



# Concept Guide for Terminology

Enhancing the learning in Australian  
University Student Volunteering







## What is University Student Volunteering?

*University Student Volunteering* refers to students acting in a volunteer capacity in a range of organisations, both inside and outside universities. This is the term adopted by this project.

When we do similar tasks not through an organisation, we are helping others out. There is debate about whether students required to volunteer are genuinely volunteering. The relationship between volunteering and Work Integrated Learning (WIL) (e.g. service learning, internships, practica and work experience) are part of this debate.

This guide is based on data gathered for this project. Details of the project are on the back page and on the project website.

## Volunteering to learn or learning to volunteer?

Not all university student volunteering is undertaken to enhance the learning associated with the degree or qualification being studied. Where the activity is undertaken for credit, there will be specific learning objectives or statements of skills to be developed. Students take up volunteering of their own volition, for a range of reasons. Even those students who volunteer for reasons other than learning benefit and learn from the activity. The learning which takes place includes a range of life skills, such as leadership, time management and organisational skills, and an appreciation of what it is like to be an active volunteer and give back to the community. This type of learning is as valuable as the learning associated with courses of study and contributes to university goals of developing engaged citizens. For more on the learning aspect of university student volunteering see the *Guide on Learning from Volunteering*.

See the *Guide for Host Organisations* to find out about Academic, Facilitated and Independent Student Volunteers.

## Defining volunteering

In the Australian context, the term 'volunteering' has a number of accepted definitions. Volunteering Australia has recently conducted a review of its definition of volunteering, and in July 2015 has adopted the following definition:

*Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.*

(Volunteering Australia, 2015a, np).

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses a definition with four criteria: unpaid, willingly undertaken, help in the form of time service or skills, and formal, through a group or organisation (ABS, 2007). They exclude some forms of student volunteering from their statistics.

The accompanying notes to the Volunteering Australia definition of volunteering indicate that

*Compulsory educational service learning (where students are required to volunteer as part of a course)*

(Volunteering Australia, 2015b, np)

is not considered to be volunteering, but is recognised as a valuable activity, and could be considered to be a pathway to volunteering (Volunteering Australia, 2015b).

Similarly, in their definition of volunteering, the ABS excludes activities done 'as a result of a legal or institutional direction' (ABS, 2007, p.72) and 'student placement' (p.87).

## What do we mean by Good Practice?

Good practice refers to those activities, structures, situations and practices which provide benefit to students, universities, and host organisations in university student volunteering, primarily in relation to enhancing learning. We are using the term 'Good Practice' in this project in preference to best practice because our aim is not to encourage the same practices in all settings. Rather we aim to capture what works, and highlight what may not, in an effort to assist students, universities and host organisations to enhance university student volunteering.



## Comparison of volunteering, community participation and service learning

<b>Volunteering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• primary purpose is to help the community, environment, or people beyond family or household;</li><li>• of own free will (so not a required part of a course or unit of study);</li><li>• unpaid; not rewarded with any compensation;</li><li>• may be for credit or other recognition by the university;</li><li>• may be on campus e.g. Open Day, Expo;</li><li>• may be organised by students or the university.</li></ul>
<b>Community participation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• primary purpose is to help others in need who are outside their own family or household;</li><li>• unpaid;</li><li>• may be for credit or other recognition by the university;</li><li>• activity done outside the university, in the community, may be for a not-for-profit or other similar charity organisation and may be within a school, hospital, event, or tourism setting but it is not practicum or placement in a school or hospital;</li><li>• may be organised by students or the university.</li></ul>
<b>Service Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• purpose gives equal weighting to both service and learning;</li><li>• associated with learning in a unit or course of study for credit, is required, recognised with credit, usually assessed or graded;</li><li>• is usually recognised in an academic transcript or similar;</li><li>• tends to involve written reflection or other activity to enhance learning;</li><li>• may be organised by students or the university.</li></ul>

Volunteering Australia (2015a). *Volunteering Australia Project: The Review of the Definition of Volunteering*. Canberra: Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia (2015b). *The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement 2015*. Canberra: Volunteering Australia.



