

Community Based Learning Faculty Handbook



**Social Action and Integrative Learning
George Mason University 2017**

Welcome

Thank you for exploring Community Based Learning pedagogy. This handbook was written with the intent to be a helpful entry point to the wealth of resources and scholarship available on this topic. Social Action and Integrative Learning exists to support your efforts to engage students in the community in ways that will enhance your learning goals for them. Please contact me to discuss your ideas and course goals.

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What is Community Based Learning?

At Mason, we use the term **Community Based Learning** (CBL) as an umbrella term for a number of pedagogies that involve students and faculty engaging in the community to enhance scholarship and learning.

Community Based Learning is a pedagogy that is encompassed in the broader spectrum of the **scholarship of engagement**, which also includes experiential education, undergraduate research, community-based research, and stronger relationships between academic institutions, their work, and local communities. “A scholarship of engagement is seen to link theory and practice, cognitive and affective learning, and colleges with communities” (Butin, 2006, p. 473).

As an **experiential learning** pedagogy, CBL is also related to other forms of active learning, such as internships, however it is unique in that it integrates academic learning objectives with goals for social responsibility and civic values, which many institutions of higher education, including George Mason University, promote.

Community Based Learning is not without criticism. There are plenty of examples of course-based service that were a demonstration of paternalism and a “we know what’s best for you” attitude toward some community members. Sometimes engagement in the community has led to students feeling stereotypes have been reinforced or that working toward the common good is a waste of time. It is a pedagogy that must be implemented thoughtfully.

Service-Learning

There are many definitions of service-learning but all reflect the principles captured in this definition from the Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges:

Service-learning is a teaching method which combines community service with academic instruction as it focuses on critical, reflective thinking and civic responsibility. Service-learning programs involve students in organized community service that addresses local needs, while developing their academic skills, sense of civic responsibility, and commitment to the community.

Community Service

A contribution of one's skills, talents, and time to address community needs. Whether the service is required or voluntary, and whether compensation such as pay or work leave is involved often differentiates community service from volunteerism. We include community service as a facet of CBL because personal development and new skills are often gained through community service. However, community service does not include intentionally designed and assessed learning objectives as service-learning does.

Community Based Research

Research projects developed jointly between faculty and community organizations such that both benefit. When students are involved in the projects, it also facilitates student learning of social issues, research methods and civic values.

Critical Service-Learning

Critical service-learning is differentiated from tradition service-learning by its focus on social justice and its goal to reveal and disrupt the social inequalities that are perpetuated by social institutions (Mitchell, 2008). Political action and advocacy is more typical of critical service learning than providing direct service to those in need. Teaching students to be critically reflective of their community engagement experience is also an important element.

Civic and Political Engagement

This term is used to describe a learning outcome of a CBL course. Through their engagement with the community, we often hope students will become more engaged in civic and political processes connected to the topic of study. However, it also refers to a pedagogy, engaging students in advocacy and political action in connection with course learning goals (Jacoby, 2003).

Why Should I Consider Using CBL in My Course?

The most compelling argument for using any pedagogy is that it is effective in reaching learning objectives. “Research heralds traditional service-learning programs for their transformative nature—producing students who are more tolerant, altruistic, and culturally aware; who have stronger leadership and communication skills; and who (albeit marginally) earn higher grade point averages and have stronger critical thinking skills than their non-service-learning counterparts (Astin & Sax, 1998; Densmore, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kezar, 2002; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993)” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 50-51).

A review of the early literature on the value of service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999) resulted in four key themes:

Learning from Experience. As a form of experiential learning, CBL captures all the benefits of learning by doing compared to the traditional method of lecturing and testing.

Connected Learning. It has been shown that intellectual development and personal development are integral to each other (Perry, 1970). CBL captures this more holistic way of learning, recognizing that transformative learning begins with making personal connections.

Social Problem Solving. Many believe that learning has not occurred if students cannot use their knowledge to solve problems. CBL can play an important role in learning how to analyze situations and think creatively.

Citizenship and Civic Life. One goal of higher education is to prepare students to be responsible citizens who are engaged in democratic life. The review found many sources citing service as a way to deepen students’ sense of social responsibility.

