

Community Engaged Learning Courses

Quick Start Guide for Faculty

1. Community Engaged Learning Courses

a. Community Engaged Learning (CEL)

Community engaged learning (formerly known as service-learning) involves students, faculty and community partners working together to apply knowledge in authentic settings. CEL courses must address community needs and meet instructional objectives by pairing action in the community with reflection in the classroom. Students apply what they learn in class to work with a community partner, reinforcing knowledge from the class itself. Partner organizations receive fresh student perspectives, campus resources and support, and an avenue through which agencies can affect students' understanding of community.

b. University of Utah CEL Course Designation

A growing body of literature supports the effectiveness of utilizing community engaged learning pedagogy in a wide range of disciplines. At the University of Utah, CEL designated courses meet three broad categories of learning outcomes that reflect the nine basic principles of community engaged learning.

Three Core Outcomes:

1. Course design incorporates community engagement to enhance student learning.
2. The course identifies learning outcomes that address community needs.
3. Reflection is utilized throughout the course to enhance learning.

Nine Basic Principles¹

- **Principle 1:** *Academic credit is for learning, not for service.* Academic credit is not awarded for doing community service, nor for the quantity or quality of that service, but rather for the student's demonstration of learning.
- **Principle 2:** *Do not compromise academic rigor.* Integrate community engaged learning in a way that supports or enhances existing academic standards and expectations through related readings, presentations, and assignments.
- **Principle 3:** *Establish learning objectives.* The development of a quality community engaged learning course begins with explicit learning objectives.
 - Make sure the Community Engaged Learning in your course matches up with the learning objectives for your course (e.g., from your course syllabus).

¹ Adapted from Howard, Jeffery, ed., *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Service Learning Course Design Workbook, University of Michigan: OCSL Press, Summer 2001, pp16-19.

- **Principle 4:** *Establish criteria for the selection of service placements.* Establishing course-objective based criteria for selecting community service placements/projects leads to more relevant student learning.
 - Instructors who meet, select, and start working with community partners before students often report a more positive CEL experience for their classes. **Speed dating events** (hosted by the Bennion Center several times a year) are a great way to meet new partners in your community.
- **Principle 5:** *Provide educationally-sound learning strategies to harvest community learning and realize course learning objectives.* Discussion and assignments that provoke analysis of community experience in the context of the course objectives are necessary to ensure the community engagement becomes an instrument of learning.
 - Ask students: *what are you learning in your work with the community partner? What parts of our reading or discussions in class have been useful in this project? What parts of your work with the Community Partner have reinforced class readings?* Discuss.
- **Principle 6:** *Prepare students for learning from the community.* Students realize the potential of community learning through appropriate preparation and orientation, examples of successful experiences, and of the expertise and assets that exist in the community.
- **Principle 7:** *Minimize the distinction between the students' community learning role and classroom learning role.* Classrooms and communities are very different learning contexts, each requiring students to assume a different learner role. The more these roles are made consistent, the better the chances that the learning potential within each context will be realized.
 - Avoid talking about class work vs. community work. Instead, try to think of the CEL experience as an extension and enrichment of the course objectives. How can you use class readings to instruct or reflect on the CEL project—or how do experiences in the community reinforce other material from the course? Discuss with students.
- **Principle 8:** *Rethink the faculty instructional role.* Community engaged learning is about student learning facilitation and guidance and not about information dissemination.
- **Principle 9:** *Be prepared for variation in, and some loss of control with, student learning outcome.* The variability in community contexts necessarily leads to less certainty and homogeneity in student learning outcomes. Expect the unexpected.

c. Matching CEL Methods to Your Course Objectives and Community Needs²

| Property | Description | Example |
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| Direct Service | Students provide service directly to individuals while at the agency site or in the community. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tutoring children • Serving meals at a shelter • Facilitating oral histories at a hospice |

² Adapted from Elon University Academic Service-Learning Faculty Handbook; George Mason University Community Based Learning Faculty Handbook; Hefferman, K. (Ed.). (2001). *Fundamentals of service-learning course construction*. Providence: Campus Compact.

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| Indirect Service | Working on behalf of an issue, population or community of concern but removed from the actual site. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing a canned food drive for a pantry • Produce a report on the impact of a certain social issue on the local community to include in agency materials such as grant proposals • Helping with a fundraising event • Sorting donations |
| Consultation | Individuals or teams of students work with a community organization to identify a specific need and then develop an academically-based solution for the need in the form of a final product to deliver to the community partner. Feedback from the organization staff on the strengths of each proposal provides a rich learning opportunity. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing campaign for a nonprofit organization • Design donor database for a nonprofit • Develop public relations plan for nonprofit |
| Capstone Project | Capstone projects are typically designed for majors and minors in a given discipline. Service acts as a point of focus for synthesizing and applying their knowledge. Projects may also incorporate the study of a topic. Capstone courses are useful in helping students transition from theory to practice. | After interviewing the teachers, staff, and students of a local school, the student team proposes a way to use locally grown produce to improve the taste and nutrition of school lunches, while staying within the current food budget. They work with local food producers and school staff to facilitate the arrangements and agreements to implement the plan for one semester as a pilot project. |
| Community-Based Action Research | Students, working in teams or independently, and faculty work with the community to design and implement research to answer a given question. | Working with an after-school tutoring program to gather and analyze data on reading scores and student attitudes toward school to inform the design of the program. |
| Community Based Internships | More lengthy and intense than traditional service-learning. Service internships differ from traditional internships in that students are required to link their service experiences with discipline-based theory throughout the internship. Principles of community engaged learning are followed such as reciprocity, partnership, etc. | |
| Individual, Group or Full Class | Courses vary in terms of whether students work on their service or research project alone, in a small group, or with the full class. Group or full class projects | |

