DISTINCTION IN SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY
PROGRAM APPLICATION

Purpose and Overview:

Service learning is a well-established educational approach that can very profoundly influence the educational and professional development of students. It combines service activities with academic activities and often consists of planning activities, service, and reflection on what was learned through service and how service contributed to that learning.

Service to the community is a core value of Mercer University and Mercer University School of Medicine (MUSM). Many MUSM students participate in service activities. The Distinction in Service to the Community (DISC) program will enrich the benefits of these service activities by adding an academic component. It will also allow MUSM students to be recognized for their commitment to community service. Finally, it will strengthen connections between MUSM, its students, and the community.

The DISC program is a partnership between MUSM students, faculty, and administration. Students who are committed to improving health care and health outcomes, eliminating health disparities, and serving their communities are ideal candidates for the DISC program. Students who fulfill the requirements of the DISC program will be acknowledged at graduation with “Distinction in Service to the Community.”

Projects will be based on student-identified community and population health needs. MUSM faculty and students will team with community partners and share responsibility and ownership of these projects. Students will assume a significant level of responsibility in the collaborative planning, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of a focused community service project.

This application is intended to serve as an initial sign up for students who are interested in the DISC program.

Steps for applying:

1. Complete the application form and submit the application to Jennifer Boryk (boryk_jm@mercer.edu)
2. You will be responsible for:
   a. Logging volunteer hours and having them signed off on by organization contact and faculty advisor
   b. Planning service project
   c. Completing short assignments for project design seminars
   d. Submitting service project proposal
   e. Document service project
   f. Complete volunteer and service project commitment (60 hours each)
   g. Turn in final project report
   h. Present at the annual Mercer University Service Learning Conference
To be completed by applicant(s):

Application Date: _11/11/13_________

1. Student name/names that are submitting the proposal

   Primary Contact: _Jacob Matthews____________________________________
   
   Campus: _Macon______________________
   
   Email: _matthews_ja@med.mercer.edu___ Phone: ___(770) 265-4446_______
   
   Additional Contacts: _Sam DeVictor__________________________________
   
   Campus: __Macon______________________
   
   Email: _sdevictor@yahoo.com__________ Phone: _(404) 630-0382_________
   
   Additional Contacts: ___Kelly Redlinger_______________________________
   
   Campus: __Macon_______________________
   
   Email: _kellymargaret6@gmail.com____ Phone: _(229) 402-2029__________

1. Please indicate which organization you are/will be volunteering with as part of the DISC project. Include contact information and a copy of your volunteer agreement.

   Miracle League of Macon, Inc.
   PO Box 26816
   Macon, GA 31221

   President/ Co-Founder: Daniel Morton
   Phone (478) 731-3215
   Fax: 478-314-1348
   Email: danielmorton39@gmail.com

2. Please briefly describe the organization and the community the organization serves.

   Miracle League of Macon provides a unique opportunity for special needs children to play baseball. Their motto is “Every child deserves a chance to play baseball.” This goal is accomplished by the volunteer efforts of countless “buddies” who help the players around the bases, field the balls and just be children’s best friends. Macon’s Miracle League was founded in 2005 by Daniel Morton after seeing the large population of special needs children wanting to play baseball in the Macon area, including his own child. Since then the League has branched into many of the surrounding communities and families commute from all over the middle Georgia area to attend these fun weekend events.

3. Do you have a service learning project with this organization in mind?

   __X__yes
4. If yes, please give a brief description of the potential service project.

Our project has a multifaceted approach with relationships and education at the heart of it all. Having been involved with Miracle League of Macon in the past and speaking with the President, one of the missing factors is a healthy on-going relationship between the buddies and players. We are proposing a launch of a group specifically tailored to providing volunteer buddies on a consistent basis for the league. First, this addresses the Miracle League’s constant issue of having enough volunteers. Secondly, it allows the children as well as the volunteers to be paired up on multiple occasions and really build a relationship that can greatly impact all parties involved. In addition this consistent approach allows the families to know that they are not alone and there are people who truly care for them and their special needs child.

