



# Connecting *Service Years* to Academic Credit

A GUIDE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION



**A Better You.**  
A Greater Us.

## About Service Year Alliance

Service Year Alliance is working to make a year of paid, full-time service – a service year – a common expectation and opportunity for all young Americans. A service year before, during, or after college – or as a way to get back on track – gives young people the chance to develop their skills, make an impact on the lives of others, and become the active citizens and leaders our nation needs. Expanding service years has the power to revitalize cities, uplift and educate children at risk, and empower communities struggling with poverty. It can unite the most diverse nation in history, binding people of different backgrounds through common cause. Service Year Alliance is asking nonprofits, higher education institutions, cities and states, companies and foundations, policymakers of both parties, and people of all ages to join the movement. **Learn more at [serviceyear.org](http://serviceyear.org).**

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## Introduction

Higher education has a long tradition of advancing service opportunities for students through service-learning, Federal Work Study, semester and summers of service, offering deferrals or gap years to do a year of service, and more.

Expanding on those opportunities - through a service year - offers students a meaningful experience that fosters identity development and career exploration. A service year connected to credit provides yet another pathway for students to earn credit through experiential learning while encouraging life-long engaged citizenship. Research has shown that a year of service has a positive correlation to acceptance of responsibility for educational success and confidence in one's ability to obtain an education; acceptance of responsibility for employment success and basic work skills including teamwork, and appreciation of cultural and ethnic diversity (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2004).<sup>1</sup>

A service year refers to service that 1) addresses important societal problems, 2) requires a substantial time commitment over a specific term (at least 20-32 hours/week and usually over the course of 9-12 months), and 3) is performed through organized programs. Due to the substantial time commitment involved, service year participants are typically paid modest living allowances and benefits.

This resource builds on the previous Service Year + Higher Education Engagement toolkit and aims to highlight existing models of service years connected to credit, explore promising models, and provide inspiration to institutions wishing to implement a service year of their own. Service years connected to credit tend to fall into the following categories:

- a bridge or gap year;
- a first year experience program;
- an elective in a general education course, or in a major or minor;
- an internship or practicum; or a
- capstone course,

and draw from the demonstrated success of high impact practices (Kuh, 2008).<sup>2</sup> This toolkit also provides information on the type of infrastructure a campus would need to have in place to develop these models.

We hope that you'll join us so that more students can answer the question, "Where did you do your year of service?"

**For further information, please contact Dr. Jenna Dell at [jdell@serviceyear.org](mailto:jdell@serviceyear.org)**



## Bridge or Gap Year

**Why create a bridge or gap year:** Incorporating service into a bridge or gap year is designed to give students experience addressing a social issue with a community organization while discovering new personal, academic, and professional passions. By learning more about themselves and the world around them, students gain context for their studies and may be more likely to graduate on time due to a clearer academic path. Institutions may include academic course work on a subject matter related to the service work, or courses related to civic and leadership skills.

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### Examples:

**The Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life at Tufts University** offers accepted students the opportunity to participate in the Tufts 1+4 Bridge Year Program. In partnership with Global Citizen Year and City Year, students can engage in a year of full-time community service at home or abroad before beginning their academic studies at Tufts.

During their service, Bridge Year Fellows are enrolled in a Tufts University blended writing course designed to integrate their service with academics and facilitate reflection upon their experiences. Through experiential learning and training, students also develop the skills needed to work across differences and prepare them for future studies and careers. Students enrolled in the City Year program also receive AmeriCorps benefits, including a Segal AmeriCorps Education Award in exchange for their 11 months of teaching.

➤ To learn more about Tufts 1 + 4 Program, [please visit their website.](#)

➤ For more information on gap years, please visit [Global Citizen Year](#) or the [American Gap Association.](#)





## First Year Experience

**Why create a first year experience:** First year experience programs connect students to the people, programs and resources necessary to provide a strong foundation for academic success and personal growth. When connected to a year of service, these programs may help students make informed decisions on about their intended program of study and career path.

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### Example:

#### University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

In order to provide additional support to medically underserved and racial and ethnic minority populations in their community, the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth created the Community Health Worker: Advocate! Navigate! Educate! service year. Students are recruited from the UMass Dartmouth College Now, a 5-year Alternative Admissions program which assists students with the transition from high school to college through a first year experience. This program provides access to academically disadvantaged students and supports them while they are enrolled.

Students accepted into the nursing program are given preference for in this eight month, 30 hour/week program. The corp members are assigned to the same academic advisor and complete the coursework each semester as a cohort. The service year is connected to 12 academic credits in experiential learning and nursing prerequisites and 1000 practicum hours in nursing. Students will also receive a minor in Leadership and Civic Engagement.

*\*University of Massachusetts Dartmouth won the public institution category for the 2015 Service Year + Higher Ed Challenge. To learn more about their program, please contact Dr. Jenna Dell at [jdell@serviceyear.org](mailto:jdell@serviceyear.org).*

**> For more information on First Year Experiences, contact Dr. Jenna Dell at [jdell@serviceyear.org](mailto:jdell@serviceyear.org)**



## Elective Course

**Why develop an elective course:** Students may wish to use a service year to complete elective general education requirements or an elective in a major or minor. These courses allow students to discover different fields of study, develop a specific skills set, or explore how their passions connect to career aspirations.

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### Example:

**Miami-Dade College's (MDC) Changemaker Corps** is hosted by Single Stop, a one-stop source for students and immediate family members to be connected to public benefits and local resources. As part of the larger Educate Tomorrow program that supports foster care youth, the Changemaker Corps is a peer-to-peer mentoring and support program that helps youth who have aged out of foster care mentor incoming foster care students. The goal of the program is to help the incoming students stay in school, graduate, and develop employability skills. Participants spend 20 hours per week for nine months, earning 3 credits and taking part in professional development activities.