Eyler and Giles (1999) extensive study on the learning outcomes of service-learning found positive correlations between service-learning experiences and:

- Learning course content
- Motivation to work harder in class
- Ability to apply material from class
- Greater engagement and curiosity about course issues
- Greater retention of course concepts
- Increased openness to new ideas

- Greater critical thinking (when CBL is well-integrated into the course)
- New perspectives on social issues
- Self-awareness
- Personal efficacy
- Interpersonal skills
- Student/faculty relationships
- Leadership skills
- Appreciating diversity
- Reducing negative stereotypes
- Perception on the systemic nature of social problems
- Citizenship values, knowledge, skills, efficacy and commitment

Research, Teaching, and Service

While CBL is considered a pedagogy, many faculty find that it has a positive impact on their research and service, as well as their teaching. Understanding how generated knowledge is being used in the community, what questions are compelling to practitioners, and how one's work as a researcher and teacher can be applied to solve real problems for people one has a relationship with, is very powerful.

An Effective Fit for Course Goals

At SAIL, it is not our goal that every instructor use CBL. It is not a fit for all faculty or for all courses. CBL is only successful when it is a fit for the learning objectives of the course, the needs articulated by the community, and the teaching/learning philosophy of the instructor.

While it is not a fit for every course, CBL has been found to be a useful and engaging pedagogy in every discipline. The American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) has a book series (available in the SAIL library) that addresses service-learning, with compelling examples, in twenty different disciplines.

What Does SAIL Provide?

Social Action and Integrative Learning, housed in the School of Integrative Studies, provides professional development and support to faculty interested in community based learning.

- Administrative support
 - o Collection of risk management forms
 - o Collection of a learning contract (available online) through which learning goals and activities are outlined and Mason's role and responsibilities is clarified. SAIL will collect these forms and log them for the University's contract office
 - o Mid-semester check-in with community partners to confirm students are meeting expectations
 - o End-of-semester evaluations collected from community partners for feedback to both students and faculty
- Staff consultation on ways CBL might enhance a course, including suggestions for models that would be a good fit for the course and referral to organizations whose needs may be a good fit for the instructor's learning goals.
- In some cases, a trained undergraduate teaching assistant can be provided, to help with the administrative load that CBL can sometimes add to a course.
- A list of community organizations that have indicated interest in being a host organization to student learners. An orientation program on the goals of community based learning is provided to these organizations.
- Up-to-date information on Mason's risk management policy and forms to help faculty navigate these considerations.
- For courses designed such that students find their own community placements, resources for students include:
 - o Online searchable databases of volunteer opportunities

- o An online handbook for students enrolled in a CBL course
- o In-class presentations can be scheduled that discuss the goals of CBL, student responsibilities and expectations of professional behavior, and strategies for students to identify community organizations to work with

Principles of Good Practice in CBL

In order to realize the student and community benefits of CBL, the research has shown that high quality implementation of the pedagogy matters (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This section provides three sets of principles of good practice, articulated by leaders in the field, as useful guidelines for either developing a new course or examining an existing course to make it even more effective.

Quality Service-Learning Programs

(Eyler & Giles, p. 189)

This research found that service-learning contributes to personal development, cognitive development and learning when such courses are designed in a high quality way. They offer the following questions to assess the quality of such courses and programs:

- Do students have opportunities to do important work and take important responsibilities in community service placements?
- Are there close connections between academic subject matter and what students are doing in the community?
- Is reflection about the service integrated into classes through frequent opportunities for discussion and written analysis or projects?
- Does reflection challenge students to go beyond description and sharing of feelings to analysis and action planning?
- Do students work with people from diverse backgrounds and cultures?
- Are community projects developed in partnership with the community?

Wingspread Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning (Porter Honnet & Poulsen, 1989)

An effective and sustained program that combines service and learning:

1. Engages people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good.
2. Provides structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience.

3. Articulates clear service and learning goals for everyone involved.
 4. Allows for those with needs to define those needs.
 5. Clarifies the responsibilities of each person and organization involved.
 6. Matches service providers and service needs through a process that recognizes changing circumstances.
 7. Expects genuine, active, and sustained organizational commitment.
 8. Includes training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals.
 9. Insures that the time commitment for service and learning is flexible, appropriate, and in the best interests of all involved.
10. Is committed to program participation by and with diverse populations.

