Community-Engaged Learning Guide

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Partnership at Muhlenberg

Muhlenberg College engages students, employees and local communities through partnerships intended to catalyze personal, institutional, and community change. We believe that the college and communities hold extensive knowledge and resources and work through a model of respect and reciprocity. In order to ensure maximum benefit for all involved, the College focuses on strategic partnerships with specific organizations/schools/institutions in a depth-focused approach rather than broadly engaging every organization/school/institution. Partnership requires establishment of long-term relationships and joint definition of goals, implementation strategies and evaluation of success. Muhlenberg's multi-faceted partnerships involve engagement through co-curricular opportunities, community-engaged courses, engaged research, internships and resource sharing amongst other things.

Defining the Concepts

ALL of these are centered in concepts of equity and justice and consider questions of access, resources and power.

Community-Engaged Courses *are a form of experiential education in which students and faculty collaborate with local communities to design and execute programs and projects that benefit local communities and enhance Muhlenberg student learning. Courses consider community context, value myriad ways of knowing and directly connect communities to learning goals.*

Community-Based Courses *are a form of experiential education that have elements that take place off the physical Muhlenberg College campus and connect what they learn inside and outside of the traditional classroom.*

Community-Engaged Research *occurs in community settings and involves community partners in the design and implementation of the research project. The research addresses mutually agreed upon goals, the process respects the contributions of communities and the end products are shared between constituents. **There may be overlap between community-engaged research and community-engaged courses.***

Community-Based Participatory Research *is a collaborative research approach to study issues defined by and affecting community members. Representatives of organizations, community members and researchers are involved in all aspects of the research process and results intend to create social change.*

If you are interested in opportunities to participate in community-engaged research or community-based participatory research, or are in search of best practices please connect with the Office of Community Engagement. There may be IRB regulations to consider as well. For guidance related to community-engaged learning, please see below.

Essential elements of Community-Engaged Learning:

- <u>Engaged learning is a praxis-based pedagogical model</u>— students should enhance their skills and citizenship from the experience and connect theory and practice. Successful community-engaged learning is integrative learning. Reflection on different aspects of the experience is a critical component of student learning.

- <u>Requires collaboration, preparation, and communication</u>— successful community-engaged-learning requires collaboration and preparation by all parties (students, faculty, office staff and community members) to enter into partnership and established modes of communication to ensure success.

- <u>Community-engaged learning provides meaningful outcomes for all</u>— the experience should be a challenging learning experience for the students and important and useful for the community partner. Community-engaged learning should be evaluated in terms of the quality of the learning experience for the students AND usefulness to the community partner to achieve intended outcomes or create change.

- <u>Community-engaged learning requires reciprocity</u>— community projects should be developed based on the community's desires in relationship to the course goals; however, students, faculty and community are equal participants in the team. All participants are learners and teachers.

- <u>Community-engaged learning necessitates connection to larger outcomes</u>— integration of in-class and out-of-class knowledge should connect with broader social and environmental justice/inequity. Students will reflect, recognizing the scope of their involvement and the inherent limitations, in addition to their capacity to contribute.

Learning Outcomes

- Describe the structural challenges communities navigate and the ways in which those impact lived experiences
- Understand how one may effectively collaborate and contribute to communities in partnership with organizations/community members
- Articulate the potential benefits of learning alongside people from varied backgrounds and/or lived experiences

- Communicate the value of community-based solutions to the social, civic and ethical challenges in our communities

Minimum Standards at Muhlenberg

- Because the community experience is a text through which students learn, projects and programs are intentionally chosen with regard to relevance for course objectives.
- Courses are planned in collaboration with community partners and the Office of Community Engagement, and address community desires and student learning outcomes.
- All constituents in an engaged-learning partnership must commit to collaboration and establish best methods for communication.
- Faculty must commit to regular check points with students for reflection purposes and to ensure participation in and completion of the program/project.
- Collaboration will last the duration of the semester or year as agreed upon by the constituents.
- Students will receive some information regarding the context of their work: the organization with which they're working, and about Allentown (local context)
- Collaborators establish a method for sharing the results/evaluations of the experience at the end of the semester/year
- The experience includes graded projects/assignments sustained throughout the experience that demonstrate that course objectives are being met.

