

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

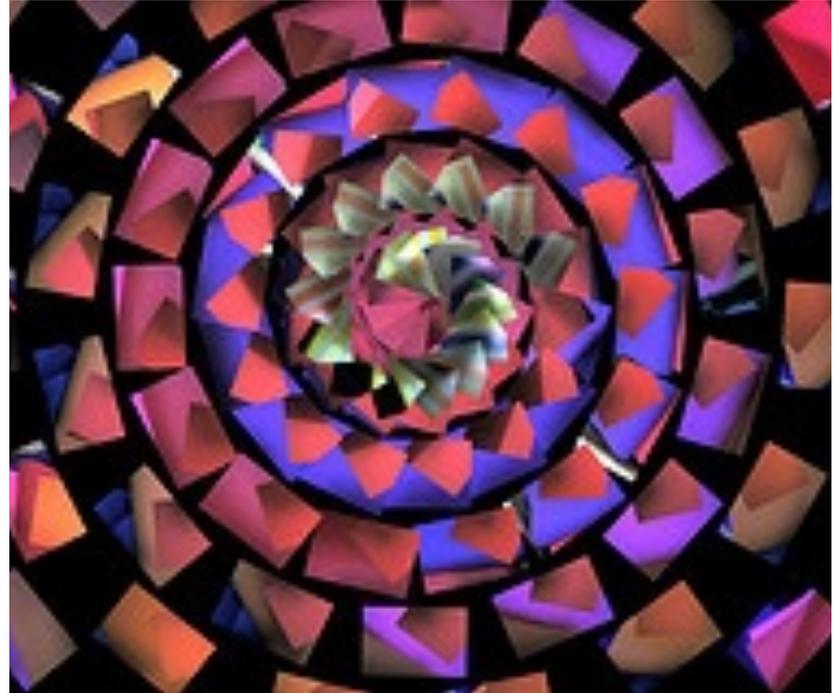
CSL as pedagogy

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.

4. *Interventionist approach*

- 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?

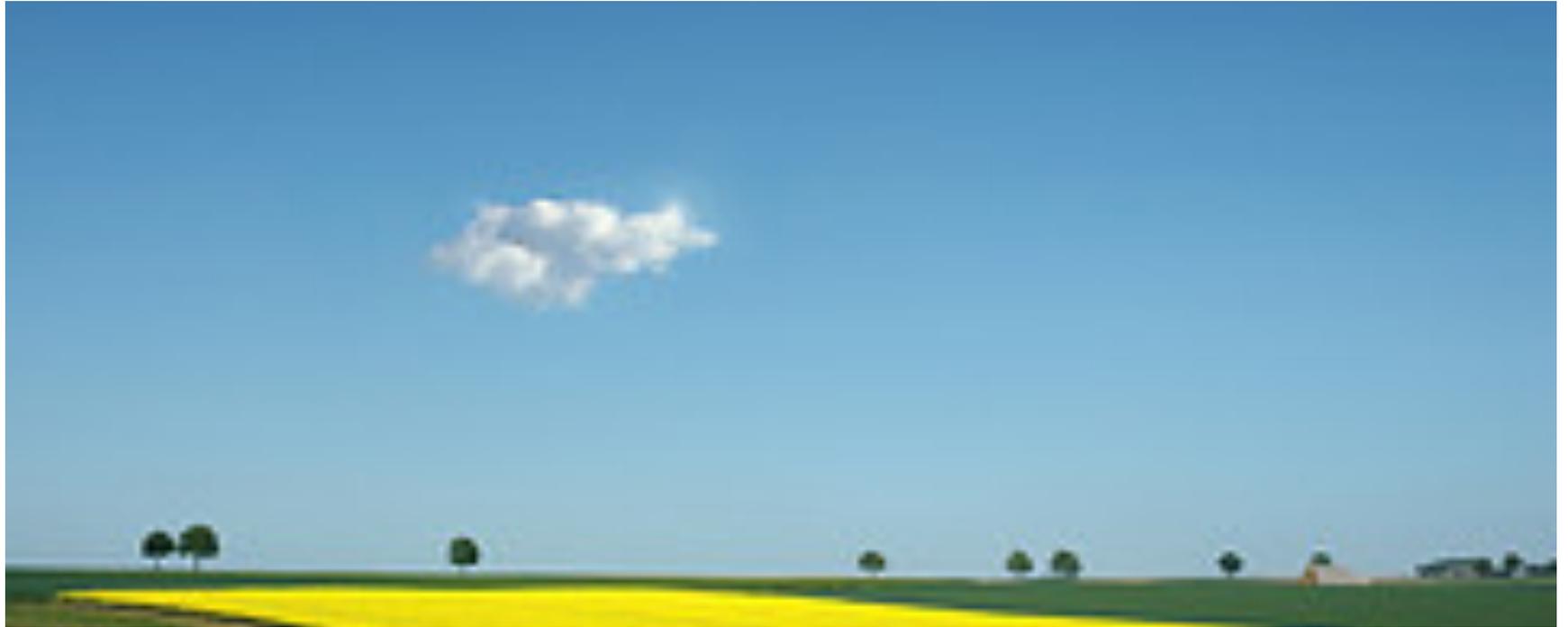
1. Fill out an Instructor Intention Form
 - Brief Description of the Course
 - Objectives/Goals of the Course & How CSL fits with these goals
 - Preliminary Plan for Integrating CSL into the Course (projects/assignments/activities)
 - Possible themes/areas to be covered
 - Types of Community activities 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 (**A**pply)
- Experience different context and perspectives (**B**roaden)
- Reconsider course ideas (and traditional ways of learning) through practice (**C**hallenge)

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

- 'Awesome. ENGAGING. Encouraged critical thinking and questioning. A hugely valuable contribution to my university experience.' (2010/11)
- '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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