Good Practice in Curricular CBL Pedagogy

Adapted from Clayton and O'Steen (2010)

Integration. The community engagement component of a course should be integrated into the course, with students' community experiences considered in the context of the course readings, assignments, class discussions and other teaching and learning strategies. Simply adding a service requirement to an otherwise unchanged course is not truly using CBL pedagogy.

Academic Grounding. Do not sacrifice academic rigor. In a traditional course, credit is not given for reading a textbook, but for demonstrated learning from that reading, through exams, papers or other assignments. Similarly, in CBL, students do not receive credit for hours served, but for demonstrating what was learned from that experience. Simply having an experience is no guarantee that learning has occurred. Clearly stated learning objectives, thoughtfully planned CBL projects and well-designed assignments help facilitate this assessment of learning.

Attention to Civic Learning. In addition to learning course-related content, CBL courses help students understand the public purposes of a higher education in general and of a discipline in particular. Instructors must be clear enough about their own purposes that they are able to articulate to students the value of developing knowledge and skills in order to apply them to the common good.

Reflection. Copious research has shown that the reflection component of CBL is critical to producing the transformational learning this pedagogy is capable of. Some faculty skip the

reflection component, believing it to be more similar to a “touchy-feely” personal diary than an act of connecting experience and learning. Challenging reflection, through discussions or assignments, “generates, deepens, and documents learning” (Clayton & O’Steen, p. 107). Learning to facilitate such reflection is a skill that continues to develop over time.

Community and Student Voices. In traditional classrooms, the instructor may often be the only voice in the room. In CBR, the community-partners and students also have an important voice in the way projects, assignments, and class discussions take shape. True collaboration takes time and trust. Sustained community relationships (faculty and community partners who continue working relationships from year to year) are more likely to find success in developing trusting, collaborative partnerships.

Build Student Capacity to do Community Work. Students may not come prepared with the knowledge and skills needed to successfully meet the goals of a service project. Besides knowing how to complete the required tasks, they may need help managing relationships, dealing with ambiguous problems and roles. Attention to issues of diversity, privilege and power will help students engage with community members more sensitively. The ability to work collaboratively with others (other students, other community members) can and should be added to the learning objectives of the course itself.

Community Partnerships

The wrong way to approach CBL is to think of the project as bestowing a benefit on the community, or as doing outreach to the community. A better goal is to strive to have students think of themselves as being members of the community – *we* doing *with*, not *us* doing for *them*.

In a true partnership, everyone plays a role in creating the goal, devising the plan, contributing to the work and benefitting from it. *Reciprocity* is an important concept from service-learning scholarship. It describes a relationship such that both parties involved benefit from the service and both parties learn.

Working with Community Partners

- Build a relationship. Expect to work together over time to build trust and understanding. If possible, start with small projects and evolve into more complex collaborations over time. If you

plan to use a course model such that students find their own community placements, work with Social Action and Integrative Learning so we can forge those partnerships for you.

- Be prepared to be clear about goals. Share a draft syllabus or learning objectives.
- Be prepared to listen. Depending on the way the course is designed, the community partner may need to have a major voice in the design of the project.
 - o What are their strengths, current goals for growth, constraints, needs?
 - o How do they see themselves benefitting from a campus partnership?
 - o What role do they see students having in their work?
 - o How many students do they have the capacity to supervise and support?
 - o How much staff time do they have to devote to meeting with teams of students?
 - o Be reflective about the power dynamics at play. What assumptions might they be making given your connection with Mason? What assumptions are you making about them?
- Brainstorm project ideas together. Aim for a collaborative effort that reflects a mutually beneficial relationship.
- Recognize the burden CBL projects place on the community partner. Be clear that they can say “no” to this project without damaging the possibility for working together on project in the future.
- Be flexible. Not everything will go completely to plan. Truly excellent instructors are able use those unexpected moments to foster even more powerful learning than a perfectly executed plan.
- Develop a communication plan. Clarify who the primary contact people should be, whether phone, email or another form is most efficient, what time of day is the best to plan to make contact and whether scheduled weekly check-ins would be useful.
- Clarify the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved, including organization staff, faculty and students.
- Be realistic about students’ capabilities in terms of both the task related skills and their interpersonal and communication skills.

