Best Practices for Academic Community-Engaged Learning

PLANNING & PREPARATION

- Community-engaged learning is only integrated into a course when it is appropriate and will enhance the academic learning in the course.

- The faculty member's goal for including community-engaged learning is not only to enhance academic learning, but also include civic learning and community learning. The best courses leverage academic learning and community learning on behalf of one another. Purposeful civic learning which directly and intentionally prepares students for active civic participation in a diverse democratic society is a defining trait of community-engaged learning, differentiating it from other community-based service and learning models (such as internships).

- There is a clear understanding of how academic community-engaged learning differs from other service based experiences such as student performed community service or co-curricular community-engaged learning.

SYLLABUS DEVELOPMENT

- The syllabus is developed or revised to incorporate the service experience into the teaching and learning objectives of the course. This includes:

  o Clearly stating that the course will utilize community-engaged learning and includes the rationale for its inclusion along with an explanation of what is meant by community-engaged learning.

  o Clearly describing the nature of the community-engaged learning placement or project including expectations about the time students should serve, if applicable.

  o Clearly describing how the service experience will be measured and what will be measured. Describe how students will be expected to demonstrate what they have learned.

  o Include, where possible, a description of the expectations for the public dissemination of students' work.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS [SEE ALSO 'PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING PEDAGOGY']

- Students do not receive credit for the time spent performing service, but for their knowledge in connecting their service experience with course content. Assignments therefore link the service and course content.

- Service experiences are connected to the course through readings and in-class presentations. The service component is not simply a service requirement grafted on to an existing course.

- The service included in the course is relevant and meaningful not only to the student but also for the community. The service is completed *with* the community not *for* or *to*.

- Where possible and practical, community partner co-designs syllabus, assignments and/or lectures with faculty member. Community partner may also suggest materials. At the very least, the issue identified, project and goals should be shared among stakeholders.

- The service/community work is grounded in an understanding of root causes of the social issues students are addressing/serving.

- Facilitation of the community-engaged learning experiences ties it into not only course objectives, but also student's lives and career path.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

- The faculty member is willing to become acquainted with each community agency (understands the agency mission, clientele, location, and student role) that students are placed with.

- The partnership is reciprocal – where each party bears equal responsibility for risk and equal opportunity for benefit. The partnership is grounded in an asset-based approach, rather than assuming a deficit within a particular community.

- The faculty member is thoughtful about what it is asking of the community partner, either explicitly or implicitly. The roles and expectations for each party involved should therefore be clearly outlined.

- Where possible, the faculty member conducts occasional site visits with the community partner. It is necessary however to agree to a good mechanism for consistent and clear communication between the faculty member and the community partner.

- Activities that prepare students for serving with the community are incorporated into the course. Minimally, this involves an introduction to the community/geographic area, to the agency and its staff and consumers, and to the work the students will undertake. But beyond such introductory efforts, students should be prepared to enter communities that may be unlike the community in which they were raised.

- The course will provide students with information about the agency and the clients and/or issue area that it serves before the service begins.

- The partnership is structured to be long-term. In other words, the faculty member has thought about how the relationship might sustain beyond the end of the term or put a termination/closure plan in place with the community partner.

- Activities are structured to allow the creation of authentic and meaningful relationships to develop between all parties involved.

Reflection

- Reflection on the service experience make explicit connections between student experiences and course content and includes dialogue about social, psychological, political, and ethical considerations involved in the service and the need for service.

- Reflection occurs before, during and after the community-engaged learning project or placement. Pre-reflection includes students' expectations, ideas about community, previous experience in similar places and/or with similar people.

- Opportunities for students to reflect on their understanding of systemic problems, privileges, opinions, preconceptions, their role as a citizen in a democracy and willingness to work for social change.

- Reflection opportunities are offered in multiple formats. Where possible and practical, the faculty member may wish to invite the community partner into the classroom to lead a reflection exercise.

Evaluation & Assessment

- Feedback is sought from all parties involved including impact on relevant knowledge, attitudes and behaviors.

- Determine whether the assets and needs have changed for the community partner. Were the shared goals for the community-engaged learning reached?

- Feedback is used to revise future courses and/or projects.