PART 2: Community-Based Learning & Research

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What is Community-Based Learning?

Community-based learning allows students to combine service in the community with academic inquiry. Community-based learning is a type of experiential learning; it is not simply community service nor is it an internship.

- Community-based learning is curriculum based, meaning that the community work is profoundly connected to and enhanced by the classroom lectures and assignments. As an educational philosophy, community-based learning fosters reciprocal learning and critical engagement and prepares students to be responsible participants in both their profession and their communities.

- Community service describes the efforts of individuals or groups who serve the community on a voluntary basis. The primary focus is the service being provided; there are usually no learning goals.

- Internships are designed for students in specific majors to gain hands-on experience for their future careers. This can be done for academic credit, but is often done without credit or pay. The focus is primarily on the students exploring career possibilities and networking for their own benefit.

At other schools, community-based learning might be referred to as service-learning or community service-learning. At Clark, we have decided on the phrase “community-based learning” because it highlights our longstanding commitment to the neighboring community and because it can be easily paired with its counterpart, community–based research. Although each campus chooses a label and definition that best exemplifies their institutional values and beliefs, the method of teaching is the same.

This pedagogy fosters the three signatures of Clark – “Learn through Inquiry”, “Make A Difference”, and “Experience Diverse Cultures”. Students are encouraged to ask questions and find solutions to real-world problems with hands-on experience and guidance from faculty members and community partners. We know that students are drawn to Clark because of these signatures, and that they often arrive with prior experience in community service and the expectation that they will continue to be involved in social activism and neighborhood work. Community-based learning is an attractive option, allowing them to combine service and academics.

Community based learning can play an important role in challenging students to use their acquired knowledge in new contexts. Janet Eyler, Professor at Vanderbilt University, explored this topic in a paper for the Mosakowski Institute in 2008-2009 and found that “in a well-designed and run program, the developmental processes that occur when students engage in real work as part of their academic studies mirrors the outcomes that lead to effective transfer.”
What Is Community-Based Research?

Community-Based Research, or community based participatory research, “is a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. [Community based research] begins with a research topic of importance to the community, has the aim of combining knowledge with action…” It is important to remember that not all research done in the community is community-based research, though.

CBR is “collaborative and change-oriented and finds its research questions in the needs of communities with the purpose of solving a pressing community problem or affecting social change. Each CBR project will differ in time, scope, and method of research depending on the specific research topic.” This form of learning is a growing trend among colleges and is a good fit for a research-oriented university like Clark. Other research universities, such as Tufts, sometimes refer to this field as promoting “active citizenship”.
## Principles of Community-Based Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the purpose of the research?</th>
<th>To provide the community with the tools and information necessary to enact change.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is the research intended to serve?</td>
<td>The local community and the academic community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whose knowledge counts?</td>
<td>That of both community members and academic experts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who determines what topics are researched?</td>
<td>Members of the local community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the rationale for choosing the research methodology?</td>
<td>Community empowerment and mutual learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who controls the research process?</td>
<td>Community members and the researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who has ownership over the results of the research?</td>
<td>Community members and the researcher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What aspect of research is emphasized?</td>
<td>Process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
History of Community-Based Learning

The foundations of community-based learning were laid in the late 19th century when Jane Addams and friends established Hull House in Chicago, premised on a philosophy of service to society through direct engagement with the community. She said, “The settlement is an effort to live among all sorts and conditions of men and insist that a life is not lived as it should be unless it comes in contact with all kinds of people. We all have dreams for our individual improvement; we all have our family life and we should endeavor in addition to our individual and family life to live a life that will bring us into a larger existence, and connect us with society as a whole.” In the early 20th century, John Dewey developed intellectual foundations of service-learning through his writings. To Dewey, service was profoundly connected with democracy, and he sought to design schools in which these values could be practiced. As the 20th century progressed, the national government created more opportunities for Americans to serve as programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, GI Bill, Retired and Senior Volunteer Program, and the Peace Corps.

