

BREAK THE “EXPERIENCE NEEDED” CYCLE: VOLUNTEERING AS A CAREER BOOSTER

Volunteering is one of the best possible ways for students to learn new skills, meet new people, and improve their resumes. More importantly, it's a genuinely important and meaningful way to make the communities in which we live and work better. Whatever your existing skillset, there are dozens of local non-profit and charitable organizations who could use your help in some way.

Know the benefits: Aside from the inherent value of doing the right thing, there are two main benefits to volunteering. First, a resume filled with volunteer experience makes you look good. Second, volunteering can provide you with an opportunity to practice and develop skills within something approximating a professional context. Volunteering can also be a surprisingly enjoyable and effective way to meet people on campus, network in your field, make new friends, and have positive social experiences.

Quality over quantity: If you're volunteering to improve your resume, it's generally better to limit yourself to a smaller number of high-involvement activities rather than a large number of “one-off” experiences. Volunteer positions that allow you to accrue experience in your field are more valuable than roles that are unrelated to the work you want to be doing. It's important to consider that accomplishments matter as much as (or more than) hours. Look for clubs and organizations on campus with administrative hierarchies, executive committees, and other opportunities for upwards growth. If the opportunity presents itself, creating a volunteer project, fundraising initiative, or organization is an excellent way to differentiate yourself.

Explore your interests: Start by identifying specific groups that agree with your interests. Finding the right not-for-profit organization can be an excellent way to serve a population or work towards a goal that authentically matters to you while positioning yourself to one day work in that or a similar field.

Lead@UWindsor: A unique program offered through the Student Success Centre, Lead@UWindsor allows students to gain valuable leadership experience by providing support to others on campus. By training students to become ambassadors for the university, Lead@UWindsor encourages participants to act professionally and deliberately in all circumstances. Successful Lead@Windsor applicants can work in six areas on campus: the Aboriginal Education Centre, Academic Integrity, Career Services, the International Student Centre, Students Orienting Students, and UWindsor Welcome Week.


UWindsor.ca/volunteer: The Student Success Centre's Volunteer website allows students to look for opportunities that agree with their interests, commitment levels, and availability. Students can also sign up to be automatically notified of new volunteer positions. Current categories include media, peer support, community, sports/fitness/wellness, environment, special events, faith and spirituality, and health care.

mySuccess: Students can also use mySuccess to browse volunteer job postings. Selecting a position from these listings can be an excellent way to secure an important volunteer position on an ongoing basis.

Volunteer Internship Program (VIP): Applying to the University of Windsor's unique VIP is an excellent way to get valuable work experience with a not-for-profit organization while practicing your skills and earning recognition on your transcript. VIP is intended to forge mutually beneficial relationships between students and community services. The VIP team evaluates and trains enterprising University of Windsor student volunteers and matches them with part-time unpaid work placements at appropriate not-for-profit and publicly funded organizations.

WEVolunteer.ca: WEVolunteer is a regional registry service from the United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County that connects volunteers to meaningful experiences by matching them with organizations that require their specific skillsets. By registering with this official database of volunteer opportunities in our area, you will be matched to appropriate community-based positions that might appeal to you.

The Co-Curricular Transcript (CCT): The University of Windsor allows students to receive recognition for their volunteer experiences through the co-curricular transcript. This new campus-wide initiative allows you to track your



involvement outside the classroom in an official capacity. The CCT is a recognized document that details your activities, including certain volunteer positions, and the corresponding skills that you've gained from them. Think of it as an excellent complement to a resume that details your skill development, initiative, and leadership capacities.

*Here are a few tips for volunteers, some adapted from *Everyone Helps, Everyone Wins* (2010) by David T. Levinson:*

Be honest about how much you have to offer: University is a busy time. Thoroughly consider all aspects of your schedule – including school, work, extracurricular or athletic involvements, and personal matters – before deciding to add a volunteer commitment. If you don't have enough time available for volunteering, are you realistically willing to give something up to do so?

Know what you're getting into: Researching the cause or organization for which you're volunteering is a best practice. If you're giving your time to Autism Ontario, as an example, you should have at least a basic working understanding of autism on your first day. Over time, working with a volunteer organization is an excellent opportunity to expose yourself to knowledgeable people who can teach you something.

Honour your commitments: Don't assume it's reasonable to treat volunteer work less seriously than paid positions. In most cases, your colleagues and supervisors will still be counting on you to deliver a service, and they will have planned accordingly. Always arrive on time and ready to work, obey the chain of command, and keep your appointments – just like you would for a paid position. Flaking out can often be worse than not volunteering at all.

What about unpaid internships? Experiential learning programs approved by accredited colleges and universities, like our Volunteer Internship Program (VIP), are excellent ways to gain valuable experience while complementing classroom learning. Other unpaid positions titled "internships" may not meet the requirements of the Employment Standards Act. Click here to learn more about your rights as a worker as they pertain to internships.

Use volunteering to "try out" various interests: Volunteering can be a low-risk way to try your hand at professional tasks you may later be asked to perform in the working world. For example, a student volunteer with a local healthcare advocacy group may be asked to create and distribute marketing materials or perform bulk data entry. If you have little or no experience with these tasks, it's difficult to say definitively whether or not you enjoy them or are good at them.

Don't volunteer only for yourself: The majority of university students who volunteer do so, at least in part, because they rightly believe it will provide a resume boost. While this is perfectly fine, it's important to remember that the ultimate purpose of volunteering is to deliver some form of necessary aid. While "putting in the time" and accumulating volunteer hours is part of the experience, you should approach each volunteer opportunity as a chance to genuinely make a difference, at least in some small way. Always remember that the people who benefit from the services provided by your organization are people at the end of the day. A smile, a listening ear, and a respectful tone of voice all go a long way.

Transition to a career in the not-for-profit world: Many organizations that hire volunteers also hire paid employees to coordinate those volunteers and perform other professional functions. If you love working in the service of others, it's easy to search for meaningful full-time work with a not-for-profit organization.

- **Bmeaningful:** A career site for paid-social impact jobs posted by difference-making companies.
- **Charity Village:** Canada's foremost database of professional jobs in the non-profit sector.
- **United Nations Careers:** Work abroad or within North America through the United Nations.

Co-op, Career and Employment Services: www.uwindsor.ca/cces | mySuccess: success.uwindsor.ca



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