The ABCs of Community Service-Learning

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Outline of presentation

- The pedagogical underpinnings of CSL
- How to do CSL
- What students and others think about CSL
- ‘Real life’ examples
Community service-learning (CSL) usually involves a course-based educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and reflect on that activity to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher 1996).
The ABCs of CSL

Community service-learning allows students to

- Apply
- Broaden, and
- Challenge
their course learning
CSL programs

- CSL is partly a response to public outcry about the ‘disengaged academic’.

- Also, a way of increasing the ‘market value’ of degrees.
The pedagogical framing of CSL

Different influences include:

- John Dewey’s pragmatic philosophy, concerns about democratic participation, and student-centred educational theory.

- David Kolb characterized experiential education as a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience.

- Paolo Freire emphasized learning situations that are collaborative, active, community-oriented, and grounded in the culture of the student.
Useful ideas for thinking about CSL

1. Rejection of theory/practice divide;
2. Assumption that the development of knowledge is a social collaborative activity;
3. Interest in examining overlapping systems with a focus on contradictions;
4. Interventionist approach aimed at transformation as opposed to adaptation.
1. Rejection of theory/practice divide

- CSL ideally presents *theory* and *practice* as different forms of knowledge that are united through reflection—not as dichotomous (Guile 2010).

- CSL plays an important role in rethinking the relationship between theory and practice, formal and informal learning.
2. Knowledge development as a social collaborative activity

- CSL challenges the dominant view of development and learning as products of solitary, self-contained individuals.

- Instead, knowledge is seen as collectively achieved in activities by groups of collaborating individuals (Vygotsky).
3. **Contradictions in/across organizations**

In CSL, students, instructors, and community partners are encouraged to

- question their professional identities,
- establish communication across their diverse perspectives, and
- explain differences between their own understanding of particular issues and others' thereby generating new knowledge.
The Russian psychologist, Vygotsky, saw knowledge as a form of active transformative engagement aimed at changing the world.

CSL should also seek to expand our horizons for possibility.
Questions on this part of our presentation?
Why do Community Service-Learning?

- Benefit for Students
- Benefits for Faculty
- Benefits for the Community
- Benefits for the University
Questions to consider when planning a CSL Course

- What learning goals/objectives can best be met through adding a CSL experience?
- Will the CSL experience be required for all students? If not, what is your alternative for other students?
- How will the CSL experience be integrated into the course in an intentional way?
- How will community partners be intentionally involved in the student learning process?
How does CSL happen at the University of Alberta?

1. Fill out an Instructor Intention Form
   • Brief Description of the Course
   • Objectives/Goals of the Course & How CSL fits with these goals
   • Preliminary Plan for Integrating CSL into the Course (projects/assignments/activities)
   • Possible themes/areas to be covered
   • Types of Community activities envisioned
2. CSL Partnership Coordinators develop a list of suitable Community Partners and projects related to your course objectives & themes
3. This list, called a Placement List, is sent to you for approval
4. Once you approve the list, you attend an Orientation workshop – where you meet your community partners & other CSL instructors
How does the CSL Office support you?

- Provides background information/material to get you started
- Provides resources/training for planning a syllabus (suggestions for assignments, assessments, activities)
- Provides ongoing support throughout the semester
- Provides opportunities for you to meet with other instructors – for teaching and for research discussion and support
Questions on this part of our presentation?
Evaluating CSL: Feedback from students

2011-2012
CSL students (N= 799)

84% Learned a lot overall

73% Would recommend CSL to peers

74% Enhanced understanding of community
Meaningful aspects of CSL for students

- Gain practical experience that reinforces learning (Apply)
- Experience different context and perspectives (Broaden)
- Reconsider course ideas (and traditional ways of learning) through practice (Challenge)
Students want to apply knowledge

- ‘I feel the course should be oriented around increasing our language pronunciation and fluidity, and the CSL program did just that.’ (2010/2011)

- ‘BRING CSL TO THE ENGINEERING FACULTY! Would be a great addition to a faculty where it can be very hard to apply the skills learned in class to the community.’ (2011/2012)
CSL broadens their knowledge

- ‘More interesting than coursework--learn more than I ever would writing a paper or reading a textbook’. (2010/11)

- ‘I thoroughly enjoyed it and benefitted greatly. It gave me many new trains of thought and career objectives.’ (2010/11)
CSL challenges students’ knowledge and ways of learning


- ‘This let me follow and explore my interests as well as take ownership of my learning.’ (2010/11)
Instructors (N=44)

76% Students learned a lot overall

98% Would recommend CSL to others

88% CSL helps students to develop transferable skills

73% Improved teaching skills
Community partners (N=33)

100% Would recommend CSL to peers

89% CSL helped students to develop transferable skills

89% Deepened university relations
Community partners also say

CSL students

- Help to increase their organizational capacity
- Provide an opportunity for critical reflection
- Contribute new ideas, skills and enthusiasm.
Questions on this part of our presentation?
Examples of CSL
Developing a CSL Community of Practice
Our website has lots of materials for instructors:  
www.csl.ualberta.ca

Or contact us:

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