

Community Service-Learning Student Handbook



CSL at STM:

Experiential learning
connected to
your class work!



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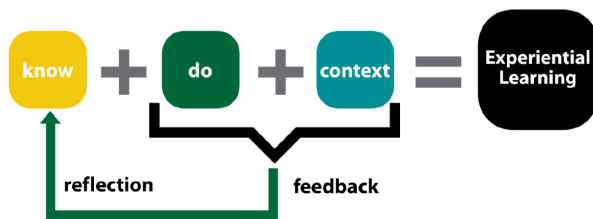
Your feedback

Land Acknowledgement

We are located on Treaty 6 Territory, Nehiyaw Territory and the Homeland of the Métis. We pay our respect to the First Nations and Métis ancestors of this place and reaffirm our relationship with one another.

Welcome to Community Service-Learning

Community Service-Learning (CSL) is an experiential learning opportunity that connects your classroom learning with meaningful community engagement. Students are paired with a community organization where they can apply course concepts in a real-world setting. Placements are coordinated by the Engaged Learning Office, and students may also propose their own community partner with approval from the Engaged Learning Office and their instructor.



Experiential Learning

Knowledge It all begins with a strong academic foundation. You will build essential competencies through your coursework, including knowledge, research skills, writing skills, and professional communication abilities, as necessary building blocks to help you to be successful in a placement setting.

Action Experiential Learning emphasizes active participation in various participation in the community placement. This placement is related to the course you are taking. The knowledge you learned in your course work that support the scope and work of your placement organization.

Context By engaging with varied settings, you gain a deeper appreciation of complexities and nuances. This then allows you to perceive expertise through a lens that extends beyond courses in a real world setting.

Reflection Reflection is a meaning part to make the best value of your experience. Allowing the students to fostering deeper thinking of the issues or the contents they learned in class.

About this handbook

The CSL Student Handbook outlines the structure, policies, expectations, and resources that support your participation in experiential learning opportunities. You are responsible for reading, understanding, and following these policies and procedures. This handbook is designed to help you succeed and have the best value in your placement.

Through this resource, you will:

- Understand your roles and responsibilities: Gain insight into what is expected of you as a CSL student, including attendance requirements, and communication protocols.
- Navigate program expectations and procedures: Learn about the placement structure, and key milestones to keep you on track.
- Access valuable support services: Discover the available resources to help you succeed during your placement.

If you have any questions or need support along the way, don't hesitate to reach out! You can contact the Engaged Learning office at:

csl@stmcollege.ca

Contact Us!

The Engaged Learning Office at St. Thomas More College is located in room 146D, off the main hallway on the ground level, and is open during regular business hours from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Closed from 12:00–1:00 pm.



Your CSL Journey

Are you interested in learning about CSL?

Your first step is to attend a CSL Contract Meeting. During the meeting, we'll walk through what CSL is all about, review the roles and responsibilities of CSL students, and help you determine whether the program is a good fit for your goals and schedule.

Once you've committed to CSL, the ELO team will connect you with a community organization or guide you through the volunteer application process. Every organization is a little different, so don't be surprised if the onboarding process varies from one placement to another.

Common onboarding requirements may include:

- Completing a volunteer application form
- Attending an orientation or training session
- Providing references
- Obtaining a Criminal Record Check (CRC).

Many organizations work with children, youth, seniors, or other vulnerable populations, so these requirements help ensure a safe and positive experience for everyone involved.

Need to Drop CSL? Life happens. Sometimes schedules change, unexpected challenges come up, or you realize CSL is not the right fit for the semester - and that's okay. If you decide to withdraw from CSL, please let the ELO team and your professor know as soon as possible so we can help you transition to another course option if needed. We also encourage you to let your community partner know about your decision.

A quick email goes a long way and is part of being a professional volunteer. Remember: communicating your decision is always better than disappearing into the void like a missing assignment on Canvas.

Volunteering Best Practices

Take initiative – as soon as you can, jump right in. We want to truly serve a community need, not to be a burden for the staff that run each program.

Of course, nervousness is normal, but it is important to separate “good discomfort” from “bad discomfort.”



