Community-Engaged Teaching at UVa: Stakeholder Benefits

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Community-Engaged Teaching: Summary of Stakeholder Benefits

Student Benefits:

- Improved cognitive, behavioral, emotional, and social engagement outcomes
- Improved persistence and grades among first generation, minority, and low-income students
- More positive attitudes toward diversity and social justice
- Increased empathy for others
- Improved cultural competence
- Clarified personal values
- Increased commitment to civic responsibility during- and post-college
- Improved communication and leadership skills
- Increased motivation to engaged with course content

Institutional Benefits:

- Improved faculty instructional productivity
- Increased understanding of community needs
- Improved relationships with local communities
- Improved justification for higher education’s value proposition through the increased contributions to the public good

Faculty Benefits:

- Increased understanding of their teaching effectiveness and motivation to improve their effectiveness
- Increased understanding of student learning process
- Improved faculty understanding of real-world applications of course content
- Increased opportunities to engage in action research and test theories

Community Benefits:

- Improved relationship with university partners
- Increased accountability for student volunteer behavior
- Increased alignment between community partner needs and university resources, both human and material
- Increased access to corps of young, energetic volunteers to advance organizations’ mission
- Increased cultivation of future donors
Benefits of Community-Engaged Teaching: Summary of Research

The 2030 Plan sets ambitious goals for cultivating citizen leaders, fostering a culture of inclusiveness and trust, and transforming the University’s relationship with the local community. The National Science Foundation, the American Association of Colleges and Universities, and the American Association of State Colleges and Universities among others endorse and support the expansion of community-engaged instruction as a powerful strategy for advancing these goals and improving student outcomes. The Carnegie Foundation established its Community Engagement Classification in 2006 to help support best practices, as defined by the research, in supporting fostering positive and ethical community partnerships. The central strategy they identify for advancing better community relationships and ensuring students acquire the necessary skills for successful community engagement is through course embedded service opportunities for students.

The following is a summary of the research on the impact community-engaged instruction has on student learning and behavior, faculty teaching and scholarship, institutional culture, and community well-being. A glossary of terms associated with this type of pedagogy is included at the end (page 8).

Student Benefits:

A substantial body of research supports embedding service opportunities for students into courses as a form of experiential learning. Multiple meta-analyses and literature reviews show consistent positive impact on cognitive, behavioral, emotional and social engagement outcomes (Burch et al. 2019; Salam et al., 2019; Kilgo, Ezell-Sheets & Pascarella, 2014; Yorio & Ye, 2012; Celio et al., 2011; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler et al., 1997). Particularly strong positive outcomes have been found for first generation, low-income and minority students for improvement in grades and persistence (Celio et al. 2011; Kuh et al. 2007, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Tinto, 1997, 2006). Based on strength of the research evidence, the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise identified community engaged instruction as a “high impact educational practice” (AAC&U, 2008).

Community-engaged courses also help shape positive student attitudes towards diversity and social justice (Moely & Ilustre, 2016; Toporek & Worthington, 2014; Asghar & Rowe, 2017; Davis et al., 2014). Multiple, high-quality curricular community engagement experiences show significant post-graduation impact on students’ cultural competence, sense of civic responsibility and level of active involvement with their local communities (Richards et al., 2016; Moely & Ilustre, 2016; Fullerton et al., 2015; Pelco et al., 2014; Garcia & Longo, 2013; Celio et al., 2011). Other studies show improved communication and leadership skills among students participating in community-engaged courses (Marshall et al. 2015; Weiler et al., 2013; Celio et al., 2011).

The key elements of community-engaged pedagogy that support these outcomes have been well documented and have informed best practice guidelines (Eyler, 2009). The opportunities for students to apply their classroom learning to real-world contexts and then engage in structured reflection, which are the primary distinguishing features of this pedagogy, are highly effective in moving learning beyond basic comprehension to critical thinking and application. Course content can also become more relevant and meaningful through application to a real-world experience (Ashgar & Rowe, 2017; Richards et al., 2016; Hart 2015; Butler & Christofili 2014; Steinke & Buresch, 2002; Sedlak et al, 2003; Vogelgesang &
Astin, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999). Because of the conditions, students often become more active learners and are better able to apply content knowledge (Marshell et al., 2015).

