

## **BCLA Engaged Learning**

### **Designing a Community-based Learning Course**



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## **What is Community-based Learning?**

Community-based Learning is a teaching pedagogy commonly used at LMU and is one component of the University's Core Curriculum Engaged Learning Flag. Community-based Learning is also a significant focus of BCLA's Engaged Learning activities. BCLA has defined community-based learning on the following:

- Courses with intentional application of theory to community identified needs
- Community-based work that enhances equity and justice
- Student reflection on and consideration of the connection between theory and community-based work
- Opportunity for social justice practice using a scholarly frame
- Reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationships with the greater community
- Includes domestic and international as well as undergraduate and graduate courses

### **Criteria for Community-based Learning**

- 1) Classes that include reciprocal, mutually beneficial relationships with the greater community. Work should be meaningful to both the community and to the learning objectives in the course. It is important to make explicit how your community-based activity helps students learn the core concepts you are teaching in your course. It is also important to be sure that the work is meaningful to the community and/or community partner with which you are working.
- 2) Community-based work should enhance the learning that is taking place in your course, above what could be done in the class without a community engagement.
- 3) Community-based learning should have a civic or social justice goal. Student activities, class assignments, and/or the community work itself, should help students consider their own role in society and how they can use their knowledge and skills to support positive change.
- 4) Reflection is a key component of community-based learning and helps students make the direct connection between their community engagements and the course objectives support their deep thinking about their civic roles.
- 5) Consistent with LMU's mission that commits to local and global justice, we specifically focus on working on issues and partnering with community organizations that seek to change the conditions that cause injustice and inequity. Community-based work should enhance equity, justice and the common good.

## Principles of Good Community-based Learning Practices

**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 academic and civic learning.

**Principle 2: -Do Not Compromise Academic Rigor.** Integrate community-based learning in a way that supports or enhances existing academic standards and expectations through related readings, presentations, and assignments.

**Principle 3: Establish Learning Objectives.** Development of a quality community-based learning course begins with explicit learning objectives.

**Principle 4: Establish Criteria for the Selection of Community Placements.** Establishing criteria for selecting community placements/ projects in order that students are able to extract more relevant learning from their experiences.

**Principle 5: Provide Educationally-Sound Learning Strategies To Harvest Community Learning and Realize Course Learning Objectives.** Discussion and assignments that provoke analysis of community experiences in the context of the course learning are necessary to ensure the community activity becomes an instrument of learning.

**Principle 6: Prepare Students for Learning from the Community.** Students realize the potential of community-based learning through appropriate preparation and orientation, examples of successful experiences, and recognition 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.

**Principle 8: Rethink the Faculty Instructional Role.** A shift in instructor role that would be most compatible with service learning would move away from information dissemination and toward learning facilitation and guidance.

**Principle 9: Be Prepared for Variation in, and Some Loss of Control with, Student Learning Outcomes.** The variability in community contexts necessarily leads to less certainty and homogeneity in student learning outcomes.

**Principle 10: Maximize the Community Responsibility Orientation of the Course:** One of the necessary conditions of a community-based learning course is purposeful civic learning. Designing classroom norms and learning strategies that not only enhance academic learning but also encourage civic learning are essential to purposeful academic learning.

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*Excerpted and modified from Howard, Jeffery, ed., Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning: Service-Learning Course Design Workbook, University of Michigan: OCSL Press, Summer 2001, pp. 16-19*

## Developmental Path toward Community Engagement among Students

To qualify for an Engaged Learning flag LMU requires the course to include 15 hours of engagement and related assignments that account for 20% of a student's course grade. With this said, in some courses a short term "encounter" may be more appropriate for the course or the level of student development. This type of encounter can be seen as a first step toward engaging students in more significant community-based work. Further, some students may be ready to engage independently with community organizations and apply their disciplinary knowledge to a community issue or problem. Because of the variation in the type and intensity of community-based activities, we propose that courses can fit into 3 categories of community learning experiences. This is particularly relevant for courses within a discipline (e.g. sociology, economic, film) or that have a similar substantive focus (e.g. homelessness, criminal justice, mental health). These categories are Introductory Courses, Reinforcement Courses, and Mastery Courses.