Good discomfort: *Meeting a new population you’ve never worked with before, new area of the city, new type of volunteer work, etc. This is very common. The discomfort comes from doing something new and unusual for you. This is where learning happens, and one of the reasons you’re doing this in the first place.*

Bad discomfort: *Feeling intimidated by clients or fellow staff, disrespected, discriminated against, unsafe, etc. It is rare, but happens occasionally. If that happens, remember: We don’t want you to suffer in silence. Our first instruction is always to talk to the community organization first, if possible. They’re the ones closest to the problem, and as a result best able to resolve it. If you try to resolve it and it doesn’t work, OR if the issue is with the placement itself, bring it to a Peer Mentor. If that does not work, talk to one of the CLS Staff Members.*

General considerations

As much as you can, treat your volunteer work the same way you would a job: Be on time; Be courteous and patient – recognize that especially at the beginning of placement, we create work/stress for placements; Be communicative – if you’re going to miss a shift, let them know.

If you're going to be late, let them know. On your first day (generally your orientation), find out who your main contact person will be.

Recognize that the impression you make is not just yours, but the impression that's left for subsequent STM students – we've had situations where we've lost placements because we sent volunteers who didn't follow through.

Your role as a CSL student

As a CSL student, you're in a bit of an odd position. You're there to volunteer, but you're also there to observe and study. Where possible, always default to helping.

Example: A CSL student taking a child psychology class witnesses a fight at a daycare. They might hesitate to intervene wondering if they should take the opportunity to observe how the children resolve the conflict. In this case, you should intervene.

When you are done volunteering for the day, take a few minutes to think about your experience that day. What stood out? What was hard? What was easy? What was surprising? Taking notes and writing down your reflections when they are fresh leaves you in a better position to write your papers later.



Professional Communication Tips

Communicating with the staff and supervisor respectfully and effectively is an important help-seeking skill to develop as an academic scholar. It marks the beginning of many professional relationships that you will have, not only as a university student but in your career as well.

Find more information how to write a professional email:

<https://libguides.usask.ca/c.php?g=717546&p=5121616>

Be sure to responding to messages in a timely manner. If something was to come up and you're unable to make it to your volunteer position, be sure to communicate that to your Volunteer Supervisor

In all communications, be sure to do so respectfully and professionally. A small tip you can use is to communicate with your practicum person the way they communicate with you. If they use smiley faces and exclamation points. Do the same.



CSL Timeline 2026

Sept. 15 Deadline to gather CSL interests

Sept. 16-23 Contract meetings

Oct.-Nov. Volunteering in the placement

Nov. 23-27 In-person reflection



Peer Mentor Support

You won't be doing CSL alone! Every CSL student is paired with a peer mentor who has completed CSL before and can help you make the most of your experience.

You'll find out who your peer mentor is during your CSL Contract Meeting or shortly afterward by email.

Your peer mentor is there to:

- Check in with you about how your placement is going
- Share volunteer tips and advice
- Answer questions about the CSL experience
- Support you throughout the term
- Host reflection sessions at the end of the semester

Think of them as your go-to student resource during your CSL journey.

Reflection and Learning Goals

CSL is about more than completing volunteer hours, it's about connecting your academic learning with meaningful community experiences and taking time to reflect on your personal and professional growth.

Your Learning Goals

By the end of your CSL experience, you should have achieved at least two of the following learning goals:

- I applied what I learned in class in a real community setting.
- I made a meaningful contribution to my community partner organization.
- I developed professional skills and confidence that will support my future career.
- I reflected on my experiences and gained new perspectives about myself and others.
- I developed a deeper understanding of social issues and my role as an engaged community member.

Reflect Throughout the Term

Keep these learning goals in mind as you complete your placement.

They can help guide your volunteer experience, reflections, and diary entries.

Consider using these questions to structure your reflections:

- How did I apply what I learned in class to a real community setting?

- In what ways did I contribute to my community partner organization? Remember, no contribution is too small, every effort makes a difference.
- What professional or personal skills did I develop, and how will they support my future career?
- What new perspectives have I gained about myself through this experience?
- What have I learned about social issues and my role in supporting the community?