- Discuss a timeline in light of the semester schedule and the time needed to prepare students before the project begins.
- Communicate about the students' preparation, training and orientation. What should it include and who will do it?
- Discuss the role of organization staff in facilitating student learning. Are they available to come to class to help connect the project to the course? Do they have the background and time to facilitate informal, on-site reflection? Are they interested in responding occasional to the class reflection blog?
- Discuss an assessment plan. How will you know if the students have met their goal?
- Expect the nature of the relationship to change over time. It is a misinterpretation of the term *sustained relationship* to assume that the partnership will always be the same in nature. Needs fluctuate and the relationship should be responsive.

Reflection

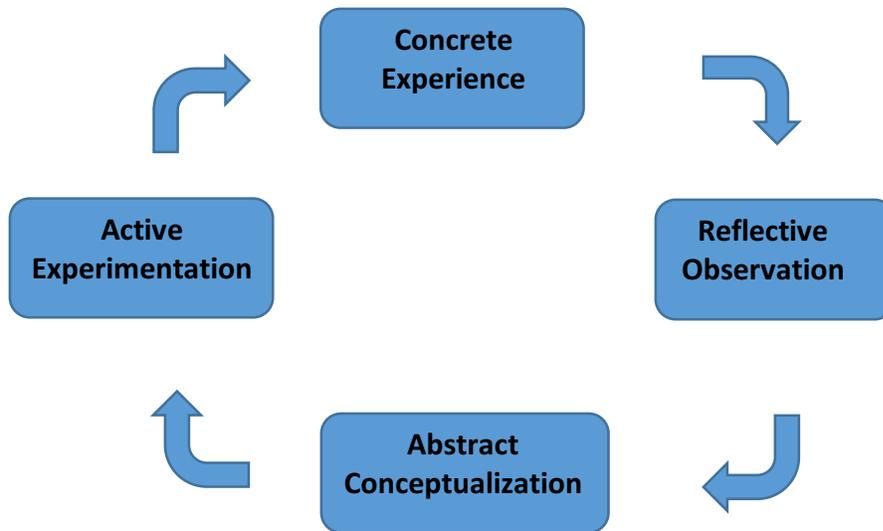
For nearly a century, learning theorists and researchers, including John Dewey, Jean Piaget, William Perry, and David Kolb have stressed that students learn through a combination of experience and reflection (Kendall, 1988). It is through reflection that students *learn*, it is how they make connections between what they did and saw and the theories they have read about.

Those who skip the reflection piece of CBL most often mistake it for a decidedly non- academic stream-of-consciousness in which students simply retell the events that occurred, sprinkled with emotional language they think the faculty want to hear. "It feels so good to know I made a difference." "I feel so guilty about my privileged life and now understand that with my education comes the responsibility to help others."

In actuality, high quality reflection exercises challenge students to analyze their community engagement in light of scholarship, to reject simplistic explanations and instead think in more complex ways, and to be able to be critical without completely rejecting. It is through reflection that students learn to recognize when assumptions are being made – either by others or themselves – and to question them.

The Kolb Model of Experiential Learning

David Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model was based on prior work by Dewey and Piaget. The model describes learning as a cycle through four types of experiences that differ in terms of how experience is perceived and processed. Good practice in experiential learning will engage students in all four types of experience and can begin anywhere in the cycle.



Concrete Experience	The “doing.” Having a hands-on experience, within a particular context.
Reflective Observation	Reviewing the experience, noting observations, feelings, and considering the event from the perspectives of many people involved.
Abstract Conceptualization	Connecting reflective observations to previous experience, existing theories and scholarship. Drawing conceptual conclusions as opposed to just a description of the experience.
Active Experimentation	Making a plan for applying what has been learned in a new context. This stage leads back to an active experience and begins the cycle of learning again.

The Four C's of Reflection

A framework that has guided CBL for many years is the four C's of reflection by service-learning researchers Eyler, Giles and Schmeide, (1996). It is good to review one's syllabus and reflection assignments in light of these recommendations:

Continuous. Reflection occurs before, during and after the experience. Pre-reflection prepares students to thoughtfully engage with the community organization and community members. Reflection during service occurs through in-the-moment self-awareness about one's observations, perceptive filters and assumptions. Post-service reflection analyzes new experiences in light of previously held beliefs to create new conceptualizations.

Connected. Reflection must connect the experience to academic content. Community engagement helps students see statistics as representing real people. It can demonstrate theory and help students challenge its applicability in all contexts.

