

Western New York Maritime Charter School

Community Based Participation and Service Learning

Guide – Adopted Spring 2008

A major aim of education in the State of New York is to prepare its students for a productive and meaningful life as citizens in local, state, national, and international settings. Walt Whitman wrote in his *Democratic Vistas*: “The Mission of government, henceforth, in civilized lands, is...to train communities through all their grades, beginning with individuals and ending there again, to rule themselves.”

The civic mission is based on the democratic idea that active citizenship in the form of political participation is essential to the health and well-being of both the person and polity. In fact, this civic aim serves as a reminder that New York State is a polity—a constituent polity within a larger federal democracy—with distinctive political character. Every election year our citizenry may vigorously debate the policies our State should pursue; but a subject on which most agree is that, as a state, we have an obligation regarding the civic education of our students.

The civics standard is designed specifically to help students become active citizens. The civics standard is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a national and state recognition of the need for educational standards to improve education in general and civic preparedness and political participation in particular.

The student should have ample opportunities to experience civics, government, and the political process firsthand, and to learn how to access and use community-based resources. In addition to inviting community representatives to class, interviewing community representatives, monitoring political news, searching the Internet, and conducting simulations or role-playing students should have experiences through the use of site visits and participation opportunities for learning.

Therefore, the Western New York Maritime Charter School Board of Trustees has mandated as a component of the school’s Participation in Government senior level course a requirement of 20 hours of Government Participation and Community-Based Service Learning.

Adapted from *Participation in Government* Core Curriculum Guide, The University of the State of New York, State Education Department, April 2002.

Community-Based Participation and Service Learning

Community-Based Participation and Service Learning can take many forms, and there are multiple communities from local to international levels. Pragmatic decisions by the teacher and school—stretched by creativity, will power, and available resources—will govern what is possible.

Out-of-Class Learning. Out-of-class service and participation learning experiences, whether it be in the form of service learning, participation in the processes of governance, or community service can take on many possibilities. In instances where it may be difficult for students to be placed, visits to such places as courtrooms and city council chambers are possible opportunities.

Students should have an opportunity to observe, record, compare, participate in and reflect on the political process and public meetings of a number of public bodies including the school, city, and county.

In-Class Learning. In-class learning experiences may be more realistic than whole class visits to sites within the community. The teacher can invite public officials, community, and political leaders to meet students in the classroom. The teacher can also provide participation and service assignments that send students out into the community on finite missions. These tasks move students step-by-step through content topics explored throughout the course.

Objectives of Community-Based Participation and Service Learning

There are several important objectives of out-of-classroom learning. All relate to the juncture of character education and civic education where students see firsthand how and why politics works in the real world.

- *Getting to know multiple communities.* The student should acquire a working familiarity with the multiple civil communities—local to international—in which s/he lives. Most students have never met an elected official or political candidate, used a government office, or visited a community organization.
- *Acquiring habits of participation.* The student should acquire habits of participation the political process. The student should have opportunities in this course to participate in the scope of the democratic process and to learn how it works.
- *Meeting role models.* The student should be able to meet public officials and community leaders who can serve as role models. Students should learn more about how and why such people became involved in politics.
- *Acquiring research skills.* The student should have an opportunity to use community resources in doing research—especially the kind of public issue research discussed earlier. The student should gain a working knowledge of basic community resources and learn how to find them by using available resources.
- *Appreciating different perspectives.* The student should acquire a sense of the many different voices and interests that make up their local community as well as the multiple communities, from local to international, in which they live.

- *Acquiring skills of negotiation.* The student will have opportunities to see how public officials reconcile differences, how they negotiate, and how they seek win-win results.
- *Learning how to interact with people in public settings.* Students will not only observe public figures but will also have to learn how to work with them. Students will learn how to request meetings, conduct interviews, request follow-up information, write thank-you letters, participate in the political process, make general inquiries, and attend related meetings.
- *Reflecting on what counts.* The student will have an opportunity for reflection on the principles and practices of American civics in action. This lends added meaning to character education.
 - What principles seem most important to those in public life?
 - How well do they apply those principles?
 - When is compromise a good thing, when is it not?
 - How should the role of principles in public life be improved?
 - How should the average citizen be involved in the political process?
 - How is the average citizen involved?
 - How can citizen involvement be improved?
- *Learning the ethics of research.* Students should gain a practical sense of the basic principles of research ethics. Students should learn to acknowledge and attribute their sources, to respect confidentiality when asked, to conduct interviews responsibly, and to write thank-you letters.

