



VCU

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Virginia Commonwealth University
CMST 410
Service-Learning Teaching Assistant Supervision

*“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*

Instructor:

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Course Description:

CMST 410 provides undergraduate students with support and instruction during the semester(s) when they are serving as teaching assistants within VCU service-learning courses. Students in CMST 410 must have successfully completed CMST 410: Orientation to Service-Learning (1.5 credits) before being placed as a service-learning teaching assistant. CMST 410 course requirements include a minimum of 5 hours per week of teaching assistance within a designated service-learning course plus attendance at monthly TA group meetings, and participation in Service-Learning Program activities (e.g., social media).

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

Service-learning courses at Virginia Commonwealth University combine a minimum of twenty hours (per enrolled student per semester) 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 teaching assistants (TAs) provide a critical support function within these courses. TAs work closely with course instructors and community members to facilitate service projects, to foster university students' understanding of the links between service and academic content, to help monitor university student service hours and project logistics, to facilitate reflection discussions, and to provide feedback on reflection writing assignments. Through these roles, TAs 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 CMST 410 encompass three broad areas—objectives related to developing an advanced understanding of service-learning, objectives related to building skills for leadership and civic engagement, and objectives related to improving written and oral communication 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 building skills for leadership and civic engagement:

1. Build self-awareness by exploring your multiple social identities, values, and beliefs.
2. Demonstrate flexibility in problem-solving.
3. Collaborate effectively within groups.
4. Appreciate and embrace diversity in your interactions with others.
5. Understand ethical issues related to service-learning.

Objectives related to improving written and oral communication skills:

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.

Course Format/Student Expectations

The course will meet for 2 hours once per month during the spring semester. Each week the course may include a combination of the following: discussion of readings, mini-lectures, guest speakers, student presentations, and experiential activities designed to integrate the material with students' experience and research. The instructor encourages a relaxed classroom atmosphere where students may question, take positions, and explore relevant ideas and issues in service-learning.

Participation, regular attendance, and preparation for class each week are vital to your understanding the components of this course and will be reflected in the participation portion of your final grade. The principles of the VCU Honor System will be strictly adhered to in this course.

Use of computers and electronic media devices in class is permitted for class functions/presentations only. Use of computers and electronic media devices for email or social networking is not permitted. Cell phones should be turned off during class. The instructor reserves the right to ban computers and electronic media devices from class at any point.

Grading:

Class Attendance/Participation (20 points)- All service-learning teaching assistants will gather as a large group four times during the semester, and attendance at these meetings is required for all **CMST 410** students. These meetings will be used to build our knowledge and understanding about service-learning, to discuss accomplishments and challenges in providing teaching assistance within service-learning courses, to develop activities that promote service-learning awareness on campus, and to facilitate support across group members. The dates for the meetings are listed below.

All meetings will be on **Thursdays from 4:00-6:00pm in the ASPIRE Residence Hall** located at 835 W. Grace Street (classroom 1004A).

I do not provide makeup work for students that miss class. It is up to the student to find out what they missed from a classmate and turn in any missed assignments at the appropriate due date. The class points are designed so that students that must miss one class for an unforeseen reason (illness, accident, death in the family, etc.) can still earn an 'A' if they attend all other class meetings and complete all other assignments.

Instructor evaluation of your TA services (50 points*)- Each teaching assistant is evaluated by his/her instructor twice a

semester. I will provide instructors with an online survey regarding student performance. Instructors will be asked to give a grade for student performance. Areas such as communication, reliability, initiative, leadership, and commitment will be examined.

Class Presentation-Each SLTA will be expected to complete a class presentation for the course they assist prior to students completing their service hours in the community. A training and powerpoint for this presentation are available on Bb. Instructors will confirm the completion of the class presentation in the mid-semester evaluation.

*The midyear evaluation will be worth 20 points and the end of year evaluations will be worth 30 points of the final grade. Instructors are expected to discuss their ratings with the SLTA. Completed evaluations will be printed and provided to students in the subsequent class meeting.

Assignments (30 points/5 points each)- Each teaching assistant will be asked to complete various assignments posted in Bb. Prior to the class meeting for the month students will be expected to access the course meeting folder on Bb and complete all readings and assignments prior to class. The Bb discussion groups will be used for posting assignments. Students are expected not only to post their own work, but read and respond to the work of their SLTA colleagues in their group.

Note: This course uses Bb and is attempting to be as 'green' as possible. Unless posted, do not print assignments. All work should be posted online.

Final grades will be calculated as follows and **students must earn at least a "B" to continue work as a Service-Learning Teaching Assistant:**

A ($\geq 90\%$) =	90 to <100
B ($\geq 80\%$) =	80 to <90
C ($\geq 70\%$) =	70 to <80
D ($\geq 60\%$) =	60 to <70
F ($\geq 50\%$) =	<60

A Few Other Course Policies:

1. VCU Email Policy
2. VCU Honor System: Plagiarism and Academic Integrity
3. Student Conduct in the Classroom
4. Students with Disabilities
5. Statement on Military Short-Term Training or Deployment
6. Excused Absences for Students Representing the University
7. Campus Emergency Information
8. Important Dates
9. VCU Mobile
10. Class registration required for attendance

Email Policy

Electronic mail or "email" is considered an official method for communication at VCU because it delivers information in a convenient, timely, cost effective, and environmentally aware manner. This policy ensures that all students have access to this important form of communication. It ensures students can be reached through a standardized channel by faculty and other staff of the University as needed. Mail sent to the VCU email address

may include notification of University-related actions, including disciplinary action. Please read the policy in its entirety: <http://www.ts.vcu.edu/kb/3407.html>

VCU Honor System: Plagiarism and Academic Integrity The VCU honor system policy describes the responsibilities of students, faculty, and administration in upholding academic integrity, while at the same time

respecting the rights of individuals to the due process offered by administrative hearings and appeals. According to his policy, “members of the academic community are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity.” In addition, “All members of the VCU community are presumed to have an understanding of the VCU Honor System and are required to:

- Agree to be bound by the Honor System policy and its procedures;
- Report suspicion or knowledge of possible violations of the Honor System;
- Support an environment that reflects a commitment to academic integrity;
- Answer truthfully when called upon to do so regarding Honor System cases, and,
- Maintain confidentiality regarding specific information in Honor System cases.