Challenging. Reflection should push students to think in more complex ways. It should challenge their assumptions and question what they believe to be true.

Contextualized. Reflection should be appropriate for the course context and content and the nature of the community engagement experience. Intentional choices should be made about the type of reflection process, where the reflection will occur, what questions and topics will be explored. Reflections may be informal or highly structured, completed individually or in small or large groups, and may include community partners, faculty members, or only students.

Evaluating and Responding to Reflection

As has been mentioned, a good metaphor for maintaining the academic rigor of a CBL course is to treat the community engagement experience as you would a textbook. Students do not receive credit for reading the required text, but for demonstrated learning through exams, papers or other assignments. Similarly, credit is never awarded for simply completing the service hours, but for demonstrating what was learned from the experience.

Course discussions and reflection assignments should be designed such that students do not just report what they did, but must weave together concepts from the course and the experience in a complex way. Assignment descriptions should be clear about expectations and

provide a grading rubric or an example of quality work if possible. The following are useful criteria for assessing the levels of student learning (Bradley, 1995):

Level One

- Gives examples of observed behaviors or characteristics of the client or setting, but provides no insight into reasons behind the observation; observations tend to be one dimensional and conventional or unassimilated repetitions of what has been heard in class or from peers.
- Tends to focus on just one aspect of the situation.
- Uses unsupported personal beliefs as frequently as “hard” evidence.
- May acknowledge differences of perspective but does not discriminate among them.

Level Two

- Observations are fairly thorough and nuanced although they tend not to be placed in a broader context.
- Provides a cogent critique from one perspective, but fails to see the broader system in which the aspect is embedded and other factors which may make change difficult.
- Uses unsupported personal beliefs and evidence but is beginning to be able to differentiate between them.
- Perceives legitimate differences of viewpoint.
- Demonstrates a beginning ability to interpret evidence.

Level Three

- Views things from multiple perspectives; able to observe multiple aspects of the situation and place them in context.
- Perceives conflicting goals within and among the individuals involved in a situation and

recognizes that the differences can be evaluated.

- Recognizes that the appropriate actions may depend on the situation. Thoughtful about the factors that affect their choices.
- Makes appropriate judgments based on reasoning and evidence.
- Has a reasonable assessment of the importance of the decisions facing clients and of their responsibility as a part of the clients' lives.

Traditional and Critical Service-Learning

The service-learning scholarship differentiates traditional and critical service-learning. Traditional service-learning focuses on experiential learning and the values of social responsibility and the common good. Critical service-learning goes beyond the goal of meeting community needs, but also seeks to understand and change the institutions and structures that maintain unequal distribution of power and privilege.

Critical service-learning uses challenging reflection processes to help students learn to question the status quo and think through what would need to happen (politically, economically, culturally) to achieve greater social equality. Students learn to see the world around them with new eyes and reflect on critical questions about diversity, privilege and power. "Our approach to service-learning should ensure that human differences are viewed in their context, not in isolation or by the standards of one's own perspective, background, and experiences." (Jacoby & Associates, 1996, p. 38).

Some CBL scholars believe it is the goal of our work to push the field toward a critical approach. At SAIL, we believe CBL is a powerful pedagogy for those who want to teach about interrupting the social structures that maintain unequal distribution of power and privilege. However, it is a powerful pedagogy for other learning goals as well, and we support the high quality use of CBL those also.

CBL Course Design

CBL courses vary widely. Below is a list of many options to consider when designing a course. The creative combination of models often helps facilitate a fit between community benefit, course learning goals, and the developmental readiness of the students. Since CBL courses can vary in so many ways, it is important to not assume that students know what to expect. Each of these approaches requires faculty to be clear about expectations of the amount of time and type of work expected.

Types of Action

Direct Service describes providing service directly to individuals while at the agency site or in the community. Students are engaged face-to-face with community members. Examples include tutoring children, serving meals at a shelter, or facilitating oral histories at a hospice.

Behind-the-Scenes Service describes serving on-site at an agency, organization, or school but not face-to-face with the people it serves. Examples include helping with a fundraiser event or sorting donations.

Indirect Service describes working on behalf of an issue, population or community of concern but removed from the actual site. Examples include organizing a canned food drive for a pantry or producing a report on the impact of a certain social issue on the local community to include in grant proposals.

