

UW-Eau Claire – Barron County statement regarding service-learning graduation requirement

The faculty and staff of UW-Eau Claire – Barron County support waiving the service-learning (SL) requirement for 2020 – 2021 graduates due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Our primary concerns include:

Face to Face Service-Learning

1. Putting students, and our community, at additional risk for COVID-19 when students engage in face-to-face SL opportunities even with appropriate precautions on site.
2. Significant probability of interruption of the face to face SL activity due to either the student's exposure to COVID-19 or a rise in local COVID-19 cases.

Virtual Service-Learning

3. Requiring students to spend additional hours in a virtual setting when engaging in online SL options.
4. Internet reliability and connectivity issues for students may lead to additional complications.
5. Lack of robust virtual options. We have options, but also want to be sure that what we have is the right fit to ensure that the student and the partner are both satisfied.

Student/Supervisor/Mentor Concerns

6. Increasing demand on students, supervisors, and mentors at a time when they already face unprecedented challenges in their academic, work, and personal lives.
7. Inequity of non-credit and credit-bearing experiences. Students in SL courses will receive credit for the SL hours even if the work is interrupted due to COVID-19, but non-credit experiences must still be completed.
8. Lack of a timely decision in this process further delays our student's ability to meet the requirement in a timely manner. Those that will need to complete now will have three and a half weeks less time to do so- adding to the already existing challenges.

To ease students' worry about whether or not this requirement will be enforced, we encourage the Academic Policies Committee to take action as soon as possible to waive the SL requirement.

We recognize that service learning is a high-impact practice that can increase student satisfaction with their college experience, positively influence retention and graduation rates, and aid in meeting community needs. We also recognize that this year, during the COVID-19 pandemic, our communities have greater needs, not fewer. Thus, we make the following suggestion:

UW-Eau Claire encourage 2020 – 2021 graduates to opt to complete the thirty hours of service-learning before graduation and then provide those students with special recognition upon completion of their degree.