The second goal of this project is education. As medical students we are consistently involved in medical education by way of books, case studies, shadowing, research and many other avenues. These items are vital to medical education but lack in training students in areas such as empathy, a key to any successful healthcare provider. Students often are trained to treat various ailments but rarely see the day to day implications on the child and family outside of the healthcare facility. Our project proposes a bridge that allows undergraduate and medical students the opportunity to learn firsthand about many of the topics that are being discussed in class simply by volunteering to be a buddy for a few Saturday’s each spring. In addition, a few families have already come forward and volunteered to come to the Mercer’s Macon campus and tell their family’s stories as well as hold a question and answer segment regarding their respective conditions. It is with this in mind, relationships and education that we hope to connect Mercer’s future healthcare providers with Macon’s miracle athletes.

The actual implementation of such a program fits perfectly into the mission’s statements of both Mercer’s medical school and undergraduate programs alike. Volunteering with the program will be open to any student, undergraduate or graduate level. Seeing that this is a DISC program, birthed out of the medical school, it will have the added emphasis of medical education by way of guest speakers, ranging from local healthcare providers, faculty and/or parents of special needs children. These presentations will have a range in format and topics in hopes of shedding light on various special needs conditions. These meetings will take place throughout the school year and are open to anyone who would wish to join.

The volunteering aspect of the program will take place each spring, when the Miracle League baseball season is played. Each year, starting in March, games are held each Saturday from 10 am-1 pm at the Miracle League baseball field off Mercer University Drive. It is our goal at this point in time to commit to volunteering one Saturday for the months March through May. This consistency achieves two goals. First, this meets the volunteer needs of the Miracle League of Macon. Various local groups have been involved but what sets our group apart is our vision of consistency. Often large groups will decide to volunteer for one day a year, which is difficult at best to really build any meaningful relationships with the children and families involved, which is the second goal. Building an ongoing and meaningful relationship between the buddy and player was one of the initial reasons for building this program. Therefore, every effort will be made to match the two participants together in subsequent weeks if both are willing. With that said, each student or buddy will be paired with a player for the entirety of the game, assisting in hitting, running, fielding and any other assistance deemed necessary. All volunteers will be given instruction, more than likely from the President of The Miracle League of Macon, prior to their volunteer experience and all questions will be addressed prior to proceeding. This instruction will either happen on Campus or the day of the event at the baseball field.

In addition to these items, a couple of future proposals for expansion have been discussed.
The Miracle League of Macon comprises around 100 families of special needs children. Their only organized interaction as a group consists of these weekly games in the spring. Seeing this only encompasses three months out of the year, our program could potentially head other group activities for the children to look forward to in the fall. These events could be held on campus or elsewhere and be anything from carnivals to other sporting events. These events could also serve as fundraisers for the programs possible financial needs signage, t-shirts and pizza for after games.

With a proposed program of this magnitude, responsibilities are necessary for success. With Jacob Matthews’ prior experience with The Miracle League of Macon, he will serve as President of the program ensuring the smooth running of all these related. He will be in charge of any written or spoken correspondence between the program and The Miracle League of Macon as well as University faculty. In addition, he will coordinate the guest speaking events overseeing aspects such as publicity, formatting and student responses for these events. Sam DeVictor will serve as Vice President of the organization. He will oversee volunteer hours for each team member. He will also coordinate the buddy/player pairing prior to game day and the day of the event making sure to match previous pairings whenever possible. Lastly, he will be in charge of the finances, which includes purchasing of needed items through program’s funding and overseeing any monetary or food donations from local organizations to support the game day environment. Lastly, Kelly Redlinger will be in charge of promotion and recruiting. This will include, but is not limited to, speaking at undergraduate/medical school clubs, meeting with faculty, and designing/distributing flyers. She will also be in charge of volunteer responses and voicing adjustments to the program through these surveys regarding game day experiences. In addition, all volunteers will be requested to RSVP prior to the event and check-in the day of, which Kelly will oversee through the utilization of an electronic sign-up sheet that Sam creates. All outside correspondence with the program will be run through a shared email: mercermentors@gmail.com that each member of the above members will have access. As always this program is a continual work in progress and subject to change for the better. We are excited to make this connection between Mercer and The Miracle League of Macon and hope that this program becomes a staple community outreach program in the Macon for some time to come.

5. If no, please describe three potential projects that you think may serve the community and organization you will be working with on the service project