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| | that require the students to work collaboratively in problem solving and task coordination offer a powerful civic learning experience. It may be a challenge for community partners to handle large numbers of students at once. In such circumstances, students may all serve the same organization but scheduled at different times, or they may serve several organizations of the same type. | |
| Single or Multiple Community Partner/s | Using the metaphor of the community engagement experience as a text, when all the students are working at one site (whether they are together or going at different times of the week), they are reading from the same text. When the students work at multiple sites, the students have read different texts and are able to share their learning with each other. | |

d. CEL Course Syllabi

A CEL Course Should Include:³

- Identify your goal(s) for using community engaged learning in this course. These objectives should be clearly indicated on the course syllabus.
- Clearly describe how the community engaged learning experience will be assessed. Assignment sheets for CEL projects should include a clear description of how students CEL work will be assessed in their overall grade for the project.
- Specify the roles and responsibilities of students in the community organization. Class discussions regarding roles should be initiated before CEL projects begin, and students should be encouraged to ask questions about their roles and the nature of the CEL relationship.
- Specify how students will be expected to demonstrate what they have learned through their community engagement (journal, papers, presentations, etc.).
 - Include an example(s) of successful student CEL work.
- In addition, inform students of basic expectations about their professional behavior while serving. Common concerns from community partners regarding student behavior include inappropriate dress and excessive texting or cell-phone use.

³ Adapted from the Indiana State University Service-Learning Faculty Guide.

e. The Four C's of Reflection⁴

- **Continuous.** Reflection occurs before, during and after the experience.
 - *Pre-reflection* prepares students to thoughtfully engage with the community organization and community members.
 - *Reflection during* community engagement occurs through awareness about individual observations, perceptive filters and assumptions.
 - *Post-service* reflection analyzes new experiences in light of previously held beliefs to create new conceptualizations.
- **Connected.** Reflection must connect the experience to academic content. Community engagement helps students see statistics, for example, as representing real people. It can demonstrate theory and help students challenge its applicability in all contexts.
- **Challenging.** Reflection should push students to think in more complex ways. It should challenge their assumptions and question what they believe to be true.
- **Contextualized.** Reflection should be appropriate for the course context and content and the nature of the community engagement experience. Intentional choices should be made about the type of reflection process, where the reflection will occur, what questions and topics will be explored. Reflections may be informal or highly structured, completed individually or in small or large groups, and may include community partners, faculty members, or only students.

2. Community Partnerships

a. Tips for Establishing Positive Community Partnerships⁵

- Community partnerships are at the center of CEL classes. As with any relationship, it takes time and effort to build trust and understanding. Make contact with your community partner well in advance of the start of the course.
- Be clear with your community partner about your course goals. Share your syllabus and learning objectives. Brainstorm project ideas together with your partner. Aim for a collaborative effort that reflects a mutually beneficial relationship.
- Identify what the community partner hopes to gain from the experience. Typically, community partners are seeking a new source of volunteers, prospective interns, or technical expertise from faculty and/or students. It is important to have a conversation about the likelihood that these objectives will be met.
- Provide a realistic overview of the skills and abilities of your students. Asking your students to complete tasks they are not prepared for—or setting unrealistic expectations for their performance will only lead to disappointing class experience for your community partner and students.

⁴ Eyler, J., Giles, E.E., & Schmiede, A. (1996). *A practitioner's guide to reflection in service-learning: Student voices and reflections*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University.

⁵ Adapted from the Faculty Toolkit for Service-Learning in Higher Education, Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse; George Mason University's Community Based Learning Faculty Handbook; Elon University Academic Service-Learning Faculty; Indiana State University Service-Learning Faculty Guide.

- Develop a plan with your partner of supervision and assessment of students.
- Share your evaluation plan with the community partner. What standards of performance will you use? It is important to communicate that students will not be evaluated solely on “showing up.”
- Prepare your students to work with the partner.
- If the agency has a volunteer manual, it should be made available to the students.
- For many on-site volunteer situations, pre-service screenings are required of volunteers, including criminal background checks and TB screenings. Ask your community partner about any specific screening requirements prior to the start of your course. Share those requirements with your students during the first few days of class. Be prepared to make alternative arrangements if a student does not meet screening requirements.
- Utilize a community engaged learning agreement for students, faculty, and community partners (see the attached MOU example below). It is a good policy to have clearly written communication that explains expectations and requirements for all parties involved.
- Communicate with the community partner on an on-going basis over the semester. Schedule “check-in” events at regular intervals during the semester when you and the community partner can discuss the CEL class project(s) and student progress.
- Invite the community partner to participate in the evaluation of final projects, presentations, portfolios, web pages, etc., and scheduling time for this in your syllabus.
- Be flexible. Things will not always go according to your plan. Remember that you can use those unexpected moments to foster even more powerful learning than from a perfectly executed plan.

3. Links to Worksheets & Sample Forms

[Click here](#) for links to the following resources:

- Links to Tips for Using Canvas
- Links to More Information
- Links to More Information on Working with Community Partners
- Worksheets
 - CEL Course Design Worksheet (Indiana State)
 - Writing a Partnership MOU (big handbook, GMU)
- Forms (GMU; Indiana State)
 - Student CEL Agreement Form
 - Student & Community Partner Agreement Form

- iii. Student Informed Consent Form
- iv. Partner – Verification of Service Form

f. Links to Support Services

- i. Bennion Center
- ii. Apply for CEL Course Designation
- iii. Speed Dating
- iv. Faculty Fellows
- v. Applying for a CEL TA
- vi. Risk Management