Community Service:  
Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who must take the Community Service course (FEX 2520)?

Every full-time student is required to take Community Service in order to graduate from Elmira College.

International Students – Most international students will complete Community Service on the same schedule as other students. However, if you are in the English as a Second Language (ESL) Program, your eligibility for Community Service will be deferred until your language skills are stronger. Please seek clarification in the Office of Career Services, Student Learning Commons in the GTL.

2. What exactly is the Community Service Requirement?

Community Service is a one and one-half credit course to be completed in your first two years. You will spend at least sixty hours with the same non-profit organization, helping them meet community needs. Everyone will do this without being paid.

3. How do I deal with my contract?

You may pick up a Community Service contract at the Office of Career Services located in the Student Commons in the GTL. You must submit your completed contract to the Office of Career Services before beginning your hours. If you work at your organization before turning in your contract, the hours worked will not count toward completing the Community Service Requirement. As soon as you have arranged a work agreement with your placement supervisor, complete the Community Service contract and turn it in immediately to the Office of Career Services, Student Learning Commons, GTL.

4. What does it mean when you say I need to complete at least sixty hours?

Sixty is the minimum number of hours needed to satisfy the Community Service Requirement. But if you agree with your work supervisor to work more than sixty hours, you are expected to honor that agreement. Also, if you are in the middle of a project at the sixtieth hour, you should respect your organization by finishing the project and tying up loose ends. Of course, you are welcome to volunteer your time beyond the required service.

5. How can I get sixty hours of service work done with all my other activities?

You are expected to do the work, like you are in any other course. The work is manageable if you plan. You will have until the end of Term II of your second year at Elmira College to finish Community Service hours and will have no trouble if you start early and pace yourself.
6. **What if I don’t know what kind of service to choose?**

There are many service options from which to choose, such as tutoring at a local school, being a mentor for an underprivileged child, serving at one of Elmira’s two hospitals, or working at the Red Cross to name just a few. However, if you need help, visit the Office of Career Services, Student Learning Commons in the GTL, as soon as possible. The staff will help you get started. All available Community Service opportunities are listed there. You can look through them to find one that suits you.

7. **What kind of things will I be doing at my work site?**

That is up to you and your work supervisor. Your work should be of interest to you. Someone might want to pick up trash in the City of Elmira because they care about the environment. Someone else might work in a human service agency because of their interest in helping people. Your work does NOT have to be consistent with your academic major or career plans, though it can be. Choose something that will be fun for you.

8. **What are my other responsibilities?**

After you arrange your placement, complete and turn in your contract, keep track of your hours on a log sheet, and take your work seriously. Keep your scheduled hours and be on time. Try to avoid changing your hours frequently; and if you must change your schedule, do so in a discussion with your supervisor. Be sure to work hard and follow your supervisor’s directions. Finally, dress appropriately. It may be OK to wear jeans when clearing trails at the nature center, but you will need to dress professionally to work at an elementary school. At the end of your service period you will need to type a three-page reflective essay, complete an evaluation of your service experience, and make sure your supervisor submits an evaluation of your performance. As you turn in your three-page reflective essay to the Office of Career Services, you will be asked to fill out a Community Service Evaluation in order to complete the requirement.

9. **How do I qualify for a particular Community Service?**

Often there will be an interview between you and a prospective supervisor before the placement is established. The goal of such an interview is for you and the supervisor to determine whether the organization is a good fit for you, and whether you are a good fit for the organization. If you need to beef up your interviewing skills, schedule a practice interview with a staff member at the Office of Career Services, Student Learning Commons in the GTL, extension 1830. This is a great way to improve interview performance.

10. **Where can I do Community Service, geographically speaking?**

Your service will be completed in the greater Elmira area when the College is in session. It is great if you are planning to volunteer at a favorite agency at home over break or during the summer, but for the purpose of completing course FEX 2520 Community Service, you will be working your hours locally.
11. How do I get to my Community Service?

