



Scaling Apprenticeship

Emerging Practice Spotlight



University of Cincinnati

ServeIT

NEXT Apprenticeship
Program



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ServeIT at the University of Cincinnati: An IT Development Pipeline for the Non-Profit Sector

ServeIT is a component of the University of Cincinnati's (UC) NEXT Apprenticeship Program and is sponsored by a Department of Labor initiative designed to expand and scale apprenticeships. Students in the ServeIT program are placed in defined length employment with area non-profit organizations to perform IT-related work including web design and development, database administration, software or app development, cybersecurity, and more. UC has developed several IT-based position descriptions that it uses in its dialogues with non-profits to identify the specific skills each employer is focused on. These become the focus of tailored recommended training for each student through [UC's Digital Skills Lab](#). Students are paid with grant funding, which relieves the financial burden for the non-profit organizations that participate. Well-defined responsibilities allow non-profit staff to serve as mentors for the apprentices. Unlike many other IT-related work experience programs, the ServeIT program recruits apprentices of all majors, which provides opportunities for a wide variety of students from underserved populations, such as women, who are vastly under-represented in IT fields, to get hands-on IT training. After completing an online preparation course, apprentices in the ServeIT program use their IT skills on the job at local nonprofit organizations. The skills the apprentices develop and provide to the non-profits complement and supplement their educational and professional development

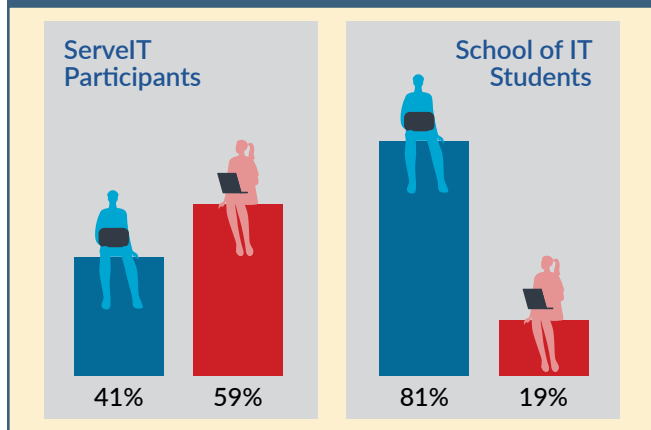
Evolution of ServeIT

ServeIT, and UC's NEXT Apprenticeship program, are an extension of the college's long-established cooperative education (co-op) program, which was established in 1906. Co-op experiences at UC are career-oriented, transcribed, and compensated. They require academic preparation, faculty mentorship and assessment, and guided student reflection that integrates the experience to student learning goals and their academic curriculum. In 2018, UC announced investments in its co-op program

ServeIT Statistics

299
unique students have participated (35% non-white)
Over
\$300,000
earned
41
academic programs represented
96
employers obtained over
24,000 hours
of tech-related service

ServeIT engages more women in IT in 2022



that shifted it from a faculty-driven program to one led by professional, dedicated co-op staff. ServeIT and UC's NEXT Apprenticeship program differ from the traditional co-op program in several ways. First, participants in the program are not necessarily in IT-related majors at the university and are generally from more diverse backgrounds and genders than students from the engineering and IT-related programs. Second, to build their IT skills, students are encouraged to develop proficiencies through recommended online training that aligns with the skills required by their partnering nonprofit employer using UC's Digital Skills Lab. This training supplements the skills being developed within the student's major and serve as an entry point into IT-related employment. Finally, ServeIT students are employed by area nonprofits whose student wages are reimbursed

by NEXT Apprenticeship grant funds. UC's NEXT Apprenticeship program, and ServeIT, benefit from UC's legacy of cooperative education using existing student management and IT resource processes as well as UC's existing employment partners and employment outreach framework.

Benefits of ServeIT

ServeIT apprentices experience both personal and professional benefits while working at one of the region's nonprofits. In addition to the professional skills apprentices develop, apprentices get experience working in the local service community to make a personal impact in the region. ServeIT apprentices develop IT-related skills that are transferable and beneficial across industries and academic majors. The opportunity to develop specific skills, credentials, and experiences vary, but can include:

- Skill development in alignment with Ohio-recognized apprenticeship requirements
- Industry-recognized credentials, certifications, and skills training
- Industry experience in computing and informatics (For students in majors with mandatory co-op, apprenticeship-style work will count toward graduation requirements.)
- Up to a \$150 voucher to cover the cost of certification exams, such as for CompTIA or Cisco certificates
- Opportunities to work remotely

ServeIT apprenticeships allow students to test a variety of career options with non-profits by taking on various roles and assignments. They are also able to develop specific, IT career-related skills through the UC Digital Skills Lab. Because nonprofits tend to work with a lean staff, apprentices may find themselves contributing to marketing, fundraising, social media, event planning and communications, and operations management in addition to IT responsibilities. These skills and experiences are valuable additions for apprentices as they seek roles after graduation.