# What is meant by *volunteering* in the university setting?

In general, University Student Volunteering refers to those activities that university students do that meet the criteria of time given, no remuneration, free will, of benefit to the community, and formally structured. In many organisations, students work alongside and in the same capacity as other volunteers and unpaid workers. They are welcomed and offered the same processes, recognition and events. Volunteering activities are integrated into universities in a variety of ways, whether within units and courses or independent from academic programs.

## Students' motivation to volunteer

Students take up volunteering of their own volition, often encouraged by their universities, for a range of reasons. Some want to help others and give back to society. Our evidence indicates a trend towards volunteering motivated by self-development, personal growth, and career development as university students seize opportunities to gain experience, skills, and networking contacts assisting them to find employment.

## Volunteering for learning

The evidence is strong that even those students who volunteer for reasons other than learning, will benefit and learn from the opportunity. The learning includes a range of life skills, including leadership, time management and organisational skills, and an appreciation of what it is like to be an active volunteer. Students report that volunteering enhances their confidence and self-efficacy, helping them to feel that they can make a difference and achieve something positive for others. See Learning Concept Guide.

## Two main inconsistencies

Two main differences of opinion were identified in this study. There is debate around whether students are volunteering if:

- they receive credit for a unit of study, or
- the activity is compulsory within a unit or course of study.

This debate is reflected in the variety of terminology in use across universities.

## Extra-curricular volunteering

The term volunteering is used to refer to activities including service by students to their university, service to clubs and associations ranging from environmental groups to photography, business and sporting clubs; placement in volunteer positions in community organisations; and volunteering through university and guild-organised programs such as a volunteer hub, referral service or centre.

There is a trend in universities to recognise extra-curricular volunteering on an academic or similar transcript and this is often measured by the number of hours, but mechanisms to capture this volunteering are a challenge for universities.

University students are often recruited to volunteer on campus (e.g. orientation and open days), and in community engagement programs arranged in part by the university or student groups such as the student guild. Leadership and support roles of university clubs may also be referred to as volunteering but membership of these clubs is not. This volunteering is considered to be 'extra-curricular'.

## Volunteering within the curriculum

Students often volunteer in order to learn professional, personal or employability skills. In general, learning is the primary goal of university student volunteering activities within courses.

Volunteering has been integrated into academic programs as *Work Integrated Learning* (WIL) (including practica or placements), service learning or community service identified by other terms such as learning through participation. Volunteer activities embedded into academic study may attract credit. There are usually specific learning objectives or statements of skills to be developed that may be discipline-based or designed to enhance generic graduate attributes.

Students and university staff in our study used the term 'volunteering' to refer to both compulsory and elective elements of university courses or programs and while this does not strictly fit the definition of volunteering as identified by Volunteering Australia, it is recognised as a pathway to volunteering. Many of the good practices identified in this project apply to these pathway activities as well as to more general student volunteering activities.

## Terminology in use

Over 75 terms, or permutations of terms, were identified in the articles selected for a systematic review of the literature on university student volunteering. These terms can largely be clustered into three categories:

- volunteering,
- community service / community engagement and
- service learning.

WIL was not canvassed by this literature review.

Evidence in the interview data was that study participants also referred to internships, practica, placement and work experience as being forms of volunteering in some circumstances. Community engagement and service learning were found to be moving towards a model of mutually beneficial, reciprocal collaboration in which all parties work together towards agreed goals with long-term impact.

Some participants stressed the voluntary nature of volunteering, and others felt that the reward of credit in a university unit is an important component of the activity. Holdsworth and Brewis (2014, p.204) suggest that "the ideal of active citizenship assumes that volunteering is a choice, and the celebrated figure of the selfless volunteer who contributes to their communities is valued not just on the basis of his/her unique contribution, but because their contribution is given willingly without compulsion". Despite this, some literature refers to students being required to volunteer (Kang et al., 2011) and 'service learning or other compulsory volunteer programs' (Gage & Thapa, 2012, p. 426).