**Should minimum standards be met, courses would likely qualify for the Integrative Learning (IL) designation.

Exemplary Practice at Muhlenberg

- Community-engaged learning partnerships involve long-term commitment to projects/programs/classes and partners.
- Experiences within community settings are regularly discussed in the classroom.
- Students are asked to connect their work with community partners to the larger social issues related to their experiences, and demonstrate knowledge about local communities and the organization with which they're working.
- Community-engaged relationships take into account sustainability of partnerships and ensure continuity of involvement.
- Outcomes from the course and partnerships are shared with students, community partners and the Office of Community Engagement.
- Community partners view themselves as educators within the classroom and are connected with what Muhlenberg students are doing in class and asked to share evaluations of work with faculty.
- Partnerships are sustained over time and are transformational in nature.

Community-Engaged Learning at Muhlenberg- Examples

There are several types of community-engaged learning, and variation among those types. Two general categories include *project-based* and *program-based* community-engaged learning. Project-based community-engaged learning, as the name indicates, involves students working on particular projects with

a community partner throughout the course of the semester/year with a concrete goal at the end. Program-based community-engaged learning involves student participation in activities with a community partner throughout the course of a semester with/without a concrete end product. Courses might combine project and program based involvement.

Project-based community-engaged learning occurs in "Local Sustainability" when students work in small groups each year to accomplish projects identified by the Allentown Parks and Recreation Department. Each project is related to a concept of sustainability and helps the department move forward with specific strategic goals. Students are able to understand and apply sustainability concepts in a local context and projects build upon each other over time allowing for research and implementation to be included in the sustainability studies/biology curriculum.

An example of a *program-base*d community-engaged learning course is "Teaching Dance- Theory and Method." As the name indicates, in this class students spend the first half of the semester learning about theory and methodologies of teaching dance. For the last six weeks of the semester, students implement a dance program within the school day at Muhlenberg Elementary School. The course addresses access to arts education within the public schools and values kids' innate capacity to dance. A year-long course experience follows teaching dance, allowing Muhlenberg students to continue within the elementary school for a full year, and provides dance 9 weeks in the year for kids in grades 1-3.

An example that combines *project- and program-based* community-engaged learning is "Developmental Psychopathology." In this course students work within emotional and autistic support classrooms in addition to community agencies to assist teachers and staff with children's learning. Muhlenberg students work in Allentown communities on a weekly basis, but they are also charged with coming up with a goal in collaboration with their community partners that they can accomplish within the semester. The goal becomes a project for the students, but participation in the various classrooms is more along the lines of a program-based model. There are discussion times within the course set aside for students to discuss community experiences, and make connections regarding access to resources within disparate community settings.

For more examples please see videos on the the following page-
https://www.muhlenberg.edu/student-life/community-engagement/engagementopportunities/communityengagedcourses/

Integrating the Pedagogy

Expected Responsibilities for Community-Engaged facilitation/integration:

Faculty
- Participate in goal/objective integration in conjunction with community partner(s) and OCE and ensure course integration with clear goals for students regarding community experience
- Host relevant outside speakers to ensure students understand the local context for their community participation, are prepared for the experience and make connections with structural challenges
- Ensure students understand basic tenets of community-engaged pedagogy

- Respond to changes in community context that may alter community-engaged experience from year to year
- Ensure regular opportunities for students to connect their community experience with course materials throughout the semester/year and monitor student progress
- Communicate with community partner at regular intervals via predetermined method to monitor student progress
- Troubleshoot with all constituents (community partner, faculty, students) throughout the course of the semester
- Ensure end-of-semester closure activity (if applicable) providing feedback to community partners about the experience