Remember that there are no right or wrong answers. Honest reflection is one of the most valuable parts of the CSL experience.

End-of-Term Reflection Session

At the end of the term, you will participate in one in-person reflection session facilitated by Engaged Learning Office staff or a CSL Peer Mentor.

Attendance at one reflection session is required to successfully complete the CSL program.

This session is an opportunity to:

- Share your experiences with fellow CSL students.
- Celebrate your accomplishments and growth.
- Reflect on your learning throughout the term.
- Learn from the experiences and perspectives of students working with other community partners.

The reflection session is a chance to look back on your journey, recognize the impact you have made, and appreciate how your classroom learning and community engagement have come together.

Program Evaluation

At the end of each term, CSL students will be invited to participate in a program evaluation. Your insights will help identify strengths and areas for improvement, guiding future program development to ensure CSL placements remain effective and mutually beneficial.

Frequently Asked Questions

Placement and Communication

How do I contact my community partner?

Most communication will happen by email. Keep in mind that community partner supervisors are often managing multiple programs, volunteers, and responsibilities, so responses may take a few days.

Remember: when communicating with your placement supervisor, you're representing both yourself and STM. Be professional, respectful, and courteous in all communications.

If you haven't heard back after a reasonable amount of time, feel free to send a polite follow-up email.

What if I cannot attend my placement?

Life happens, and we understand! If you're unable to attend a scheduled volunteer shift, notify your placement supervisor as soon as possible.

Please don't disappear without communication.

If your placement is no longer working with your schedule or your circumstances change during the term, please contact our office

at csl@stmcollege.ca right away. The sooner we know, the more options we may have to help, whether that's adjusting expectations or exploring another placement.

How do I stay on as a volunteer at my placement after the CSL program is over?

Let your volunteer supervisor know that you wish to continue as a volunteer. The supervisor will likely be happy to hear you want to continue (after all, longer term volunteers can develop a better connection with those they are working with, understand what needs done for the placement to run smoothly, and can be used to train new volunteers) and will work with you to schedule subsequent volunteer sessions.

What happens at the end of my placement?

Many CSL volunteers continue to volunteer with their organization. Many cannot due to their work schedule, final exams, graduation, moving away, etc. If you will not be returning to your placement once the CSL program is over, please make sure to communicate this to your supervisor in the weeks leading up to the last volunteer date.

Communicate that you appreciate their time and efforts in training you and introducing you to their organization. Be sure to not only sign off with your supervisor, but with those you have been working with directly. This might be the child you were tutoring, or the older adults you were visiting at mealtime. Thank them for welcoming you into their space and for the time you have spent together.

It is extremely important that those you are working with know their time is valued and that you have appreciate your time together. If you "disappear" with no goodbye or thank you, it creates an ugly dynamic in how we interact with those in the great community that is unethical and sees us taking advantage of others. We do not want this.

Hours and Documentation

How many volunteer hours do I need for my placement?

Ideally, CSL volunteers do 16-20 hours over the course of the term. Where do we get this number from? This equates to ~2 hours of volunteering each week for the course of the semester with some room to miss a session or two in case you are sick/out of town.

In order to build a positive relationship with those you are working with, it is paramount that volunteers commit time each week to their program to build trust and rapport. For that reason, we ask that volunteers go each week for a shorter time period (e.g. 2 hours) rather than volunteering a few times for a longer period (e.g. volunteering 3 times for 7 hours over the course of the term).

How do I complete and submit my hours?

Most community partner organizations track volunteer hours directly and will share them with the ELO at the end of the term. If your organization does not track hours, use the timesheet template provided at the end of this handbook. Submit your completed timesheet to the Engaged Learning Office (Room 146D) during the last week of classes.

Important: If you are unable to submit your sheet during the last week of classes, please be sure to make alternate arrangements so that he can notify your professor that you completed the CSL program.

What counts toward my hours?