While other teaching strategies may challenge students to engage in higher order thinking and reflection, course embedded service opportunities can provide additional emotional motivation to engage with the concepts presented in class (Rose, Rose, & Norman, 2005; Hart & King, 2007). This emotional attachment to course content is fostered by several elements found in these classes: more interaction with faculty and other mentors; and more conversation amongst students about the service experience and course material (Wolff & Tinney, 2006). Engaging in sustained dialogue across difference with peers about their community experiences also improves appreciation of and respect for diversity (Keen & Hall, 2009; King & Magolda, 2005; Vogelgesang & Astin 2000). In addition, these dialogues with peers can enhance the students’ sense of belonging, fostering empathy and helping to clarify values (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000; Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2002; Marshell et al., 2015).

Given these findings, it is clear that expanding the University’s capacity to offer community-engaged courses will address some of the key goals of the 2030 plan:

- “Prepare students to be servant-leaders in a diverse, globally connected world.” (Goal II.a)
- “prepare them to be productive servant-leaders in a diverse, globally connected world, regardless of their careers or professions.” (Initiative 2)
- “Promote a culture of integrity, mutual respect, excellence and innovation.” (Strategic Goal I.e.)
- “Continuously promote and strengthen an inclusive community of trust... We will also encourage and make it easier for students, faculty, and staff to build bridges across difference, because any community is only as strong as the connections within it.” (Strategic Goal II.b.)

Institutional Benefits:

Research on the benefits to higher education institutions of adopting embedded service-learning pedagogy have focused on the impact it has on student outcomes. At the most basic level, it shows positive effects on retention and persistence (Lockeman & Pelco, 2013; Pascarella, Salisbury, & Blaich, 2011; Keup, 2006; Bringle et al., 2004). It is also a highly effective way to provide students with real-world learning opportunities and fosters important workplace skills like communication and interpersonal abilities (Kohlbry & Daugherty, 2013). For institutions interested in fostering stronger community relationships, service opportunities embedded within courses as an approach to community service ensures better accountability to community partners than co-curricular service-learning. The expanded leadership role that faculty play in facilitating the partnership combined with the reflective exercises for students help to ease the burden on the community partner in managing student attitudes and behaviors (George-Paschal et al, 2019). Co-curricular service-learning typically lacks this type of structure.

At a macro-level, the evidence base around student outcomes, combined with growing interest in fostering better community relationships, has resulted in a growing number of higher education institutions actively promoting this pedagogy. As of 2020, 359 institutions have successfully applied for and received the Carnegie Foundation’s Community Engagement Classification (https://www.brown.edu/swearer/carnegie/2020-release). UVa’s Institute for Advanced Studies in
Culture found 90 percent of the higher education institutions surveyed reported some level of centralized, community-engaged pedagogy as part of their strategic efforts to improve community engagement (Yates & Accardi, 2019).

This evidence, though not as developed as the student-focused research base, suggests that supporting faculty to develop community-engaged courses would advance the 2030 Plan in the following ways:

- “Discovery is also not confined to the realm of research. Great learning experiences also involve moments of discovery, which enrich the lives of our students. The idea of learning as an opportunity for discovery should guide how we approach our teaching...Faculty will help students learn in engaging and innovative ways...” (Strategic Goal 3)
- “Third-Century Faculty Initiative—We will provide faculty the tools and support they need to take advantage of the latest developments in pedagogy, including experiential (learning)...” (Strategic Initiative 3)