Students
- Gain knowledge of the goals/ mission of the community organization
- Actively participate in community programming, including follow through on expectations set up by the community partner, faculty, and OCE
- Connect academic learning with partnership in the community, including sharing experiences through journal writing or class discussions
- Be open to the processes of self- reflection and be flexible in logistical aspects of working with community partners
- Communicate concerns that might arise during process
- Be own self-advocate and take ownership of the experience
- Participate in end of semester evaluation of experience

Office of Community Engagement
- Assist faculty with course development- e.g., general pedagogical information, fit between course goals and community objectives, assignment ideas for integration, syllabus review.
- Connect faculty and community partner(s) for goal/objective discussions
- Assist with long-term course planning in conjunction with community partners
- Visit class to discuss community-engaged pedagogy, community-based work, concepts of service and local context
- Assist faculty with logistics related to course including safety information, required paperwork, clearances, scheduling, transportation, etc
- Troubleshoot with all constituents (community partner, faculty, students) throughout the course of the semester
- Connect with partners/faculty at semester's end to evaluate experiences
- Oversee sustainability of the partnership and multiple entry points across campus

Community Partners
- Participate in goal/objective integration in conjunction with faculty and OCE
- Visit class to discuss organization/context and project/program or meet with students individually/in groups to provide orientation
- Supervise students throughout experience and, if not self, communicate to students' supervisor expectations for the course/students
- Ensure agreed upon goals/objectives are fulfilled in community experience

- Communicate with OCE and/or faculty throughout the semester via predetermined method regarding experiences with students (challenges and benefits) or logistical concerns
- Provide evaluation of student participation for faculty at conclusion of semester and assessment for OCE

Suggested timeline for the process

- Beginning of semester prior to planned community-engaged course
    - Meeting between faculty member and OCE to discuss possibility of course design goals for community-engaged learning integration and partnership possibilities
        - Research pedagogy, talk to colleagues, etc
        - Examine course goals/outcomes, goals for the community experience and their intersection
    - Meeting between faculty member, OCE, and community partner to discuss connection between organization and course, beginning mutually beneficial relationship
- 2-3 months before start of course
    - Course should have clear goals for community-engaged component and community partner should be aware of these goals
    - Transportation options for students should be discussed (if necessary)
    - A contract between faculty member and community partner about expectations should be created in consultation with OCE
    - If students will need any clearances or background checks, this should be communicated to them immediately after registration
- Start of the semester
    - Faculty member should submit required paperwork to OCE and (if needed) community partner
    - Expectations for community engagement should be shared with students
    - OCE can attend an early class to introduce community-engaged learning, Allentown communities, and lead class discussion
    - Students have an orientation to community partner- for example, community partner can attend/lead class discussion, run an orientation on site or engage the assistance of an already involved student to orient their peers.
    - Students should complete an assessment of their expectations/goals for the semester
- During the semester
    - Faculty should lead discussions and incorporate community-engaged learning experiences with course content
    - Faculty and community partners should check in with one another at regular intervals to be sure that goals and expectations from both ends of the relationship are being met
    - Students should be actively engaged in the process both in the classroom and while working with the community. Active engagement includes consistently attending community-based activities, communicating concerns to appropriate constituents, contributing to class discussions and reflecting on experiences.
- End of semester
    - Students should complete an assessment reflecting on knowledge and skills gained, learning outcomes, etc

- o Faculty and community partners should meet to provide feedback to one another about the experience
- o Faculty, community partner and OCE should meet to discuss future partnerships

Resources

Office of Community Engagement-
http://www.muhlenberg.edu/main/campuslife/community-engagement/

Faculty Center for Teaching- http://www.muhlenberg.edu/main/aboutus/fct/

Campus Compact- https://compact.org/

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ904630.pdf - Transformative Relationship Evaluation Scale (TRES) Differentiating and Assessing Relationships in Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Exploitative, Transactional, or Transformational

Resource faculty who have partnered with communities in different capacities (note: this list is not exhaustive)

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