

Community Service in London

Facilitator: Bill Sheasgreen

Term: Spring 2007

Value: One Credit

General Information: Welcome to the London Centre's community service option. There are three distinguishing features of the option:

1. As the College grants one credit for the successful completion of the option, there is an academic component to it.
2. Unlike our internship programme, where our Coordinators find the placement for the students, in the community service option the student is expected to pursue her/his own interests and find the organisation on her/his own. London Centre staff will provide assistance in the search if necessary.
3. The term is divided into two: in the first part of the term, the student should identify the organisation at which s/he wishes to volunteer. Students should begin the search as soon as possible as the application process might take a few weeks and there might be security checks involved. The actual volunteering takes place in the second part of the term.

Volunteering in the community offers an excellent opportunity (a) to immerse yourself into British society, (b) to get to know a wider range of people, (c) to understand critical issues in British society, and (d) to contribute to society. There is also a strong comparative dimension to community service: how do the British and the Americans compare on social issues like homelessness, one parent families, child abuse, educational need, domestic violence, the care of the sick and elderly, the treatment of animals, the status of refugees, pollution, carbon offsetting, etc? Finally, volunteering has a long history in the United Kingdom. Volunteers govern schools, they devote free time to charity shops, they promote 'Friends of the Earth' and 'Amnesty International', they help with literacy in deprived inner city schools, they help out in hospitals. In brief, volunteering is a very British thing to do and the Government is now attempting to recruit more volunteers to help out with the range of issues in British society.

London is a city rich in volunteering opportunities. It houses the headquarters of most UK charities and, as a multicultural city of over 7 million people, it harbours most of the social, educational, environmental and medical problems of the 21st century. The government is sponsoring a debate about citizenship and what it means to be 'British'. The focus of the debate is community

awareness and support. As the 'welfare state' withdraws, more people will need to volunteer their time and energy to the community good.

Responsibilities and obligations:

1. Students interested in community service should contact the facilitator at bsheasgreen@ithacalondon.co.uk BEFORE the beginning of term alerting him to the area of community service in which s/he would like to volunteer. As some agencies might need to do background checks on volunteers, it is important that an application is made as soon as possible.
2. If you are interested in volunteering with children or vulnerable groups, you will need to bring a US police clearance with you. Even then, the host organisation may need to apply to the Criminal Records Bureau [CRB] here in the UK for clearance.
3. If schedules permit, there will be a meeting of all interested students in the third week of term [week of January 29th].
4. Volunteers are expected to work a minimum of 40 hours over the course of the term.
5. They should inform the facilitator no later than week 5 of the term the identity of the organisation and of a contact person at the organisation in which they will be volunteering [February 15th].
6. Students must keep an electronic journal in which they note their researches and their experiences in the placement. These journals must be submitted twice, once before spring break [Friday March 2nd], and also at the end of term [Friday April 26th]. Entries should be a minimum of 200 words in length and a maximum of 500. They should be both descriptive and reflective and should incorporate some discussion of the area of volunteering e.g., literacy, refugees, the elderly, carbon offsetting, heart disease, etc.
7. There will be a final seminar of the students in the community service option on Friday, April 26th, 2007. At that time, students will be expected to share information about their activities and contribute to a discussion about their experiences.

Grading: There are three components to the grading:

1. Completion of a minimum of 40 hours of community service. The facilitator will be in touch with a contact person at your organisation to ensure that the required hours are completed.
2. Keeping a descriptive and reflective journal. There should be one journal entry for each day at the organisation.
3. Evidence of wider reading and participation in the final seminar.

Required Reading: There are three types of reading for community service: information produced by the organisation; stories in the national press about the issue [e.g., refugees or heart disease, etc.], research into the issue.

Immigration status: Volunteering is a first cousin to work. You should have code 2 student status in order to volunteer.