**Faculty Benefits:**

The effects on faculty of adopting this pedagogy are not as fully researched as those on students. This pedagogy is challenging in terms of planning and implementation. The traditional lecture format typically used by faculty, and that their departments are engineered to support, does not meld easily with community-based experiential learning. However, for those faculty that do adopt this pedagogy, there is evidence of rewards. The research shows community engaged teaching pedagogy has positive impact on teaching effectiveness through increased faculty-student interactions around the service opportunities and reflection exercises. Faculty have more opportunities to observe student learning processes, and how their instructional strategies either do or do not support their learning objectives (Darby and Newman, 2014; Pribbenow, 2005). This results in faculty enhancing their teaching ability, or even transforming their teaching styles, and improving their instructional productivity in terms of student engagement and understanding of course content (George-Paschal et al., 2019; Leon, Pinkert, & Taylor, 2017; Carrington et al. 2015; Pribbenow, 2005). Faculty also can acquire an increased critical understanding of the content they are teaching and how it can be applied to real-world problems—how they can make clear, logical connections for students (George-Paschal et al., 2019; Carrington et al. 2015; Pribbenow, 2005). Not surprisingly, faculty report this type of instruction is more rewarding than traditional the traditional lecture-based pedagogy (George-Paschal et al., 2019; Cooper et al., 2014; Pribbenow, 2005; Abes et al., 2002; Hammond, 1994).

Community-engaged instruction can also provide an opportunity for faculty to engage in action research and test theories in real-world contexts (Darby & Newman, 2014). The improved understanding and connection to the community and its needs through the partnerships they have either created or participate in can inspire new research projects (Pribbenow, 2005).

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Community Benefits:

The research on the benefits to community partners resulting from engaged instruction is very limited, consisting of small-scale qualitative studies. Most of the literature reports on indirect benefits through improved student and faculty understanding of community needs (Salam et al., 2019). For those that include direct data from community partners, they find that communities appreciate access to university resources, intellectual capital, and a corps of young, energetic volunteers (Coleman & Danks, 2016; Srinivas et al., 2015; Westover, 2012; Tryon et al., 2008; McNall et al., 2008; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Bassinger & Bartholomew, 2006; Bushouse 2005; Seifer & Connors, 2007; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000). A couple studies found that university partnerships improved community self-efficacy in terms of negotiating a more mutual and reciprocal relationship with the university (Gerholz et al. 2017; Sanders et al., 2015) and cross-generational connections (Laks et al., 2016; Penick et al. 2014). It is also noteworthy that a number of studies found that community partners may engage with university partners for reasons of self-interest initially, but then become invested in the student learning experience and sense of civic commitment as the partnership evolves (Tyron et al., 2008; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Bassinger & Barholomew, 2006; Bushouse, 2005; Worrall, 2005). Some community partners hope to cultivate students and faculty as future donors (George-Paschal et al., 2019; Srinivas et al., et al., 2015)

The 2030 Plan places a strong emphasis on the University improving its relationship with the surrounding community:
• “Our relationship with Charlottesville and the surrounding counties is critically and mutually important. Our success as a university depends in no small part on the strength of those communities, and on the strength of our relationship with them...as an anchor institution we must take seriously our responsibility to be a good neighbor and employer.” (Strategic Goal II)
• Be a strong partner with and a good neighbor to the Charlottesville region. (Strategic Goal II.d)

Pursuing and investing resources in this pedagogical approach would help to support these goals through faculty professional development on how to establish and maintain positive community partnerships, and ensure every student graduates with the skills and attitudes needed to become the citizen leaders of the 21st century.
**Glossary of Terms:**

**Community Engagement:** The collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in the context of partnership and reciprocity. It can involve partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems and serve as catalysts for initiating and/or changing policies, programs, and practices.

**Community-Engaged Instruction/Teaching/Pedagogy:** A pedagogical approach that connects students and faculty with activities that address community-identified needs through mutually beneficial partnerships that deepen students' academic and civic learning. Examples are service-learning courses or service-learning clinical practice.

**Course Embedded Service:** Public service that is included as part of a course curriculum and aligned with best practices for community-engaged pedagogy (see definition above).

**Community-Based Research:** A collaborative process between the researcher and community partner that creates and disseminates knowledge and creative expression with the goal of contributing to the discipline and strengthening the well-being of the community. Community-based research (CBR) identifies the assets of all stakeholders and incorporates them in the design and conduct of the different phases of the research process.

**Public Service:** The application and provision of institutional resources, knowledge or services that directly benefits the community. Public service may entail the delivery of expertise, resources, and services to the community.

**Public Interest Research:** Any research in any field or discipline using any method that is intentionally framed around the pursuit of individual human flourishing or community well-being.
References


