graduate Teaching Assistant (SLGT). Read the descriptions for each item and circle the most appropriate rating (5=outstanding, 1=unsatisfactory). If you have not had the opportunity to observe the student in a particular area or if the item is not relevant to the student's responsibility, please circle the "x".

Please return the completed evaluation to your Service-Learning TA by the following due date:

Evaluation #1 is due _____ Evaluation #2 is _____

Student Name _____ Evaluation Completed by: _____

Course Number & Title: _____ Today's date: _____

1. **RESPONSIBLE:** Accepts responsibility for own behavior; high level of maturity and professional judgment.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

2. **RESOURCEFUL:** Has ability to locate information when lacking knowledge in specific areas.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

3. **SENSITIVITY:** Exhibits sensitivity to people (students, community partners, etc.). Able to identify needs & problems.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

4. **WRITTEN COMMUNICATION:** Able to provide clearly written communications; written materials are clear, concise, accurate and complete.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

5. **ORAL COMMUNICATION:** Able to communicate clearly orally; ability "to get message across."

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

6. **FEEDBACK:** Welcomes and seeks suggestions and advice on ways to improve performance.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

7. **WORK WITH OTHERS:** Highly effective in dealing with diverse people.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

8. **ENTHUSIASM:** Enthusiasm is evident; does not complain excessively.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

9. **INITIATIVE:** Displays high degree of initiative; goes ahead with work assignments.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

10. **WORK OUTPUT:** Work output consistently exceeds requirements.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

11. **CONFIDENTIAL:** Skilled in handling controversial or delicate matters.
Unsatisfactory Outstanding No Opportunity/NA
1 2 3 4 5 X

12. **FLEXIBILITY:** Flexible in adjusting activities to meet emergency/unexpected conditions or unanticipated requirements.
Unsatisfactory Outstanding No Opportunity/NA
1 2 3 4 5 X

13. **ETHICS:** Has clear understanding of ethical expectations for position; consistently behaves in an ethical manner.
Unsatisfactory Outstanding No Opportunity/NA
1 2 3 4 5 X

14. **ATTENDANCE & PUNCTUALITY:** Fulfills weekly commitments and is punctual.
Unsatisfactory Outstanding No Opportunity/NA
1 2 3 4 5 X

15. **DEALING WITH PERSONAL BIASES & ATTITUDES:** Able to separate facts from his/her own attitudes/biases and recognizes importance of doing so.
Unsatisfactory Outstanding No Opportunity/NA
1 2 3 4 5 X

16. **OVERALL PERFORMANCE:** *Unsatisfactory* *Outstanding*
1 2 3 4 5

Please add additional comments below. In particular, we ask that you elaborate on any items that you rated as either a "1" or "5". If you have any specific questions or concerns, feel free to contact the EDUS 641 instructor, Dr. Lynn Pelco at lepelco@vcu.edu or 804-827-8215. Thank you. (Use reverse side if necessary).

Evaluation reviewed by:

Faculty Signature: _____ Date: _____

Student Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please estimate the number of hours per week you think the SLGTA devotes to teaching assistant tasks in your service-learning course. _____ hours/week

If possible, would you like to have this SLGTA work with you again as a teaching assistant in a service-learning course? Yes _____ No _____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (use reverse side):