Consultation describes students submitting recommendations to a community organization based on course-based knowledge. Examples include proposing a marketing campaign for a nonprofit organization or suggesting the optimal design for a donor database. Often, multiple student teams from a single course will submit proposals to the same organization for their consideration. Feedback from the organization staff on the strengths of each proposal provides a rich learning opportunity.

Innovation Projects describe initiatives created and implemented by students to benefit the community partner. After meeting with community partners to understand the social issue, services available, community characteristics and current needs, students use their own creativity and problem-solving skills to propose and ultimately implement an innovative new project. This is an excellent model for senior capstone courses, challenging students to

integrate the learning from multiple courses and apply it in creative ways. An example includes: after interviewing the teachers, staff, and students of a local school, the student team proposes a way to use locally grown produce to improve the taste and nutrition of school lunches, while staying within the current food budget. They work with local food producers and school staff to facilitate the arrangements and agreements to implement the plan for one semester as a pilot project.

Community Based Research describes students and faculty engaged with community partners in conducting a research project. Community members are essential in defining the research questions to be addressed and how the results should be shared and used. An example includes working with an after-school tutoring program to gather data on reading scores and student attitudes toward school to inform the design of the program.

Individual, Group, or Full Class Experience

CBL courses vary in terms of whether students work on their service or research project alone, in a small group, or with the full class. Direct service done individually can allow the student to tailor the experience to his or her interests and personal learning goals. However, they tend to rely on a higher level of developmental readiness than direct service projects performed as a group. Group or full class projects that require the students to work collaboratively in problem solving and task coordination offer a powerful civic learning experience. If direct service rather than community based research or an innovation project or is the goal, it may be a challenge for community partners to handle large numbers of students at once. In such circumstances, students may all serve the same organization but scheduled at different times, or they may serve several organizations of the same type.

Another way to frame this element is as the decision to with a single community partner or several. Using the metaphor of the community engagement experience as a text, when all the students are working at one site (whether they are together or going at different times of the week), they are reading from the same text. When the students work at multiple sites, the students have read different texts and are able to share their learning with each other.

Community/Faculty Directed Projects or Community/Student Directed Projects

In some CBL courses, the faculty member and community partner collaborate prior to the first day of the course to determine the nature and scope of the project. In other courses, it is the Community Based Learning Faculty Handbook, George Mason University

student(s) that seek out a community partner to work with and negotiate the details of the project. Again, the developmental readiness of the students is a critical consideration if the needs of the community partner are to be balanced with the student's goals. A learning contract (SAIL provides a worksheet) can help students facilitate a conversation with community partners around mutually beneficial objectives of their CBL project.

Innovation Projects and Community Based Research can sometimes represent a hybrid model, such that the faculty member and community partner collaborate to define the parameters of a student initiative (usually well in advance of the first class), but it is up to the students to define what the project will be given the community partner's articulated assets and needs.

Models of Structure

The Required Course Component describes a model in which all students are engaged in the CBL project. The advantage of this approach is that integration of the community experience into the course assignments and class discussions is easier since all the students have the CBL experience in common.

Service as an Optional Course Component describes a model in which CBL is one of several options from which students choose. For example, students can choose between a writing research paper, giving a presentation, or doing a CBL project. The CBL option is coupled with appropriate integration and reflection assignments. The advantage of this approach is that the students who engage with the community are self-motivated and invested in it, as it was their choice to do so. When provided a menu of course activities, students are able to choose something that matches their learning style.

The Fourth-Credit Option describes giving students enrolled in a three-credit course the option to earn a fourth credit by engaging in course-related CBL project and demonstrating their learning by integrating course content to the experience. The faculty and the student negotiate the parameters of the service activity and the integration and reflection assignments through a learning contract. At Mason, the general guideline is 1 academic credit is equivalent to 45 hours of community work (time invested in reflection and other assignments does not go toward these hours). The advantage of this option is that the CBL project is entirely student-initiated and taps into the learning desires of students. It can be a good option for instructors who are new to CBL pedagogy.