The term “service-learning” was first used in 1966 to describe a project that linked eastern Tennessee college students with development organizations in the area. Through the last quarter of the 20th century, interest in public service and service-learning continued to intensify. In 1985, Campus Compact was formed as a coalition of college and university presidents whose primary purpose was to help students develop the values and skills of citizenship through participation in public and community service. In the past several years, service-learning has spread rapidly throughout communities, K-12 institutions, and colleges and universities. In a Five-Year Impact Summary compiled from annual surveys of member campuses, Campus Compact reports a consistent increase on virtually all measures of engagement. Over the years 1998-2003, Campus Compact membership grew from 548 schools to 924. The average percentage of students involved in service in those schools grew
from 10% to 36%. The total estimated number of students involved in service on member campuses grew from 274,000 to 1.7 million. The increase of student involvement occurred in significant part to the increase of faculty members involved, a number that doubled from 10,800 to 22,000.

Today, community-based learning has become institutionalized, and can be considered an academic field in and of itself: books, conferences, journals, and professional associations attest to its vibrancy and legitimacy. Scholars and practitioners differ over the terminology, as in all new fields, but there is a growing body of knowledge about “what works” and increased attention to community as well as educational benefits. In the following pages, you will find highlights from recent research, selected to whet your curiosity and inspire you to get your classes involved and engaged.

As a part of the Worcester community, Clark has played an active role in redeveloping the Main South area through its role in the University Park Partnership (UPP). The UPP is a partnership consisting of neighborhood residents and organizations, local churches and businesses, government officials, public schools, the Main South Community Development Corporation (CDC), and Clark. The UPP continues to create and support opportunities for faculty and students to contribute their time and talents to the neighborhood. Community-based learning provides faculty and students with the means to take advantage of those opportunities.
Key Elements of Community-Based Learning

The critical elements that must be included when developing a community-based learning course are the following:

1) COMMUNITY VOICE / STUDENT VOICE

Both community and student voices are essential in providing well-structured and beneficial community-based learning projects. Make sure that both parties are represented in the planning process. This can be challenging given the time constraints of the academic calendar, but the CEV Center staff can be especially helpful in this process.

2) THOUGHTFUL ACTION

Thoughtful action refers to the idea that the service being done is necessary and valuable to the community itself. When service is not perceived as necessary and valuable, students and community members will quickly lose motivation for the service and the partnership.

3) ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

Orientation and training are important first steps for any service experience. Students, faculty, and community members should be provided with information that will help to prepare for the experience. The CEV Center hosts orientations at the beginning of each semester open to all volunteers and community-based learning students. CEV Center staff can also help faculty with a brief presentation relevant for community-based learning courses.

4) REFLECTION / ANALYSIS

Reflection is a crucial component of the community-based learning experience and works as both a vehicle to process the experience and apply academic work.

5) EVALUATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Evaluation measures both the impact of the students’ learning experience and the effectiveness of the service in the community. Students, faculty and community partners should evaluate the effectiveness of the partnership and the service.
Reflection Is Key

When designing & implementing Community-Based Learning and Research curriculum, making space for reflection is key to practical, purposeful and memorable learning experiences for students. Below are some tools and strategies to make reflection a core piece of your Community-Based Learning course.

What is Reflection?

Reflection is an integral component of community-based learning. The process of reflection connects one’s service experiences to both the learning objectives of the course and broader social issues that are relevant to the community. Reflection can occur in various forms, some of which are described below. Critical reflection activities provide a place for students to actively engage the deeper meaning behind the service they have done. Reflection is also what makes the service something more than just “community service” or “volunteering”. It is an active learning process that allows students to digest their service experiences in a unique way.

Benefits of Reflection

- Enhancing self-awareness
- Developing a sense of community
- Encouraging better problem solving skills
- Creating stronger sense of civic responsibility
- Incorporating multiple perspectives into the critical thinking process
- Allowing for greater cultural competency and sensitivity
- Empowering students to continue to serve community after experience concludes

Sample Reflection Methods

- Personal journals
- Guided journals
- Electronic discussion groups
- Small-group work
- Ethnographies
- Agency presentations
- Reflective essays
- Artistic projects
- Case studies
- Role plays
- Class discussions
- Problem-solving papers
- Products created for agencies
- Portfolios
- Group problem solving

We do not learn from our experiences; We learn from processing our experiences.

- John Dewey
NOTES


iii University of Wisconsin-Madison Service Learning and Community Based Research Manual for Community Partners (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Madison, n.d.)


v Adapted from the Edward Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning, Comparison of Community-Based Research & Traditional Academic Research (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, n.d.).


The very best kind of education is obtained in doing things one's self under competent direction and with good guidance.

-Charles W. Eliot