

CMST 691: Independent Study in Service-Learning The Service-Learning Graduate Teaching Assistants Program

SLgTA Name: _____ SL Faculty Name: _____

*“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*

CMST 691 Instructor:

Lynn Pelco, Ph.D.
Associate Vice Provost for Community Engagement
Ginter House, 901 W. Franklin Street
lepelco@vcu.edu

Course Description:

CMST 691: The Service-Learning Graduate Teaching Assistants Program provides graduate students who have been selected by VCU service-learning instructors with support and instruction during the semester(s) when they are serving as teaching assistants within VCU service-learning courses. The course also allows graduate students the opportunity to work with a service-learning instructor on an individual project that meets a service-learning need at the university. CMST 691 course requirements also include a minimum of 5 hours per week of teaching assistance within a designated service-learning course.

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

Service-learning courses at Virginia Commonwealth University combine a minimum of twenty hours 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 graduate teaching assistants (SLGTAs) provide a critical support function within these courses. TAs work closely with course instructors and community leaders to facilitate service projects, to assist students with understanding the links between service and academic content, help monitor student service hours and project logistics, facilitate reflection discussions, and provide feedback on reflection writing assignments. Through these roles, SLGTAs 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 691 encompass two broad areas—(a) objectives related to developing an advanced understanding of service-learning pedagogy in higher education and (b) objectives related to deepening the students’ civic identity through the lens of their academic discipline(s).

Objectives related to understanding service-learning pedagogy:

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 the deepening professional civic identity:

1. Build self-awareness by exploring your multiple social identities, values, and beliefs.
2. Appreciate and embrace diversity in your interactions with others.
3. Understand ethical and professional issues related to service-learning within the student’s academic discipline.

Course Assignments:

Part 1: Independent Project. To be developed in collaboration with the course instructor and the faculty member who is teaching the service-learning class for which the SLgTA is assisting. Projects may be related to teaching, scholarship and/or community service and should further the SLgTA's professional development. The SLgTA will develop a Project Action Plan that details what activities will be completed, the timelines for completion, and all deliverables. Both the CMST 691 instructor and the service-learning class instructor must formally approve (i.e., sign) the Project Action Plan.

Part 2: TA Duties. An average of 5 hours per week of direct teaching assistance provided to the student's assigned service-learning faculty instructor. The assigned service-learning faculty instructor will complete mid- and end-of-semester performance evaluations to assess the SLgTA's work in supporting the success of a VCU service-learning class.

Part 3: Reflection Paper. Each SLgTA will **complete a brief reflection paper** that addresses the student's experiences as an SLgTA as they relate to the student's civic professional identity development. The reflection prompt and due date for this assignment are shown below.

Deliverables, Grading & Due Dates

• Mid – & End-of-Semester Evaluation (Evaluation Form shown below)	40%	Due: _____
• Independent Project	40%	Due: _____
• Reflection paper (Prompt shown below)	<u>20%</u>	Due: _____
	100%	

CMST 691 Reflection Paper Question
Topic: Civic-minded professionals

Civic identity is a multifaceted and dynamic notion of the self as belonging to and responsible for a community or communities (Rubin 2007). Knefelkamp (2008) points to four essential characteristics of civic identity—that civic identity is "community work," an act of "cognitive complexity," "a holistic practice which integrates critical thinking and the capacity for empathy," and "a deliberately chosen and repeatedly enacted aspect of the self" (2–3)

Professional identity is defined as one's professional self-concept—the set of attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences by which an individual defines themselves in their professional lives.

Using these two definitions as your starting place, write a 500-word reflective essay about the influences of your SLgTA experiences on the development of your identity as a civic-minded professional. (NOTE: Cited references do not count towards the 500-word total. Attach references list as a separate page).

CMST 691

Supervising Instructor's Evaluation of VCU Service-Learning Graduate Teaching Assistant

Dear Instructor: Please complete the evaluation questions below in reference to your current Service-Learning Graduate Teaching Assistant (SLGT). Read the descriptions for each item and circle the most appropriate rating (5=outstanding, 1=unsatisfactory). If you have not had the opportunity to observe the student in a particular area or if the item is not relevant to the student's responsibility, please circle the "x".

Please return the completed evaluation to your Service-Learning TA by the following due date:

Evaluation #1 is due _____ **Evaluation #2 is due** _____

Student Name:

Evaluation Completed by:

Course Number & Title: CMST 691

Today's date: _____

1. **RESPONSIBLE:** Accepts responsibility for own behavior; high level of maturity and professional judgment.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

2. **RESOURCEFUL:** Has ability to locate information when lacking knowledge in specific areas.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

3. **SENSITIVITY:** Exhibits sensitivity to people (students, community partners, etc.). Able to identify needs & problems.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

4. **WRITTEN COMMUNICATION:** Able to provide clearly written communications; written materials are clear, concise, accurate and complete.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

5. **ORAL COMMUNICATION:** Able to communicate clearly orally; ability "to get message across."

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

6. **FEEDBACK:** Welcomes and seeks suggestions and advice on ways to improve performance.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

7. **WORK WITH OTHERS:** Highly effective in dealing with diverse people.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

8. **ENTHUSIASM:** Enthusiasm is evident; does not complain excessively.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

9. **INITIATIVE:** Displays high degree of initiative; goes ahead with work assignments.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

10. **WORK OUTPUT:** Work output consistently exceeds requirements.

Unsatisfactory					Outstanding	No Opportunity/NA
1	2	3	4	5		x