Independent Studies describe individually created learning contracts in which the CBL project and reflection assignments are agreed upon with a faculty sponsor. Either individually or in a seminar format, the students and faculty meet regularly to discuss pertinent readings and the field experience itself. Typically, a culminating activity is involved, such as a paper or other project, which meets the needs of the community partner and engages the students' knowledge of associated disciplines. The advantage of this option is the extensive amount of time on the project permits students to invest deeply in an organization as well as the academic questions it poses. This also can provide excellent professional development for the students. Again, at Mason, the general guideline is 1 academic credit is equivalent to 45 hours of community work, with time invested in reflection assignments not included in those hours.

Course Planning

While designing a CBL course is more nuanced and complex than can be described “in six easy steps” the following guidelines can be useful for approaching the task of course design. Although they are described in a linear way, each step influences the others such that steps are often revisited and adjusted.

1. Articulate the course learning objectives

According to Jeffrey Howard, learning theory generally uses five categories of learning goals that can be enhanced by CBL (Howard, 2001). It is helpful to consider these in light of your other course objectives:

Course-specific academic learning	Knowledge or skills related to the course itself
Generic academic learning	Such as problem solving, critical thinking, clear written and oral communication skills
Learning how to learn	Evaluating the credibility of new information, applying it to new situations or contexts
Community learning	Such as understanding how organizations work, navigating both bureaucracy and ambiguity

Inter- and intra- personal learning	Such as the ability to work collaboratively, and building self-awareness of strengths, role in teams, leadership style
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Once the learning objectives of the course are clear, it will be easier to determine if CBL is a pedagogy that fits with the goals of the course. It is also an important principle of CBL that credit is given for demonstrated learning rather than completed service hours. It will be easier to create integration and reflection assignments that provide the opportunity for students to demonstrate their learning if the learning objectives are clearly articulated.

2. Foster partnerships with community organizations

Community organizations should be considered colleagues. They assist faculty and students in facilitating learning and creating meaningful projects that address real community issues. In some courses, faculty have students find their own community placements. In these cases, working with SAIL helps us to forge partnerships with the organizations that host our students. In project-based course models, it is ideal for instructors to meet with representatives of community organizations prior to the course to explore what a partnership could look like, share the learning objectives and ideas for the CBL model. In this way, the partnership can be a true collaboration, with the CBL project co-created by the faculty member, students and community partner.

Faculty and community partners should also establish a communication plan, clarify roles and expectations, and discuss accountability. Some faculty prefer to work with SAIL as a liaison to the community partners. These decisions should be clear from the beginning.

3. Plan for a meaningful community engagement

In order for service to be meaningful, the work being done should be valuable to the community. Participants should feel involved and useful. Students should “experience situations which challenge their ways of knowing and allow them to expand their perspectives” (Brown & Huck-Watson, 2006). The options described in the previous section on CBL Models should be evaluated to determine the best fit.

Working with the community partner(s) and in some cases with the students, the parameters of the CBL project should be clearly defined. The amount of time expected of students to meet the

project goals, clarification on what will be determined to be quality work and other expectations should be clearly articulated in the course syllabus.

4. Integrate the CBL project and reflection into the other teaching/learning strategies It is an important principle of good practice that the CBL project should not be an add-on to an otherwise unaltered course. The students' experiences should be integrated into class discussions, connected to readings, theories, and other course content, and woven into at least one assignment. Reflection is best when it is on-going, so decisions about using regular in-class reflection discussions, short weekly reflection writing should also be thoughtfully made.

5. Incorporate education, orientation, and training into the syllabus

Before sending students out into the community, they need to be prepared to be effective. Brown and Huck-Watson (2006) describe three areas of preparation:

- Education: information about the social issue
- Orientation: an overview of the community organization's mission, history and services and information about the community context, its history and relevant demographics
- Training: the skills needed to safely and effectively complete the tasks involved in the project

6. Plan for both learning assessment and evaluation of community impact

Faculty should determine in advance how to evaluate whether the learning objectives have been met through the CBL project. Reflection assignments can be a challenge for students who are unfamiliar with them, so creating a rubric for how these assignments will be evaluated BEFORE assigning them will help the faculty member more clearly articulate his/her expectations for the assignment.

Faculty should also work with the community partner(s) to determine how impact on the community will be assessed. Finally, course evaluation should explore whether the CBL aspect of the course enhanced student learning of the course learning objectives.

Risk Management

Faculty can limit their liability by working closely with the SAIL and George Mason University's Risk Management Office. Due care and judgment must always be exercised to assure that the University does not knowingly place students in situations fraught with danger or unreasonable risk.