The following activities may count toward your CSL hours:

- Volunteer service activities
- Orientation sessions

- Required training
- Placement-related preparation or planning
- Other activities approved by your community partner

Note: Some organizations only track active volunteer hours and do not include orientation or training time. If that's the case, make sure to record those hours yourself using the timesheet template and follow the steps above to submit those hours.

I don't have enough volunteer hours... what now?

Email the Engaged Learning office (and copy your professor in the same email) to discuss the reasons behind the lower hour count. It may be possible to make arrangements so you may complete your placement.

There are also situations where it's beyond your control — for example, a long-term care home goes into a health-related outbreak. In some cases, it may also be necessary to drop out of the CSL program and enter the non-CSL stream of your class.

How long does onboarding usually take?

Every organization has a different onboarding process. Some students can start volunteering within a week or two, while others may need additional time to complete application forms, training, reference checks, or criminal record checks.

To avoid delays, complete any required paperwork or onboarding steps as soon as possible. The sooner you finish the process, the sooner you can begin your placement and start earning hours.

Support and Problem-solving

Who should I contact if I need help?

For placement-specific questions, contact your placement supervisor. They are the best person to answer questions about volunteer duties, schedules, and organization policies.

For volunteer tips, placement experiences, or general student advice, reach out to your peer mentor.

For CSL program questions, contact the Engaged Learning Office:

Email: csl@stmcollege.ca

Office: Room 146D

If you're ever unsure who to contact, start with the Engaged Learning team and we'll help connect you with the right person.

I am feeling really overwhelmed or uncomfortable in my placement, what should I do?

Email Engaged Learning to set up a time to chat about issues that have come up. If you prefer to correspond via email, that is OK too, but an in-person meeting is preferable.

We will work with you to find a way to continue your placement. If it is necessary for you to leave your placement, we can help to smooth out the transition of leaving a volunteer placement.

Community Service-Learning is an opportunity to gain meaningful hands-on experience while making a positive impact in the community.

Throughout your placement, you will develop valuable skills, discover new interests, and connect what you're learning in the classroom with real-world experiences.

The Engaged Learning Office, together with our CSL Peer Mentors, is here to support you every step of the way. Whether you have questions, need guidance, or simply want to talk through your experience, don't hesitate to reach out.

We want your CSL journey to be rewarding, meaningful, and enjoyable, and we're always happy to help make your volunteer experience as smooth and successful as possible.

Student Resources

Career Development Support

Sagar Chakraverty, Career Readiness Officer at St. Thomas More College, is available to support students with career planning, resume and cover letter reviews, job search strategies, interview preparation, and career exploration. STM also hosts career events and workshops throughout the year to help students build professional skills and connect with employers. Appointments are available in person, by phone, or through Microsoft Teams and can be scheduled around your availability. Visit the Career Planning page to learn more.

Wellness Support

Your well-being is an important part of your learning journey. STM Campus Ministry offers confidential listening, as well as spiritual and personal support, to students of all backgrounds.

The Campus Ministry team includes Michael MacLean, Fr. André Lalach, Celeste Woloschuk, Priest Chaplain Fr. Dan Yasinski, and Basilian Fr. Ron Griffin. Dr. Gertrude Rompré serves as the Director of Mission and Ministry.

Visit the Campus Ministry page to learn more about available supports.

Academic Advising

Whether you have questions about your program, course planning, or academic success, STM Student Services is here to help. Academic advisors Richard Medernach, Dean Schmidt, and Sagar Chakraverty are available to meet with students and provide personalized guidance.

Appointments are available in person, by phone, or through Microsoft Teams. Book an appointment online or call 306-966-8900. Visit the Student Services page for more information.



Acknowledgements

This handbook was developed through the collaborative efforts of many individuals. It was developed by Caitlin Ward and Tina Zheng, and special thanks also go to Yash Tendulkar for his valuable contributions to the content, and to the STM College Marketing & Communications team for their support with the design and production of the handbook.

Share Your Feedback

We are always looking for ways to improve this handbook. If you have any questions, suggestions, or ideas for topics you would like to see included in future editions, we would love to hear from you! ***Please send your feedback to csl@stmcollege.ca.***

***Fun,
friends
& food!***



***Make some
great memories!***