Most importantly, “All VCU students are presumed upon enrollment to have acquainted themselves with and have an understanding of the Honor System.” (The VCU INSIDER, VCU Honor System 131-132).

The Honor System in its entirety can be reviewed on the Web at http://www.provost.vcu.edu/pdfs/Honor_system_policy.pdf or it can be found in the 2011-12 VCU Insider at <http://www.students.vcu.edu/insider.html>

In this class, because coursework will be collaborative at times, particular issues of integrity arise. You should not copy or print another student’s work without permission. Any material (this includes IDEAS and LANGUAGE) from another source must be credited, whether that material is quoted directly, summarized, or paraphrased. In other words, you should respect the work of others and in no way present it as their own.

Student Conduct in the Classroom

According to the *VCU Resource Guide*, “The instructional program at VCU is based upon the premise that students enrolled in a class are entitled to receive instruction free from interference by other students. Accordingly, in classrooms, laboratories, studies, and other learning areas, students are expected to conduct themselves in an orderly and cooperative manner so that the faculty member can proceed with their [sic] customary instruction. Faculty members (including graduate teaching assistants) may set reasonable standards for classroom behavior in order to serve these objectives. If a student believes that the behavior of another student is disruptive, the instructor should be informed.” Among other things, cell phones and beepers should be turned off while in the classroom. Also, the University Rules and Procedures prohibit anyone from having “...in his possession any firearm, other weapon, or explosive, regardless of whether a license to possess the same has been issued, without the written authorization of the President of the university...” See <http://www.students.vcu.edu/rg/policies/rg7conductguide.html> and the *VCU Resource Guide* for more information: <http://www.students.vcu.edu/insider.html>

Certainly the expectation in this course is that students will attend class with punctuality, proper decorum, required course material, and studious involvement.

The *VCU Resource Guide* contains additional important information about a number of other policies with which students should be familiar, including Guidelines on Prohibition of Sexual Harassment, Grade Review Procedure, and Ethics Policy on Computing. It also contains maps, phone numbers, and information about resources available to VCU students. The *VCU Resource Guide* is available online at the link above or through the Division of Student Affairs.

Students with Disabilities

SECTION 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 require that VCU provide an “academic adjustment” and/or a “reasonable accommodation” to any individual who advises us of a physical and/or mental disability. To receive accommodations, students must declare their need for disability-related accommodations with the Disability Support Services Office (DSS). The DSS office is located in the Student Commons, Room 102. The office phone number is 828-2253. The Director of Disability Support Services is Joyce Knight. More information is available at the Disability Support Services webpage:

<http://www.students.vcu.edu/dss/>

If you have a physical or mental impairment that requires an academic adjustment or accommodation, arrange a meeting with me at your earliest convenience. Additionally, if your coursework requires you to work in a lab environment, you should advise me or department chairperson of any concerns you may have regarding safety issues related to your limitation(s). This statement applies not only to this course but also to every other course in this University.

Statement on Military Short-Term Training or Deployment

Military students may receive orders for short-term training or deployment. These students are asked to inform and present their orders to their professor(s). For further information on policies and procedures contact Military Services at 828-5993 or access the corresponding policies at

<http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/bulletins/about/?Default.aspx?uid=10096&iid=30704> and
<http://www.pubapps.vcu.edu/BULLETINS/undergraduate/?uid=10096&iid=30773>.

Excused Absences for Students Representing the University

Please be aware that students who represent the university (athletes and others) do not choose their schedules. Student athletes are required to attend games and/or meets. All student athletes will give you their schedule in the beginning of the semester. The Intercollegiate Athletic Council (IAC) strongly encourages you to treat missed classes or exams (because of a scheduling conflict) as excused absences and urges you to work with the students to make up the work or exam.

Campus Emergency information

1. What to Know and Do To Be Prepared for Emergencies at VCU: Sign up to receive VCU text messaging alerts (<http://www.vcu.edu/alert/notify>). Keep your information up-to-date. Within the classroom, the professor will keep her phone on to receive any emergency transmissions.
2. Know the safe evacuation route from each of your classrooms. Emergency evacuation routes are posted in on-campus classrooms.
3. Listen for and follow instructions from VCU or other designated authorities. Within the classroom, follow your professor’s instructions.
4. Know where to go for additional emergency information (<http://www.vcu.edu/alert>).
5. Know the emergency phone number for the VCU Police (828-1234). Report suspicious activities and objects.

Important Dates

Important dates for the Spring 2012 semester are available at:

http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu/ac_fullViewAll.asp?term=Spring+2012http://academiccalendars.vcu.edu/ac_fullViewAll.asp?term=Spring+2012

VCU Mobile

The VCU Mobile application is a valuable tool to get the latest VCU information on the go. The application contains helpful information including the VCU directory, events, course schedules, campus maps, athletics and general VCU news, emergency information, library resources, Blackboard and more. To download the application on your smart phone or for more information, please visit <http://m.vcu.edu>/<http://m.vcu.edu/>.

Class registration required for attendance

Please remember that students may only attend those classes for which they have registered. Faculty may not add students to class rosters. Therefore, if students are attending a class for which they have not registered, they must stop attending.