Our purpose in service learning is to prepare our K–12 Spence students to use an ethic of care when engaging with and serving in their community and to use their time, education, resources and the power of partnership to interrupt and reverse systemic inequities. We define an ethic of care as the belief that all humans have value and deserve respect and that empathy is a virtue that must be cultivated. We define service as active engagement with others that helps to ameliorate a stated need. To serve is to see people the way they want to be seen, recognizing the paradoxical worth and brokenness in every person and then acting in a way that lets worth reign and brokenness heal.

At Spence, we always use the F.A.R. model when engaging with and serving the wider community. First we FAMILIARIZE. Then we ACT. Finally, we REFLECT and look at next steps. We use the four domains of anti-bias education—identity, diversity, justice and action—to root our service deeply within our institutional pursuit of equity.

“We come into the world already obligated by the mere gaze of the other, a gaze that demands from us a response.”

—EMANUEL LEVINAS
To serve is to acknowledge the humanity in oneself and in others.

*Misunderstanding:*
*We are obligated to serve primarily by noblesse oblige.*

Who am I? Who are you?
Why do I serve? How is it part of my life purpose?
Who am I as a helper? Who am I as someone who needs help?
What do I have inside of me that inspires me to be a giver?
Is it true that with power comes much responsibility? Is it true that I am my “brother’s keeper”?
How is service an intellectual experience? How is it an emotional experience?
What have I learned that I didn’t know before? How did I change in a way I didn’t expect?
PURPOSE IN SERVICE LEARNING

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS & ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Service is selfless and selfish.

Misunderstanding:
Service is noble because it is selfless.

What do I give when I serve? What do I get? Should they be the same?
What do I give up to serve? What do I receive that I can't give back? Is this fair? Is it just?
Do I get more if I give more?
What is the difference between sympathy and empathy?
Serve locally first.

**Misunderstanding:**
The people who really need help live in other communities and countries.

What needs exist in my school?
What needs exist in my neighborhood?
What do I have (skills, resources, time, etc.) that could help meet needs?
Who in my community has a different experience than I do?
How can I learn empathy for someone’s situation if I have not experienced it myself?
Service is built on a relationship between partners.

Misunderstanding:
There are two types of humans: those who need help and those who don’t.

What is a partnership?
How can I get to know the people I serve?
How do I impact who I serve? How do those I serve impact me?
Will people who need help always need help? Is needing help temporary?
Is this partnership mutually beneficial?
Help is defined with the person who needs help.

Misunderstanding:
I know what you need to thrive.

How does partnership help in defining a need?
How do we determine what someone else needs? How do we see to the root of the problem?
How can I get feedback from those whom I am helping?
What if the help someone asks for is not what I think is best for them?
What if the help I want to give is not what is needed?
What do I do when the help that is needed changes?
PURPOSE IN SERVICE LEARNING

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS & ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Race matters.

Misunderstanding:
My racial identity does not impact how I see the world nor how others experience the world.

What is race? What other identities do I have and how do they impact how I serve?
What is racism? What is anti-racism?
Do people who need help all look the same?
Where is the intersection of race and the other identities of the community that I’m serving?
How does race impact those who need help?
Who has power in our society and how does one get power?
Serving is an action.

Misunderstanding:
I’m a good person, and as long as I don’t harm anyone, I am not part of the problem.

Where do I see service opportunities?
How do I put my good ideas to use?
How do I learn to care about something that doesn’t seem to affect me?
How does an activist behave?
What type of effort is necessary to create change?
**PURPOSE IN SERVICE LEARNING**

**ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS & ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**

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**Change is both slow and possible.**

_Misunderstanding:_

_The major social injustices will never be fixed. I can fix institutionalized oppression._

- How can we measure our progress if the problem we choose is too big to solve?
- How can we balance patience and perseverance? Progress and miles to go?
- How can we tell when it is time for a partnership to end?
- What type of work will we leave for the next set of helpers?
- What do I hope will happen because of our efforts?
- How do my small goals fit into the larger picture?
- How can I define success? What happens if I’m not successful?
Injustices affect everyone.

Misunderstanding:
If I don’t experience it, it doesn’t affect me.

How do I participate in my community? How do I affect my community?
What does my community give me freely?
What relationship do I have with the person I’m serving?
How do I learn how this social issue affects me?
Where do I get my information? How do I tell if it’s reliable?
People have important and rewarding careers in helping their communities.

Misunderstanding:
There are no good jobs in the social service industry, and, thus, a job in the social service industry is not a worthy aspiration for a Spence student.

What types of jobs exist to help people?
Are they profitable?
Why do people choose to work in these jobs?
How do I choose what to do with my time?
How do non-profits operate?
Is service part of my life work?
Social injustices were started and are perpetuated by humans and institutions with power.

*Misunderstanding:*
It’s always been this way and, therefore, efforts to change the system are futile. We’re not responsible for what previous generations did.

How do institutions exercise power?
How do I know when I see institutionalized oppression?
If I did not start oppression, do I have a responsibility to end it?
Is oppression a choice?
Who gets justice?
What are the characteristics of institutions and people who reject oppression?
What is power in my community? How do I see power being used for good? For bad?
What power do I hold? Do the people I serve hold the same power? Why or why not?
PURPOSE IN SERVICE LEARNING

ENDURING UNDERSTANDINGS & ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Service work can become social justice work.

Misunderstanding:
All service work is good and helpful and creates equity.

How can I work to resist and reverse systemic oppression?
What is the root cause, including historical context, of the issue that my non-profit partner addresses?
What would a just society look like? How does what I see in my neighborhood and in NYC fall short of this type of society?
Are there ways in which my individual service perpetuates a system of inequality?
How can I disadvantage myself to advantage others?