It is most important to choose an organization that is compatible with your needs, one that will give you a fulfilling experience. Many of the organizations available to you are within walking distance, which is defined as being within a mile from campus. It is a good idea to start your service hours early to avoid doing most of your walking during the colder months. Time spent traveling to and from your placement can not be counted. Also, you can try walking with a friend, carpool, or take the bus. Keep in mind that a ride you get from a friend in Term I will probably not be available Term II because people’s schedules change. Most Community Service organizations are on the municipal bus routes. Buses stop at points on campus several times an hour. You may access a bus schedule from http://www.chemungtransit.com/.

12. What should I expect from my academic advisor?

Your academic advisor will approve your Community Service and then sign your contract. Your advisor may contact your work supervisor to check on your progress. At the end of your service work your advisor will review your reflective essay and the performance evaluation before grading your service experience.

13. What should I expect from my work supervisor?

Community Service is a realistic experience . . . so you should assume that your supervisor will be your boss and have expectations for your performance. Make sure you understand these expectations. Ask. In general, supervisors are great people who will treat you with respect and be happy with you as long as you are on time for your hours and do your work. But every year several students get fired from their organization because of irresponsible behavior. Don’t let that be you!

14. Will I get the information I need to do my job well?

You should expect your supervisor to provide an on-site orientation, job training as appropriate, clearly defined expectations and supervision with feedback. If this does not happen, contact the Office of Career Services to receive individual placement assistance.

15. But what if I don’t like my work or my supervisor?

Once in a while a student may experience a problem with their placement. Contact the Office of Career Services right away at 607-735-1830 or stop by the Student Learning Commons in the GTL. They will help you solve the problem, whatever it is. Make this call as soon as you are aware of a problem so you can fix things and relax.

16. I understand that there is a deadline to meet, and that if I don’t meet the deadline I could flunk Community Service. What’s this all about?

You’re absolutely right. You have until the end of your sophomore year to complete the requirement. Missing this deadline means getting an “F.” This “F” would be replaced by a passing grade (“P”) once Community Service is satisfactorily completed. Meanwhile the "F" would definitely take a bite out of your GPA and might even prevent student athletes and student leaders from competing or performing in their leadership roles. This should come as no surprise. You would get an “F” in any course for which you did little or no work. But don’t worry! The deadline is easy to meet with a little planning. The key is not to procrastinate. So, get started right away.
17. **How is Community Service graded?**

Community Service is graded on a pass-fail basis. Assuming that you will likely not complete your hours during your first term of Community Service, a grade of “I” or “incomplete” will show up on your grade report. The “incomplete” grade will carry forward from term to term until you complete the requirement, unless you miss the completion deadline. In that case the “incomplete” grade would convert to an “F.” Once the requirement is satisfied, the “I” (or “F”) would be replaced by a “P.”

18. **What happens if I don’t want to finish my hours at the organization where I began my work?**

You may choose to leave a placement before your hours are completed, but please do not leave an organization high and dry – talk it over with your supervisor in advance. Maybe the two of you could work out a way for you to finish your hours there. Otherwise, you will have to start your hours over again somewhere else.

19. **What about safety?**

Make sure you understand what is expected of you on the job, and express any discomfort you feel about these expectations. Your supervisor should listen to your concerns. Also, you do not have to do anything you consider to be dangerous. Use common sense. Your job orientation and training should help make your work tasks and work environment safe for you. Finally, if you are walking to your Community Service site, map out the safest route to travel even if it takes you a little out of the way. The staff at the Office of Career Services, Student Learning Commons in the GTL, can help you with this. Report all safety or security concerns related to your Community Service placement immediately to the Office of Career Services at (607) 735-1830 who will do what is necessary to rectify the situation.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Remember, do not commit yourself to an organization that does not meet your needs. If you choose to change organizations, you will have to start your hours over again.