*\*Miami Dade College won the community college category for the 2015 Service Year + Higher Ed Challenge. To learn more, please visit Single Stop at Miami Dade College or contact Dr. Jenna Dell at [jdell@serviceyear.org](mailto:jdell@serviceyear.org)*

Institutions may also wish to award credit for prior learning and count those credits towards electives. Strategies such as portfolio assessment allow students to demonstrate what they've learned instead of relying solely on time spent in the classroom.

**> For more information on prior learning assessment through portfolios, please visit [The Council for Adult & Experiential Learning](#).**





## Internship, Externship, or Practicum

**Why create an internship, externship, or practicum:** These experiences provide valuable experiential learning opportunities for students to “learn by doing.” Professional programs such as law, medicine, education, and social service, have traditionally included these types of experiences as a way to build skills and move from theory to practice. Employers are 94% more likely to consider hiring recent college graduates who have completed an internship (Hart Research Associates, 2015)<sup>3</sup>

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### Examples:

#### Drexel University

Drexel University offers a first year civic engagement course designed to help students develop skills as active participants and enhance their learning through structured discussion and reflective learning assignments. The UConnect Service Year program builds on this introductory course while giving students another option through which to complete their required co-op. As navigators, students will work together with community members to provide information, referral and support as they navigate the social service system. It is designed to allow students to participate full-time while on co-op, and then continue their service for an additional three months while they resume a full-time academic schedule. In addition to receiving co-op credit, students will receive 3 academic credits for the training needed to participate.

*\*Drexel University won the private institution category for the 2016 Service Year + Higher Ed Challenge. Their program is intended to launch in fall 2017.*

#### UC-Hastings School of Law

Lawyers for America is a two-year fellowship program, created at UC Hastings and open to other law schools. This program helps increase the availability of legal services for those who cannot afford lawyers and provide support to under-resourced organizations while providing practical training for new lawyers. Interested students are chosen during their second year of law school and begin their externship placement in the third year, taking the place of regular coursework. Third year law students work 32 hours/week at an externship placement either in a non-profit or government law office while taking a limited course load that supports their externship. After graduation and taking the bar exam, the new graduates return for a year as paid fellows through a contract relationship between LfA and the placement site.

 Visit the [Lawyers for America website](#) to learn more.



## Capstone Requirement

**Why create a capstone course:** Capstone experiences afford students the opportunity to bring together the knowledge, skills, and interests nurtured through all aspects of their education. By making connections across different contexts, capstone courses can serve as preparation for transitioning into the workforce. A service year capstone provides both an opportunity to connect to what they have learned in the classroom to a real-world context and get a head start on their intended career path.

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### Example:

A promising capstone model was proposed by the **The Clinton School at the University of Arkansas** in response to the 2016 Service Year + Higher Education Innovation Challenge. The Clinton School is the first school in the nation to offer a Master of Public Service degree. The School requires eleven credit hours of field-based study completed at public service organizations. A service Year year capstone would allow graduate students to dedicate even more time during their final academic year to completing high-level work that meets the needs of those organizations by completing 1,000 hours of service work. Students would receive capstone course credit for their service and earn a modest living stipend.

# Appendix A. Blueprint for Creating a Service Year Program

## INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

1. Identify existing service programs and resources on campus. These may include offices dedicated to this work, service-learning instructors, student organizations, and existing community partnerships.
2. Consider who might champion this idea on campus and who you will need to get buy in from.
3. Identify similar credit-bearing offerings on campus such as internships, service-learning, study abroad, or capstone experiences.

## PROGRAM DESIGN

1. Work with your stakeholders and community partners to identify an unmet need in the community or on campus. Consider how a service year program may address that need, being realistic with the time commitment required.
2. Identify if there are existing service programs in your community (for example, Teach for America, City Year, AmeriCorps). It might make sense to integrate existing programs on campus.
3. Design the program using Service Year Alliance's Creating a Service Year Program [\[link here\]](#) guide. The guide prompts readers to consider best practices for funding, logistics, preparing the organization, evaluation, and connecting service members to others also who are enrolled in service programs.

## CURRICULUM DESIGN

1. Brainstorm how a service experience fits into the curriculum as this will help determine when the service year should take place - before, during, or after college. For example, conservation corps members in national parks could take classes in environmental studies; health corps workers in community health centers could study medicine or public health; and education corps members could apply their learning in math, English, literature and history to tutor youth. Consider whether this experience fit into an existing course.
2. Identify whether students could meet major or minor requirements through these experiences. A service year could also serve as a capstone or internship equivalent.
3. Establish learning outcomes and decide whether the academic credit will be attached to the course, the service component, or both. For learning outcomes associated with the service component, we recommend using the Civic Engagement VALUE Rubric from AAC&U (Appendix B) which has learning outcomes associated with:
  - Diversity of Communities and Cultures;
  - Analysis of Knowledge;
  - Civic Identity and Commitment;
  - Civic Communication; and
  - Civic Action and Reflection
4. Consider what professional skills or competencies the students develop as a result of the and how the service will advance students' career opportunities.
5. Develop the syllabus and assignments



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**Thank you to our higher education partners**

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1 Corporation for National and Community Service. (2004). Serving country and community: A longitudinal study of service in AmeriCorps.

2 Kuh, G. (2008). High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. Association for American Colleges & Universities.

3 Hart Research Associates. (2015). Falling short? College learning and career success: Selected findings from online surveys of employers and college students.