Adapted from *Participation in Government* Core Curriculum Guide, The University of the State of New York, State Education Department, April 2002.

The Value of Community-Based Participation and Service Learning

Community-Based Participation and Service Learning helps students:

- Acquire life skills
- Understand their responsibilities as citizens in the community
- Improve their self-esteem
- Take and accept new challenges
- Apply classroom learning to “real life” learning experiences

Community-Based Participation and Service Learning provides students with:

- Opportunities for higher level thinking skills
- Opportunities to assume responsibilities
- The positive experience of helping others
- A chance to explore new roles
- An experience to enrich their learning
- Opportunities for career exploration

Community-Based Participation and Service Learning Requirements

Twenty (20) hours of Community-Based Participation and Service Learning is a requirement of the Participation in Government course or any other course to supplement the Participation in Government graduation requirement (e.g., AP Government).

1. Community-Based Participation and Service Learning may allow the student to later apply their experiences to:
 - a) Select an issue relevant to the community (local, state, national, international),
 - b) Gather information on the issue through interviews and/or research,
 - c) Reach a conclusion, and
 - d) Write up the findings in a report that could be presented to an official involved with the issue.

Students would internalize a community related issue that s/he wants to investigate. This issue should have at least two sides to it so research can point out the opposing points of view and clearly show what the issue is and why there are different points of view.

The student may select his/her own issue, or s/he may decide to research an issue from a list of suggestions provided by the teacher. Whatever issue is chosen, the issue and thesis must be approved by the teacher.

The student would do background research and reading on the issue.

The student could prepare a report, which identifies and explains the issue, the current and/or recommended policies/actions on that issue, the various points of view, the student's own position on the issue and what ought to be done to improve/solve the issue and why s/he is supporting that position.

A report along these guidelines could substitute, at the teacher's discretion, for the requirement of an overarching course final question response or public policy research paper assignment.

2. Community-Based Participation and Service Learning shall shall not exclusively benefit the high school or their ancillary organizations (e.g., National Honor Society, Sports team, etc.), and shall not earn the student any academic credit or co-curricular remuneration or credit in any other organization.

3. Community-Based Participation and Service Learning hours shall only be accounted for during the actual semester the student is enrolled in the course (no hours completed prior to the semester shall count).

4. Community-Based Participation and Service Learning must not involve the direct solicitation of funds for non-profit agencies nor generate profits for any private company. Students should not handle monetary transactions nor collect pledges. It must not place the

student in any situation, which would pose a risk to their health or safety. It must not place student in a situation that would be inappropriate for their age, background or level of maturity. It must not be for any family member.

5. Students are expected to approach Community-Based Participation and Service Learning with the same integrity as they would be expected to do their other academic endeavors. Students shall not receive remuneration or credit in any other organization, including court ordered community services hours.

6. For students completing Community-Based Participation and Service Learning at a site, it is required that students are clear of their responsibilities, and to whom at the site they are to report. Further, students must not participate in any activity involving the use of dangerous or potentially dangerous tools and/or equipment. Under no circumstances should students be exposed to or perform service in an area that involves dangerous activities. Students should not operate a motor vehicle and should not drive while engaged in the service experience. Students should not perform service at either unreasonably early or late hours of the day or evening. Students engaged in clinical, medical, hospital or related settings should not attend to any duties resulting in exposure to fluids, excretions, or contaminations known to be harmful, contagious, or injurious. Student safety and supervision is of the utmost importance.

7. A maximum of three (3) hours may be attributed to attendance at a Western New York Maritime Charter School Board of Education meeting, a local government meeting, or other government meeting wherein the student would provide a summary of the meeting with requirements as determined by the teacher.

8. A maximum of ten (10) hours may be attributed to assistance at any school (including their own), wherein the student would provide a summary of the work performed with requirements as determined by the teacher. This experience should not consist of only clerical support, but should instead provide students with opportunities for direct contact with working with children at the school.

9. Students who are members of advisory groups/councils can apply their hours of participation towards meeting the above requirements, as long as they are not credited or benefit in another manner.

10. Throughout the semester individual teacher discretion to modify and adjust specific student expectations can be determined on an individual by individual basis with consultation with building administration when necessary.