**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**ABOUT COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING**

**Does community engaged learning work in introductory and lower-level courses?**

Students at any level can have successful and rich community engaged learning experiences. The key is to carefully select community engaged learning placements where students are given levels of responsibility that are appropriate to their skill levels. Community engaged learning coordinators can help you identify community opportunities that should work well for your students.

**Does community engaged learning work in large courses?**

Our office has supported community engaged learning courses with enrollments as low as 10 students and as high as 250. With large courses, the key to success is making sure that all the teaching assistants understand the community engaged learning component and are prepared to facilitate students’ reflection on their community work in discussion sections. Of course the logistics are more complicated in larger courses, so it’s also important to stay in close contact with the community engaged learning coordinator assigned to your course so they can help keep tabs on students getting their placements and logging their hours throughout the semester.

**Do students have time to do community engaged learning?**

We all know that many students are juggling classes, part- or full-time work, family obligations, and other activities, and it can be difficult to fit in a community engaged learning requirement. But we have found that most students are able to fit in the 2-3 hours per week typically required of community engaged learning students and, in fact, some students who didn’t think they would have time for the community work decide to continue to make volunteering part of their routine after their course ends. Our staff members also work hard to offer students community engaged learning opportunities with different scheduling options and convenient locations. If a student seems to have extraordinarily challenging circumstances and community engaged learning is a requirement for your course, your community engaged learning liaison can help you think about alternative assignments for exceptional cases. When incorporating community engaged learning into a course, you’ll want to make sure you adjust the workload of readings and other assignments in recognition of the time students will be working in the community. Your community engaged learning course liaison from our office is always happy to review your syllabus and offer suggestions.

**Should I require community engaged learning or have it be an option in my course?**

Our office support courses with community engaged learning requirements and with community engaged learning options (where students can choose to do community engaged learning or a different assignment, such as a research paper). Either way can work well, and it’s up to you to decide which you prefer. There are, of course, pros and cons to each. When community engaged learning is required, all the students will have a shared basis for class discussions about their community work, but you may also be sending some students into the community who don’t really want to be there. You can avoid this pitfall by making community engaged learning optional, but then it can be harder to facilitate reflection if not everyone has a community experience to draw on. Our staff can help you think this decision through and can share sample syllabi of both models. If you do require community engaged learning in your course, this should be include in the course description students see when they register so they’ll be aware of this expectation.

**How should I grade students on their community engaged learning?**

Because we think of students’ work with community organizations as a “lived text” for a course, you can compare the time students spend at their organizations to required readings. Just as students’ grades are based not on whether they’ve done the readings, but rather on how well they demonstrate what they learned from the readings on assignments like exams and papers, your community engaged learning class should include assignments that require students to articulate what they’ve learned from their community work and how it connects with other course texts, lectures, and discussions. These assignments are examples of reflection, and reflection is a key aspect of community engaged learning that sets it apart from other types of volunteer work. To learn more about reflection and see examples of how you might ask your students to do reflection in a community engaged learning class, see the Reflection section of this Guide.

Most community engaged learning instructors do require a minimum number of hours of community work for the semester, but you can think of this component of the students’ experience as being similar to other parts of their grade that are based on attendance and participation. The required number of hours is intended to give students enough time in the community organization to fulfill the course learning objectives, and also to make sure that the organization is getting enough benefit from students’ service to balance the time and effort their supervisors are investing in them. We do recommend that students doing community engaged learning be asked to commit 2-3 hours per week to their organization, for a total of 25-30 hours over the course of a semester, to achieve this balance.

**How do I make sure community engaged learning is well integrated into my class?**

Reflection assignments are the most effective way to integrate community engaged learning into your course because they help students make connections between their community work and the course content. Also, when we ask students at the end of each semester how community engaged learning could have been better integrated into their class, a common response is that more time could have been spent in class discussing students’ experiences in the community, so we strongly encourage you to keep this in mind as you plan your course. Whether community engaged learning is required for all your students or an option that only some students pursue, think about the ways they could learn from each other through these discussions. Just remember the importance of making sure that community engaged learning doesn’t appear to be an “add-on” to the course – it should be clearly woven into your curriculum.

**What if something happens to a student, or if their actions cause damages to someone else?**

Every community engaged learning student who requests a referral to an organization needs to complete a Participant Agreement, in which they acknowledge “that there are risks involved in doing community work and that the University does not assume any responsibility for injuries or loss to my personal property while I am participating in a community organization.” We work to minimize these risks by visiting community partner organizations to gain a better sense of where and how they operate, and our partner organizations also sign an agreement limiting the University’s liability and providing proof of their own liability insurance coverage. However, the University of Minnesota’s own liability insurance does provide coverage for all academic credit-bearing student activities, including community engaged learning. If a student reports an incident to you, please let your course liaison to our office know as soon as possible. Should there be any question of liability, the U’s Risk Management staff will work with the organization and the student to resolve the issue.

**What are some of the challenges encountered by students doing community engaged learning?**

During the semester, students will likely share with you the challenges they’re experiencing with their community engaged learning. These could include delays in hearing back from their organization and getting started with their work, difficulty getting in their required hours, dissatisfaction with the work they’re being asked to do, or a lack of clarity about their role in the organization. If students approach you with concerns about their organization, you should work to address the situation as quickly as possible, either by communicating directly with the student’s supervisor at the organization or by letting your community engaged learning coordinator know about the situation so she can follow up. The community engaged learning coordinators try to encourage students to contact them with any concerns, but because students see you more frequently you will likely be the first to know when these situations arise. Because a semester goes by so quickly it’s imperative that any issues be resolved promptly – and, of course, this will also help students maintain a positive attitude about their community engaged learning assignment and the course in general.