Experiential learning involves some risks that might not be encountered in a classroom environment. It is important that students, George Mason University, and community organizations understand their liabilities and responsibilities. The following information is from the George Mason University Service-Learning Handbook (1999).

Educational Appointment

Students must be representing George Mason University and must be assigned in writing to specific learning experiences as part of their academic program. This appointment should cover their duties and responsibilities. It must also designate the Mason faculty mentor. It is further recommended that the University have a *Letter of Understanding* with the external organization that covers that assignment of the service-learning student(s). All of these components are integrated into the Service-Learning Agreement available through SAIL.

Liability Insurance

Service-learning students and Mason faculty members acting within the scope of the aforementioned Educational Appointment are considered to be *agents* of the Commonwealth. As such, they are covered by the State's Risk Management Plan for any *simple negligent acts*. This coverage does not extend to illegal or willful acts. In the event the external organization requests a Certificate of Insurance, the GMU Risk Management Office (MSN 2B9 or Phone Number 993-2595) will provide such.

Assumption of Risk

Service-learning students should be aware that the work site may not provide the normal protections offered on campus. Students may be subjected to coarse speech, lack of privacy, unsanitary circumstances, difficult transportation requirements, and possibly unsafe conditions. The prudent faculty mentor and student must assess these conditions when developing the Community Based Learning Faculty Handbook, George Mason University

experiential learning project. George Mason University, the Commonwealth of Virginia, and their agents are not guarantors of a student's safety, health, or the negligent acts of third parties. All students should complete the risk release form, available through SAIL, prior to engaging in any experiential learning project.

Health and Background Checks

Service-learning students are responsible for their own medical expenses and to carry personal health insurance. The external organization may require vaccinations or TB tests as a requirement of service as well as criminal background checks. It is the responsibility of the learner to complete these requirements at their own expense.

Vehicles

Service-learning students will check out and operate a GMU vehicle only when specifically approved by their faculty mentor. In this case, the University's insurance will cover any claims in accordance with the Code of Virginia. In the event of an accident, students are expected to notify Nationwide Insurance, (1-800-421-3535), the State Police, 911, the GMU Motor Pool (993-2442), and the GMU Risk Management Office (993-2595). Students are *not* covered by University insurance when operating their own or another's vehicle. In the event the service-learning student is expected to operate a vehicle owned by the external organization, the matter of who will be insuring its operation must be resolved and addressed in the *Letter of Understanding*.

Property

Students are responsible for safe-guarding Mason property that they use in their experiential learning project. In the event of its damage or loss, the University's property insurance may be used; however, the department loaning the property must assume the \$1,000 deductible per incident. Neither the personal property of the student nor the property of the external organization is covered by the University's insurance.

Contractual Agreements

All Letters of Understanding and Contracts with external organizations must be approved by the University's Legal Affairs Office (MSN 2A3, 993-2619). The University is prohibited from

agreeing to *hold harmless, indemnify*, of designate external organizations as *Additional Insured* under the State's Risk Management Plan (insurance).

Special Consideration when Working with Children

Social Action and Integrative Learning makes the following recommendations to CBL students and clients regarding abusive situations that could potentially occur while working with children (from the Service-Learner's Handbook, 1995):

Screening Volunteers

Service-learning students working directly with children should be screened according to the guidelines of the agency before their placement at the site. Screening may include a personal interview with the supervisor, police background check, criminal history disclosure statement, fingerprinting and/or letters of recommendation. Service-learning students working with children should ask their agencies about screening procedures. Site supervisors have their right to refuse placement of any student.

Educating Volunteers

Prior to their placement, service-learning students working with children should be informed of the potential liability risks in areas of sexual harassment, child molestation, one-on-one situations and physical and mental abuse. Service-learning students working with children should ask their agency about training procedures to avoid these situations.

Taking Precautions

Service-learning students are advised to take the following precautions:

- ◆ Avoid one-on-one situations that place you alone with a child or isolate you and the child from the main area of activity.
- ◆ Respect the privacy of the child. Do not become intrusive or curious more than is necessary when working with the child.
- ◆ Respect your own privacy. Some children express a natural curiosity about boyfriends or girlfriends, personal relationships, and even sexual activity. Use common sense when discussing sensitive subjects and do not go into details about your private life.

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