

**SOUTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY**  
**COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING COURSE DESIGN**  
**Compiled By: Dr. Sarah Brackmann, Director of Civic Engagement**

**WHAT IS COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING?**

Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) is one example of civic engagement whereby students apply academic skills and knowledge to address a community need, issue, or problem and to enhance student learning.

CEL is a form of teaching and learning in which students engage in structured service and action that is responsive to community needs, provides mutually beneficial experience for students and community partners, and is designed to include critical analysis and reflection linking service to academic, cluster, and discipline specific learning goals.

**A. DESIGNING A CEL COURSE<sup>1</sup>**

Begin by broadly thinking about your discipline in relation to society:

- What difference does your discipline make for society? What is the social relevancy of your field?
- How have you used your discipline outside of the academic environment to help others?
- What social issues do you want to explore via your academic discipline?
- What kind of person is a scientist/historian/musician/artist... (name your discipline)?

Consider the goals of the Paideia program and your cluster:

- *Cluster:* How can the students use the community experience to evaluate, explicate, and/or analyze the theme or problem of the cluster?
- *Interdisciplinary:* How will students be able to connect community experience and academic knowledge in ways that invite interdisciplinary approaches and awareness of distinct disciplinary contributions?
- *Integrative:* How can students integrate and connect the community experiences with cluster content in ways that encourage the synthesis and transference of learning to new, complex situations within and beyond the campus?

Think particularly about what types of learning occur in your course:

- *Content specific:* What theories, principles, concepts, major idea, methodology, etc will students learn in the course that can be reinforced or strengthened through community experience?
- *General Academic:* How could a community experience help students learn problem solving, critical thinking, reasoning, or decision-making skills that are important in your discipline?

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Duquesne University's *Crafting Learning Objectives for Service-Learning* and the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning's *Service-Learning Course Design Workbook*

What learning strategies will achieve the enhanced academic learning objectives that you've identified?

Classroom Strategies- What activities will achieve the learning objectives? Examples may include small group discussions, one-minute reflection papers, online discussions, case studies, and simulations?

Student Assignments- What assignments outside of class will enable students to meet academic learning objectives? Examples may include integrative papers, structured journals, weekly logs, personal narratives, portfolios, directed writings, and reflective interviews.

Assessment Methods- What methods will gauge enhanced academic learning? Assessment methods may or may not correspond with student assignments, and may be formative or summative. Examples may include public policy papers, research papers, oral presentations, and group journals. (See Table 2: Civic Engagement Assessment Rubric)

Table 1: Learning Strategies and Assessment Methods

Categories of Goals	Specific Objectives	Classroom Strategies	Student Assignments	Assessing Learning
Discipline- Specific Learning				
Cluster Learning				
Interdisciplinary Learning				
Integrative Learning				
Content-Specific Learning				
General Academic Learning				

## **B. DEVELOPING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

The practice of community-engaged learning is inherently *reciprocal*, meaning students provide needed assistance to community partners, while community partners provide appropriate learning opportunities to students.

The degree to which students and community partners benefit from a community experience somewhat depends on the duration of time spent in the community setting and quality of the work students perform. The OCE can help you connect with community agencies that have a need for student work and that provide learning opportunities complimentary to the learning objectives of your course.

Consider the following models:

1. Students work within the existing structure of the community organization. *Example: Spanish III students tutor bilingual students at Mitchell Elementary.*
2. Students work with a community organization to design a specific project related to the course concepts and skills. *Example: General Chemistry students conduct various science presentations for students at Mitchell Elementary.*
3. Students in one course partner with a variety of partners. *Example: Sociology of Childhood students mentor children at various non-profits.*
4. Students conduct research and produce reports for community organizations. *Example: Business students conduct a marketing analysis and present strategies to the community partner.*

In order to guide your planning, here are some questions to consider:

- What type of environment? *School, after-school, social services, government agency, foundation, etc?*
- How many hours on-site are needed to meet your learning objectives? *Just as the length of a research paper varies from course to course, so too does the amount of time spent in the community. As a rule of thumb, the more often a student goes to the community site, the more benefit is derived from the experience. Typically, it is recommended that students contribute 2 hours each week for ten weeks for a 3-credit course. However, the community component may be designed to occur less frequently, depending on the needs of the community agency or the learning objectives of the course.*
- What training will students need to complete in order to begin the experience? *Some organizations require students to complete background checks or training before working with them.*
- Do you want students to work with people directly, or would you rather they work “behind the scenes” and observe others working directly with clients at your site?

## **C. REFLECTION: CONNECTING COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE TO ACADEMIC LEARNING<sup>2</sup>**

Reflection is the intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives. It should be both retrospective and prospective: students consider their community experience in order to influence their future action. Effective reflection activities are linked to particular learning objectives of the class, are guided by the instructor, occur regularly throughout the course, allow for feedback and assessment, and include opportunities for the clarification of values. When reflection activities are integrated into class discussion and appear on

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from IUPUI’s Extending Your Classroom Using Civic Engagement

exams, students report higher levels of satisfaction with the course and greater academic gains from the experience. Including reflection affords students the opportunity to document the learning that has occurred from the community component.

#### *SAMPLE STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING REFLECTION INTO YOUR COURSE*

PERSONAL JOURNALS are easy to assign, yet often difficult to grade. Some contend that this means of personal reflection should be graded only for completion. Personal journals provide a way for students to express thoughts and feelings about the community experience throughout the semester. Structured journals provide guidance so that students link personal learning with course content.

