

Civic Learning and Community Engagement Course Design Framework

Why would I design a course that includes community engagement? What are the benefits?

Civic engagement benefits faculty and students by providing diverse perspectives and relevant social problems applicable to all disciplines. Students get to apply course content to real social issues, which is more engaging and helps retain students. It strengthens the communities we serve through the success of our students by helping to meet community needs. All of this supports the achievement of student learning outcomes.

What does community engagement look like in a higher education classroom?

Community-engaged learning (CEL) and community-based learning are experiential teaching strategies that help students learn course content by participating in relevant community service. These pedagogies help students understand democratic engagement, advocacy, and social problems specific to the discipline they are studying.

How do I begin?

You do not have to do this alone! There are people at SLCC who can help you with this work. Contact Lucy Smith at the Engaged Learning Office at 801-957-4688 or lucy.smith@slcc.edu for academic and pedagogical questions. Contact Anita Lui at 801-957-4620 or anita.lui@slcc.edu in the Thayne Center for Student Life, Leadership, and Community Engagement for community partnership questions.

Introduction

This document provides best practices for faculty participating in the broad range of general civic and community engagement (outside of formal community-engaged learning designation) and ideas for implementing the [SLCC Civic Literacy Student Learning Outcome](#) (CLSLO). This can be a stepping stone to fully integrating CEL, although there are many ways to participate in community engagement outside CEL. The CLSLO reads:

Students develop civic literacy and the capacity to be community-engaged learners who act in mutually beneficial ways with community partners. This includes producing learning artifacts indicating an understanding of the political, historical, economic, or sociological aspects of social change and continuity; thinking critically about—and weighing the evidence surrounding—issues important to local, national, or global communities; participating in a broad range of community engagement and/or service-learning courses for community building and an enhanced academic experience.

The levels mentioned below are relative to the intensity of community engagement (basic=relatively low levels of engagement, better=moderate levels of engagement, best=high engagement). These categories are interrelated but are listed separately for ease of preview.

- **Community-engaged experiences enhance academic content and course design**
 - **Basic:** The instructor includes a few community-based activities that enhance educational content. Students identify their community events as a course requirement
 - **Better:** At least one or two stated learning outcomes address the community-based component and relate to the course's expectations. The faculty member identifies community events or activities and provides students with multiple choices. Students may also have the option to choose their service activities as well.
 - **Best:** Community experiences are related to multiple student learning outcomes. Community-based experiences are woven throughout the course (possibly via the six pathways to public service listed below) and ideally involve mutually beneficial service.

Note: Community engagement can be a focus even if no service is completed. General community activities may include community lectures or events, documentaries, community-based research, fairs, and museums. Attending conferences related to social issues or democratic engagement may also be a component. If community-based service is included, students can participate in different ways that benefit student learning and community needs. These include the [pathways to public service and civic engagement](#), such as community-engaged research, community organizing and activism, direct service, philanthropy, policy and governance, social entrepreneurship, and corporate social responsibility.

- **Intercultural learning**
 - **Basic:** Minimal learning about intercultural issues in the community is incorporated via readings, assignments, discussions, or content.
 - **Better:** Moderate learning is incorporated and focused on intercultural issues in the community through readings or course discussion and is linked to the discipline. Students increase their direct knowledge about privilege and oppression through individual acts, individual biases, and intercultural communication by interacting with diverse communities (may include attending cultural events, visits to religious organizations, or community lectures)
 - **Best:** Learning about systemic and institutionalized privilege and oppression, individual biases, and intercultural communication is woven throughout the course. Students productively engage in intentional dialog with those different from themselves (this may or may not include service).
- **Opportunity for analysis/critical reflection**
 - **Basic:** Students reflect after the experience in a free-form manner or don't reflect at all.
 - **Better:** At least one assignment requires students to reflect on the course's experiential and/or service component and how it impacts learning. Critical reflection around social issues is conducted in a semi-structured way.
 - **Best:** Critical reflection with guided reflection happens throughout the course and is revised and compiled in ePortfolio. Critical thinking around social issues and experiences is explicitly connected to discipline-based content formally and intentionally.

Note: Some [reflection resources and prompts](#) can be found online. Reflection can include in-class discussions, online discussion boards, written assignments, social media, video, and/or creative expression.

- **Partnerships**

- **Basic:** Students identify their partners or community events as a course requirement (a great first step for this is the SLCC database for community partners [Campus Groups](#)).
- **Better:** The faculty member identifies partners and community events and provides a list to students from which to choose that may meet student learning outcomes. Students may also have the option to select their partners as well.
- **Best:** Faculty collaborates and communicates with partners with the support of the Thayne Center, the Engaged Learning Office, or Campus Groups. The faculty member collaborates with partners in advance and regularly to develop scheduling and activities that mutually meet the needs of both students and partners. Faculty share their syllabus with partners as co-educators.

Note: There are many benefits to using official Thayne Center partners. Reciprocal engagement includes communication and collaboration. This ensures that community-identified needs are met and opportunities for student learning and growth occur.

- **Incorporation of civic learning**

- **Basic:** Minimal civic learning is incorporated via readings, assignments, discussions, or content that link highlights social issues.
- **Better:** Moderate civic learning is incorporated via readings, assignments, discussions or content that link the course to the discipline with a focus on social issues, democratic engagement, and relevant community issues. Discipline-based learning is loosely connected to social problems.
- **Best:** Civic learning is woven throughout the course via readings, assignments, discussions, and other content in an intentional manner. Discipline-based education is explicitly linked to understanding the root causes of social issues.

Note: There are [many readings and resources](#) focused on civic engagement that may be helpful.

- **Assessment**

- **Basic:** Students are given participation credit for community-based experiences.
- **Better:** The instructor uses tools to measure student learning outcomes from community-based experiences.
- **Best:** The instructor uses tools to measure student learning outcomes from community-based experiences. If feasible, feedback is received from the community partner on how students' presence impacted the organization and/or how the students performed on the assignment/activity.

If you find yourself landing in the "best" category, consider an official [Community-Engaged Learning designation](#). There is funding for faculty and students!

Bibliography:

Dahan, T., Seligsohn, A. (2013) Assessing the Quality of Engaged Civic Learning courses. *Engaged Civic Learning Course Design Workbook*. Retrieved January 2013.

Stanford Haas Center for Public Service, Pathways to Public Service and Civic Engagement, accessed March 12, 2019, <https://haas.stanford.edu/about/our-approach/pathways-public-service-and-civic-engagement>

Resources:

SLCC Civic Literacy Student Learning Outcome: <http://www.slcc.edu/gened/learning-outcomes.aspx>

Reflection resources and prompts: <http://www.slcc.edu/service-learning/faculty/reflection.aspx>

Civic engagement readings and resources: https://slccbruins-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/r/personal/jsmit931_slcc_edu/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc=%7Bf808d5ef-219b-442b-bf9c-8bba8a7d985e%7D&action=default&CID=8e850264-6225-4627-9f14-5bcfa7994174

Community-Engaged Learning Designation proposal: <http://www.slcc.edu/service-learning/faculty/index.aspx>