Risk Management in Experiential Learning at CSUSM

Adapted from CSUF version

Updated:2/2026

The Need for Risk Management in Experiential Learning

Because numerous claims have been made against universities, faculty, students and community organizations, it is imperative to implement rigorous risk management and mitigation measures and policies. Such measures include the gathering, retention and disclosure of important information to all parties involved in experiential learning, the utilization of formal agreements that define respective obligations, and a requirement that the learning site maintain a minimum amount of insurance coverage. A landmark case, involving the assault of a student leaving her internship, ended with the Florida Supreme Court ruling that the university failed to make reasonable efforts to determine what risks existed at the learning site and to inform the student of their findings[1]. These failures resulted in a significant financial loss to the university, as well as damage to its reputation. Other potential consequences of such institutional negligence include, but are not limited to:

- Faculty and staff members may face disciplinary actions for negligence or failure to follow institutional policies and procedures.
- Most importantly, students are exposed to dangers they could otherwise avoid.

As faculty and staff, we have a duty to protect our students and the university while providing the maximum flexibility possible for students to get the experiences they need to achieve success. The Career Center (academic internships) and the Office of Service Learning and Civic Engagement (service learning) make a concerted effort to gather information about any risks experiential learning activities may involve and share it with students before they engage, ensuring that they are fully informed and aware that they may request alternatives.

CSUSM Risk Management Policy and Processes

Experiential learning at CSUSM is governed by CSU Student Academic Internships and Community Engaged Learning Policy and the Chancellor's Office *Managing Risk in Service Learning* guide. CSUSM University Policy Statements (UPS) APC 245-02 (for service learning) and SAC 714-15 (for academic internships) interpret these documents and outline campus risk management policy concerning experiential learning. These campus policies require the implementation of risk mitigation processes including:

- Identification and communication of potential risks to students engaging in experiential learning opportunities
- The collection of emergency contact information from students prior to beginning an assignment.
- The execution of a University Community Partnership Agreement (UCPA) by the learning site and University for unpaid opportunities or verification of paid opportunities as W-2 employment (academic internships).
- The collection of signed release of liability and student acknowledgment from each student.
- Compliance with requirements that ensure that the Student Academic Field Experience for Credit Liability Insurance Program (SAFECLIP) is in place (including having a signed UCPA on file).

CSUSM Risk Management Processes

The Career Center and the Office of Service Learning and Civic Engagement have integrated risk management requirements into streamlined processes for students, learning sites and faculty.

- Information about potential risks is gathered from learning sites when they propose an experiential learning opportunity (academic internship or service learning) in the CalStateS4 database. This information is analyzed by staff and considered in the approval process. Proposals are referred to risk management as warranted and all reasonably potential risks identified on approved opportunities are communicated to students through the position description in the database.
- Our departments issue a UCPA to sites hosting CSUSM students for unpaid experiential learning activities for which students will receive academic credit. We also route signed UCPAs to Contracts and Procurement who

[1] https://www.chronicle.com/article/florida-supreme-court-says-university-is-liable-for-interns-injury/

maintains copies of all fully executed agreements. We do not approve experiential learning opportunities that do not have a fully executed UCPA on file or are verified as W-2 employment (academic internships).

- The student placement process, managed through the CalStateS4 system, includes collecting emergency contact information, a Release of Liability and applicable student consent forms, as well as a safety orientation.

Process Specifics for Risk Management

Registration (CalStateS4 Database)

In 2011, the CSU Chancellor's Office document, *Managing Risk in Service Learning*, outlined a series of questions to identify risks that students may face if they engage in an experiential learning activity. Over time, these questions have been revised and, in some cases, modified into affirmations. These questions and affirmations are included in the registration process for paid and unpaid experiential learning through the CalStateS4 Database. They are:

Supervision Restrictions

- Students engaged in unpaid academic internship or service-learning positions cannot be left alone for any amount of time with minors, elderly individuals or any other vulnerable populations. Supervision must be provided at all times.

Driving Restrictions

- CSUSM students are not permitted to drive any clients as part of their duties for an unpaid academic internship or service-learning experience.

Questions

These questions allow the identification of risks a student may face as a result of engaging in the internship or service-learning opportunity:

- Will the student be working unsupervised with minors?
- Will the student be working with behaviorally challenged populations?
- Will the student be working with individuals who have a known criminal background or history of violent behavior?
- Will the student ever be required to work alone at night (between 6pm and 8am)?
- Will the student be working in an area where parking and work areas may not be secure or adequately illuminated?
- Will the student be working in a high-crime area?
- Will the student be required to work with hazardous materials, heavy machinery, heavy equipment, or heights?
- Will the supervisor of the student(s) oversee more than 8 people or will the student be supervised less than 50% of the time?

Where a question is answered affirmatively, clarifying information is automatically required. This information is considered in whether a position can be approved. It can also be referred to risk management for guidance where risks are more pronounced.