1. First year seminars as Introductory courses that include either a discussion about community context, "field trips" to communities, course activities that challenge students to grapple with issues such as justice, partnership, or direct service. *This course would NOT qualify for an Engaged Learning Flag.*

*Angela James' FYS - "Black Los Angeles". Students go on a community tour to important locations about which they have learned the history and culture of Blacks in Los Angeles and end with a local soul food lunch. This course could lead students to her Engaged Learning Flagged course in which students partner with Children and Family Services in Los Angeles and focuses on the experiences of African Am*

2. As students continue in their studies they would take Engaged Learning courses that provide Reinforcement of skills and knowledge they gained in Introductory and other courses, while testing their disciplinary theories and focusing on community contexts. Reinforcement courses would meet the requirements for the EL flag, whereas Introductory courses would not.

*In the course, The Elderly and the Law, Janie Steckenrider had students work with senior facilities by serving as companions, and by creating legal fact sheets that could be used by the organizations. She wanted students to get a first hand understanding of how senior mental capacities, trusts, guardianships, and related issues create a dilemma in finalizing legal issues.*

3. In upper level EL courses students would engage in more substantial projects and programs that encourage independent work and that illustrate students' Mastery of skills, knowledge and application of their discipline to community issues and concerns. These may be courses that encourage a high level of community-based research, advocacy, and policy, but always in partnership with communities

**Worksheet: Should this course be a Community-based Learning course?**

**Course Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Learning Objectives or Core Course Concepts (Achievable, Measurable)**

- 1) What are your learning objectives for this class? This can include different types of objectives:
- a) Specific academic content, skills, attitudes or behaviors. This can include theory, knowledge of communities, understanding of an issue, or how a community organization deals with specific issues, and more.
  - b) General academic skills that are important to your discipline and typically learned through your course. This can include critical thinking, problem solving, learning to become an independent learner and others.
  - c) Inter and Intra-personal learning that is important to your course. This might include respect for others, civic knowledge and engagements, ethical reasoning.

Specific Academic Content Objectives	
General Academic Skills Objectives	
Inter/Intra-personal Learning Objectives  *required for EL flag	

- 2) Envision how, beyond didactic teaching, students would best learn the materials related to each objective?

Specific Academic Content Objectives	
General Academic Skills Objectives	
Inter/Intra-personal Learning Objectives	

3) Review your answers to assess whether community engagement is listed. If not, CBL may not be an appropriate learning strategy for your course. If community engagement is listed, then what will be the specific learning and assessment strategies you can use to meet this objective? Be sure to make an explicit connection between the community work and the classroom strategies and student assignments that will help students explicate the work that they are doing in the community.

	Community Activity	Classroom Strategies	Student Assignments	Assessing Learning
<b>Specific Academic Content</b>				
Objective A				
Objective B				
Objective C				
<b>General Academic Skills</b>				
Objective A				
Objective B				
Objective C				
<b>Inter/Intra-personal Learning</b>				
Objective A				
Objective B				
Objective C				

Revised from Jeff Howard (2001). Service-Learning Course Design Workbook. Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning.

## Practical Elements of Planning your CBL Course

### Community Investment

- 1) How much time do you want students to invest in working with local communities? Fifteen hours during the semester are required if you want to obtain the EL Flag.
- 2) What are the prerequisite experiences you would want students to have to engage in the activity?
- 3) Do you want a study abroad experience to fulfill your community-based requirements?
- 4) How involved do you want to be in the students' community-based work? This could include leading a project that the students do with a community organization. For instance, you could develop a plan with your students to conduct a needs assessment of a local jail. You could also simply want to send students to any relevant community setting and have no involvement in the community-based work itself.
- 5) How do you want the students to engage in their work?
  - a) All together on a single project (generally faculty/community designed engagement),
  - b) In groups (generally faculty/community designed engagement), or
  - c) Individually with communities (generally chosen by students from volunteer opportunities in communities).

### **Choosing Organizations and Relationships**

- 1) How many students will be enrolled in the class? This may have implications for the types of projects in which your students can realistically engage.
- 2) With what types of organizations do you want your students to work?
- 3) On what types of activities do you want your students to work?
- 4) Do you personally have relationships with organizations that meet your needs?

### **Supports Needed for Community Engagement**

What type of support do you need to implement engaged learning

- 1) Financial
- 2) Relationship building with community organizations
- 3) Skills building workshops for students
- 4) Opportunities for students to learn more about Los Angeles communities (information packets, community tours, videos, etc)
- 5) Training or materials on:
  - a) Reflections with students
  - b) Assessing student learning
- 6) Faculty affinity groups to discuss projects
- 7) More access to community organizations

### **Additional Resources**

Engaged Learning at BCLA/LMU

<http://bellarmine.lmu.edu/forfaculty/engagedlearning/>

Engaged Learning Syllabi (Campus Compact)

<http://www.compact.org/category/syllabi/>