- *Critical incident journal:* This journal includes a set of prompts that ask students to consider their thoughts and reactions and articulate the action they plan to take in the future: Describe a significant event that occurred as part of the community experience. Why was this event significant to you? What did you learn from this experience? How will this incident influence your future behavior? What new action steps will you take next time?
- *Three - part journal:* Each page of the weekly journal entry is divided into thirds: description, analysis, application. In the top section, students describe some aspect of the community experience. In the middle section, students analyze how course content relates to the community experience. And in the application section students comment on how the experience and course content can be applied to their personal or professional life.
- *Highlighted journal:* Before students submit their reflective journal, they reread personal entries and, using a highlighter, mark sections of the journal that directly relate to concepts and terms discussed in the text or in class. This makes it easier for both the student and the instructor to identify the academic connections made during the reflection process.
- *Key-phrase journal:* The instructor provides a list of terms and key phrases at the beginning of the semester for students to include in journal entries. Evaluation is based on the use and demonstrated understanding and application of the term.
- *Double-entry journal:* Students describe their personal thoughts and reactions to the community experience on the left page of the journal, and write about key issues from class discussion or readings on the right page of the journal. Students then draw arrows indicating relationships between their personal experience and course content.
- *Dialogue journal:* Students submit loose-leaf journal pages to the instructor for comments every two weeks. While labor intensive for the instructor, this can provide regular feedback to students and prompt new questions for students to consider during the semester. Dialogue journals also can be read and responded to by a peer.

EXPERIENTIAL RESEARCH PAPERS ask students to identify an underlying social issue they have encountered at the community site. Students then research the social issue. Based on their experience and library research, students make recommendations to the agency for future action. Class presentations of the experiential research paper can conclude semester work.

ONLINE DISCUSSION is a way to facilitate reflection with the instructor and peers involved in community projects. Students can write weekly summaries and identify critical incidents that occurred at the community site. Instructors can post questions for consideration and topics for directed writings. A log of the e-mail discussions can be printed as data to the group about the learning that occurred from the community experience.

ETHICAL CASE STUDIES give students the opportunity to analyze a situation and gain practice in ethical decision-making as they choose a course of action. Students write up a case study of an ethical dilemma they have confronted at the community site, including a description of the context, the individuals involved, and the controversy or event that created the ethical dilemma. Case studies are read in class and students discuss the situation and identify how they would respond.

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING PORTFOLIOS contain evidence of both processes and products completed and ask students to assess their work in terms of the learning objectives of the course. Portfolios can contain any of the following: community-engaged learning contract, weekly log, personal journal, impact statement, directed writings, photo essay, products completed during the community experience (e.g., agency brochure, lesson plans, advocacy letters). Students write an evaluation essay providing a self-assessment of how effectively they met the learning and community objectives of the course.

PERSONAL NARRATIVES are based on journal entries written regularly during the semester. Students create a fictional story about themselves as a learner in the course. This activity sets a context for reflection throughout the semester with attention directed to a finished product that is creative in nature. Personal narratives give students an opportunity to describe their growth as a learner.

WEEKLY LOG is a simple listing of the activities completed each week at the community site. This is a way to monitor work and provide students with an overview of the contribution they have made during the semester.

**Table 2: Southwestern University  
Civic Engagement Assessment Rubric**

Civic engagement is acting upon a heightened sense of responsibility to one’s communities, including the notions of global citizenship and interdependence. Through civic engagement, individuals —as citizens of their communities, their nations, and the world— are empowered as agents of positive social change for a more democratic world.

Jacoby, B. (2009) *Civic Engagement in Higher Education*

Learning Outcomes	Exemplary (5)	Competent (3)	Developing (1)
Diversity of Communities and Cultures	Demonstrates evidence of adjustment in own attitudes and beliefs because of working within and learning from diversity of communities and cultures. Promotes others’ engagement with diversity.	Reflects on how own attitudes and beliefs are different from those of other cultures and communities. Exhibits curiosity about what can be learned from diversity of communities and cultures.	Expresses attitudes and beliefs as an individual, from a one-sided view. Is indifferent or resistant to what can be learned from diversity of communities and cultures.
Analysis of Knowledge	Connects and extends knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/field/discipline to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.	Analyzes knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/field/discipline making relevant connections to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.	Begins to identify knowledge (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/field/discipline that is relevant to civic engagement and to one's own participation in civic life, politics, and government.
Civic Identity and Commitment	Provides evidence of experience in civic engagement activities and describes what she/he has learned about her or himself as it relates to a reinforced and clarified sense of civic identity and continued commitment to public action.	Provides evidence of experience in civic engagement activities and describes what she/he has learned about her or himself as it relates to a growing sense of civic identity and commitment.	Provides little evidence of her/his experience in civic-engagement activities and does not connect experiences to civic identity.
Civic Action and Reflection	Demonstrates independent experience and shows initiative in team leadership of complex or multiple civic engagement activities, accompanied by reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of one’s actions.	Demonstrates independent experience and team leadership of civic action, with reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of one’s actions.	Has experimented with some civic activities but shows little internalized understanding of their aims or effects and little commitment to future action.
Awareness of civic contexts/structures	Demonstrates ability and commitment to collaboratively work across and within community contexts and structures to achieve a civic aim.	Demonstrates ability and commitment to work actively within community contexts and structures to achieve a civic aim.	Experiments with civic contexts and structures, tries out a few to see what fits.

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