Home-Based Organizations

Additional scrutiny is required when a learning site is home-based and requests that a student work at that location. Home-based businesses may be approved once required criteria are met. Furthermore, a site visit may be required but does not guarantee approval.

Site Visits

In the majority of cases, a site visit will not be required because the campus can reasonably demonstrate sufficient knowledge of the learning site through the site's partnership application in S4 and alternative methods, such as communicating directly with site personnel and/or reviewing the online presence or available reports.

If there is a flagged risk that cannot be vetted, and the campus would like to proceed with possible placement, a site visit is warranted. The site visit is an informative meeting for all parties involved. If possible, the meeting should include site leadership, any staff who may supervise students, and a CSUSM representative familiar with the internship or service-learning expectations and program, e.g., faculty, Internship or Service-Learning Office staff. The objective of the site visit is to evaluate the identified

risk. The CSUSM representatives are encouraged to prepare key questions that may be pertinent to the opportunity and students' safety. In addition, observing the environment directly will provide valuable firsthand insights into the environment, operations, and supervision practices; this will confirm if the site is accountable and can meet CSUSM standards for a quality internship or service-learning experience.

Integrated Risk Management can be consulted prior to and/or after the visit for further review. The final decision about whether the site is suitable will typically be made jointly, involving the CSUSM representative and Integrated Risk Management.

Accident/ Incident Protocol

Students should be made aware of emergency plans before the start of their experiential learning experience. If the student has not received emergency protocol training, remind the student to ask the site supervisor. To help ensure a safe environment for all students across the colleges, reporting incidents, accidents, or emergencies to the Director of the Career Center for internships or Associate Director of Experiential Learning for service learning opportunities, strengthens campus awareness of site conditions and provides critical visibility into site operations that might otherwise go unrecognized.

If faculty or staff are made aware of an incident at the internship or service-learning site location, these procedures should be followed:

- For medical emergencies, confirm the site has called 9-1-1, and the site supervisor is aware.
- Report all incidents, including emergencies and non-emergencies, to the Director of Career Center for internships (internships@csusm.edu) or Associate Director of Experiential Learning for service learning opportunities (servicelearning@csusm.edu) and Integrated Risk Management at risk@csusm.edu or 760-750-4505 with the details provided.
- Instruct the site supervisor to complete the Non-Employee Incident/Accident Form and return the form to the Director of Career Center for internships or Associate Director of Experiential Learning for service learning opportunities and Integrated Risk Management.
- Based on the severity of the incident, Director of Career Center for internships or Associate Director of Experiential Learning for service learning opportunities may initiate additional response protocols.

It is strongly encouraged that students carry personal health insurance. For access to mental health resources and support, the student can be referred to Student Health & Counseling Services or Cougar Care Network

University Community Partnership Agreement

This agreement formalizes expectations and obligations of the learning site and CSUSM for unpaid/stipend paid experiential learning. It is an important tool in mitigating risk for students and CSUSM. View a current draft of the UCPA here.

Student Registration

Learning Site Location and Emergency Contact Information

The student registration includes a placement process where students identify the organization and position they will be engaged with. This includes location information allowing the Career Center and/or Office of Service Learning and Civic Engagement to identify where students are placed. Additionally, students are required to submit contact information for an individual close to them in the event there is an emergency. The importance of tracking this information is necessary in the event emergencies occur necessitating the identification of students who may be engaged in for credit activities at those locations. Students are also required to watch and acknowledge a site safety training video.

Risk acknowledgment

Students sign the Release of Liability, Assumption of Risk and Promise not to Sue form as part of the placement process. By doing this, students agree to release CSUSM from all liability stemming from their engagement and actions in their experiential learning activities for academic credit. Because we require this of students, it is critical that we ensure they are suitably appraised of any identified risks that engaging in an experiential learning opportunity may present to them so they

can make informed decisions. Given that students always have the flexibility to choose where they engage in experiential learning it is appropriate that we require this form to be signed.

Student Participation Guidelines

On this form, students are appraised of general guidelines intended to help them identify and avoid risks and risky behavior and of their responsibilities concerning injury to themselves while engaged in experiential learning. Students are required to sign this form acknowledging that they have read and understand these guidelines.

Conclusion

Risk management requirements and related processes form an integral and streamlined part of experiential learning at CSUSM. It is critical that faculty support the Career Center and/or the Office of Service Learning and Civic Engagement in maintaining these processes to ensure compliance, promote safe opportunities for our students and avoid costly legal actions that negatively impact all stakeholders. The Career Center and/or the Office of Service Learning and Civic Engagement can provide assistance to all faculty teaching experiential learning courses. If you have questions, are unsure about any of the processes involved in experiential learning risk management or need to refer a student for assistance, please email internships@csusm.edu or servicelearning@csusm.edu