AS A FACULTY MEMBER: THINGS TO ESTABLISH WITH YOUR COMMUNITY PARTNER

A key part of planning an ACE project is continual communication with your community partner. In many cases, this means checking in with them every step of the way. For example, we highly recommend sharing your course syllabus with community partners.

1. The scope of your project. How often do you plan on working with the community partner? How long will each session be? How much time do you expect them to be putting into the project? It is also important to discuss how/where the final product of the project will be used. Who will have ownership over the final product? Will it be shared with the greater community or displayed somewhere?

2. What you're each getting out of it. Be clear about your intentions for the project and the learning outcomes you have in mind, as well as the community partner's goals for the project. How will you create a reciprocal relationship? What do you both hope to accomplish?

3. Best forms of communication. Will you be communicating with your community partner via email, phone, in-person meetings, or another method? Will you be checking in with them throughout the project to see how it's going? How can the community partner contact you if any questions or concerns arise?

4. Guidelines for students. What information do Carleton students need to know before starting this project? What does the community partner expect from Carleton students?

5. Will this project need an IRB or not? If your work involves research and will be shared with a public audience, it probably will need to go through an IRB review.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD ACADEMIC CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

1: Academic Credit is for Learning, Not for Service
Credit for academic courses is given to students based on the demonstration of academic learning. It should be no different in academic civic engagement courses. Academic credit is for academic learning. Therefore, the student's grade is for quality of learning and not for the quality (or quantity) of service.

2: Do Not Compromise Academic Rigor
The additional workload imposed by an academic civic engagement assignment may be compensated by additional credit, but not by lowering academic learning expectations. Adding an Academic Civic Engagement component, in fact, may enhance the rigor of a course because in addition to having to master the academic material, students must also learn how to learn from community experience and merge that learning with academic learning, and these are challenging intellectual activities that are commensurate with rigorous academic standards.

3: Set Learning Goals for Students
Faculty who are deliberate about establishing criteria for selecting community service placements will find that the learning students extract from their respective service experiences will be of better use on behalf of course learning.

We hold three criteria as essential in all academic civic engagement courses. First, the range of service placements ought to be circumscribed by the content of the course; homeless shelters and soup kitchens are learning appropriate placements for a course on homelessness, but placements in schools are not. Second, the duration of the service must be sufficient to enable the fulfillment of learning goals. A one time, two-hour shift at a hospital will do little for the learning in a course on institutional health care. Third, the specific service activities and service contexts must have the potential to stimulate course-relevant learning; filing records in a warehouse may be of service to a school district, but it would offer little to simulate learning in a course on elementary school education.

4: Provide Educationally-Sound Mechanisms for Community Learning
Experience, as a learning format, in itself, does not consummate learning, nor does mere written description of one's service activities. To maximize students' service experiences on behalf of course learning in an academic civic engagement course requires more than sound partnerships. Course assignments and learning formats must be carefully developed to both facilitate the students' learning from their community service experiences as well as to enable its use on behalf of course learning.

Learning interventions that instigate critical reflection on and analysis of service experiences are necessary to enable community learning to be harvested, and to serve as an academic learning enhancer. Therefore, discussion, presentations, and journal and paper assignments that provoke analysis of service experiences in the context of the course learning and that encourage the blending of the experiential and academic learning are necessary to help insure that the service does not underachieve in its role as an instrument of learning. Here, too, the learning goals set for the course will be helpful in informing that course's learning formats and assignments.

Principle 5: Provide Supports for Students to Learn How to Harvest the Community Learning

Faculty can help students realize the potential of community learning by either assisting students with the acquisition of skills necessary for gleaning the learning from the community, and/or by providing examples of how to successfully do so. The former would be to providing instruction on participant-observation skills; the latter would be to make accessible a file containing past outstanding student papers and journals to current students in the course.

Principle 6: Minimize the Distinction Between the Student's Community Learning Role and the Classroom Learning Role

Classrooms and communities are very different learning evironments, each requiring students to assume a different learning role. Generally, classrooms provide a high level of learning direction, with students expected to assume a largely learning-follower role. In contrast, communities provide a low level of learning direction, with students expected to assume a largely learning-leader role. Though there is compatibility between the level of learning direction and the expected student role within each of these learning contexts, there is incompatibility across them.

Therefore, if students are expected to assume a learning-follower role in the classroom, then a mechanism is needed that will provide learning direction for the students in the community (e.g. community agency staff serving in an adjunct instructor role); otherwise, students will enter the community wearing the inappropriate learning-follower hat. Correspondingly, if the students are expected to assume a learning- leader role in the community, then room must be made in the classroom for student to assume a learning-leader role. Otherwise, students will enter the classroom wearing the inappropriate learning-leader hat. The more we can make consistent the student's learning role in the classroom with her/his learning role in the community, the better the change that the learning potential within each context will be realized.

Principle 7: Re-Think the Faculty Instructional Role

Regardless of whether they assume learning-leader or learning-follower roles in the community, academic civic engagement students are acquiring course-relevant information and knowledge from their experiences. Because students carry this new information and these learning challenges back to the classroom, it behooves academic civic engagement faculty to reconsider their interpretation of the classroom instructional role. A shift in the instructor role that would be most compatible with these new learning phenomena would move away from information dissemination and move toward learning facilitation and guidance.

Principle 8: Be Prepared for Uncertainty and Variation in Student Learning Outcomes
In college courses, the stimuli and class assignments largely determine student outcomes. This is true in academic civic engagement courses too. However, in traditional courses, the learning stimuli are constant for all enrolled students; this leads to predictability and homogeneity in student learning outcomes. In academic civic engagement courses, the variability in community partnerships necessarily leads to less certainty and homogeneity in student learning outcomes. Even when academic civic engagement students are exposed to the same presentations and the same readings, instructors can expect that the context of the class discussion will be less predictable and the content of students papers will be less homogeneous than in course without a community assignment.

Principle 9: Maximize the Community Responsibility Orientation of the Course
If one of the objectives of an academic civic engagement class is to cultivate students' sense of community and social responsibility, then designing course learning formats and assignments that encourage a communal rather than an individual learning orientation will contribute to this objective. If learning in a course is individualized and tacitly understood as for the advancement of the individual, then we are implicitly encouraging a private responsibility mindset; an example would be to assign papers that students write individually and that are read only by the instructor. On the other hand, if learning is shared amongst the learners for the benefit of the corporate learning, then we are implicitly encouraging a group responsibility mentality; an example would be to share those same student papers with the other students in the class. This conveys to the students that they are resources for one another, and this message contributes to the building of commitment to the community and civic duty.

(Adapted from Praxis I: A Faculty Casebook on Community Service Learning, edited by Jeffrey Howard, 1993)