*What is meant by volunteering in the university setting? continued...*

### **Terminology in use in Australian universities**

One conundrum in terminology is when volunteering is said to be *required*. Volunteering Australia states clearly that volunteering is always a matter of choice and specifically excludes compulsory activities required by the university. The data from the desk audit, and in the interviews for this project, however show that volunteering, as a term, is often used in universities as verb to describe what students do in a compulsory activity or a program. For example, university students are often said to volunteer to do community service activities or service learning units or courses. Even if service learning or community service activities are electives and therefore not compulsory, if the activity is a required part of a unit then some would say that it is not of their own free will. Yet our research indicates that these programs are often described as volunteering.

There is a growing trend for university students to volunteer in nonprofit, community groups or other volunteer involving organisations. The demand for universities to arrange experience-based learning for students to develop practical, professional and employability skills has meant that university students seek the opportunities that volunteering activities offer.

## **Differences in uses of the term *volunteering* in universities**

In Australian universities, *volunteering* is currently being used as a noun to describe an activity that students do of their own free will in an unpaid capacity to help the environment or people who are outside their own family or household. *Volunteering* is also being used as a verb to describe what students do in volunteering, service learning, community service or other activities that may be part of an academic program, or separate from their studies.

### **Service Learning**

A variety of experiential learning has been termed Service Learning. One defining feature of Service Learning is the balance and equal weighting on both service and learning. When Service Learning is a required part of a university course, students are not volunteering according to some interviewees. Service Learning is any service experience in which a student has intentional learning and service goals and intentionally reflects on their learning and experiences.

Our study has separated out formal Work Integrated Learning such as placements and practica from volunteering but it is not as easy to separate out Service Learning and community participation.

### **Work Integrated Learning (WIL)**

Patrick et al. (2009)'s definition of WIL is now generally accepted and widely used:

- WIL is "an umbrella term for a range of approaches and strategies that integrate theory with the practice of work within a purposefully designed curriculum" (p. iv).
- a WIL placement as "a type of work integrated learning that requires the student to be situated in the workplace" (p. iv).



## **Keeping it legal**

All volunteering students do which is associated with the university has some form of legal framework. Formally arranged volunteering within a university is incorporated within university legal structures. In many cases legal agreements are drawn up between universities and host organisations. All parties should be familiar with what they cover:

- the nature of the host, student and university relationship;
- the obligations of all involved;
- what restrictions there are, if any;
- what liabilities there may be;
- how insurances are arranged and what they cover; and
- the period of the agreement.

In addition, there are more broadly applicable legal provisions which apply to any workplace, such as confidentiality, harassment.

While it is not possible to provide individual information to cover all circumstances, nor is it appropriate to provide legal advice all student volunteers, managers and host organisations should be aware of the specific provisions which apply including those relating to employment law.



## About the Project

*Volunteering to Learn* is an Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded project led by Murdoch University and involving Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, Macquarie University and the University of Western Australia.

## Methodology

The project relied on a qualitative approach to develop an understanding of the different perspectives on university student volunteering from a range of stakeholders.

The project team sought to collect data in a way that allowed for inclusion of the voices of stakeholders. The multi-stage data collection involved familiarisation with the extant literature, a mapping exercise to capture the publicly available information on university student volunteering from all of the Australian university websites at one point in time, and an extensive suite of interviews conducted with: students, host organisations, participating universities, and peak volunteering bodies.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by members of the project team, who developed and used a set of interview frameworks to ensure some level of consistency across the various interviews with different stakeholder groups. The interview frameworks were informed by the literature, the mapping exercise, and the pooling of knowledge and experience of the team. A modified grounded theory approach was used in the analysis of data.

Drafts of the Guides were sent to our reference group, and a group of critical friends for feedback, and a series of workshops were held to further refine the guides before they were finalised.

### Other Good Practice Guides:

- Students
- Senior University Staff
- University Program Managers
- Host Organisations
- Employers

### Plus Concept Guides on:

- Enhancing Learning

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