Employers benefit from ServeIT through the development of partnerships with UC, and access to apprentices with emerging and in-demand skills, that they don't need to pay for, for specific high-skill IT roles and projects. In the short-term, this meets an immediate need. In the long-term, the apprentices represent a new candidate pool for permanent

"When the pandemic hit, we got busier because communities realized they didn't have good ways to connect people to ways to help. Michael [Sharp-UC Director of Service Learning] reached out to us shortly after COVID first hit. We said we would take a couple. Ended up being 12. They did data mining for us. All virtual."

Carol Roundtree, Chief Volunteer Officer,
Cincinnati Cares

positions at the non-profits who have demonstrated skills and who understand the culture and mission of the organizations. Furthermore, as a nationally recognized, urban university, UC students come from diverse backgrounds and apprentices can bring unique perspectives and benefits to the nonprofits they work for through ServeIT.

Essential Component of ServeIT

- Students participate in an online career development course prior to employment.
- Use of IT position descriptions to identify the specific skills that the nonprofits need so that an individualized skill development plan can be developed for each apprentice.
- Access to IT skill development training that aligns with employer needs through the UC Digital Skills Lab.
- Apprenticeship hours are flexible and scheduled over the course of a semester to accommodate classes and other obligations.
- Apprentices can work full-time (35+ hours a week), part-time (5-20 hours a week), or for a project-specified period of time (up to 80 hours per term).
- Apprentice wages are paid through UC's NEXT Apprenticeship grant.

ServeIT in Action

"This was one of the best experiences I've had working with the university and students. It has been so impactful to have students working on things they're passionate about, growing not only from the technical side, but also soft skills. Having students compensated was great, I believe it helped with retention."

Tonkia Bridges, N.E.R.D.S Founder & Executive Director

(Nurturing Educational Readiness and Development from the Start)

The ServeIT program has developed a partnership with a UC campus organization, the Center for Community Engagement to facilitate outreach to Cincinnati area non-profit organizations. This partnership enables ServeIT to communicate with CCE's membership which includes 750 organizations that are interested in hiring or looking for volunteers. Organizations are offered the opportunity to submit an application to participate in the ServeIT program, the organizations are vetted by UC and the employer signs an MOU to formalize the partnership with the ServeIT program.

Non-profits partners are responsible for developing a job description, interviewing and hiring candidates, and invoicing UC for the number of hours worked by the ServeIT apprentice. UC uses these descriptions to identify specific skills needed for each position and then develops a recommended IT skill development plan for the apprentice using synchronous and asynchronous training available through its Digital Skills Lab.

UC uses a platform, Handshake, which enables students, career centers, recruiters, and ServeIT partners to share, coordinate and track information. UC coordinates with partners to post job descriptions where students are able to search and apply for positions. UC also shares job descriptions through faculty and student networks.

Elements of Success

- ServeIT is part of a larger cooperative education program at UC which has existed in some form since 1906.
- University's leadership invests in the cooperative education program and has a professional staff dedicated to support those programs.
- UC invested in software and technology that enables staff to track, advertise and organize ServeIT opportunities.
- Grant funding is used to provide wages at nonprofits who, otherwise, would not be able to support student apprentices.
- The ServeIT staff includes job developers who are key to

"A lot of students stay multiple semesters, sometimes almost an entire year. Makes it easier since you don't need to continually repeat onboarding process."

Samantha Conover, Price Hill Will

building and sustaining relationships with employers. Job developers engage with businesses and non-profits as well as identify job developers at organizations with similar interests like the Chamber of Commerce, Small Business Association, and the local American Job Center.

Tips and Strategies

- Establish relationships with non-profit businesses and non-profit organizations as partners for the apprenticeship program.
- Communicate with employer partners to identify the specific technical skills necessary for success and then use them to develop individualized training programs for each apprentice.
- Build upon institutional history and community connections to establish employer partnerships.
- Obtain administrative buy-in and support for dedicated job development staff, software, and other tech needs. Identify the needs of your apprenticeship partners to match apprentices and ensure the apprenticeship is mutually beneficial.

Resources

- [ServeIT](#)
- [UC's Digital Skills Lab](#)
- [Center for Community Engagement](#)
- [UC's Experience-Based Learning](#)
- [NEXT Apprenticeship](#)



More Information

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