Best Practices Guide for Civic Engagement & Service Learning (CE&SL)

In Transdisciplinary and Binational Courses

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Course Design and Integration

· Begin with alignment. Choose community partners and course objectives that naturally align to avoid forced fits and maximize impact.

· Use proven frameworks. Consider co-creation models, constructivist pedagogy, and adaptive management strategies. Allow flexibility for iteration and student input.

· Scaffold learning. Break down project phases to help students gradually build understanding and confidence. Prepare them for ambiguity and change.

Partner Collaboration

· Engage early and respectfully. Build relationships well in advance, ideally a semester or summer before. Show up in community spaces before proposing projects.

· Build champions. Identify a partner champion: someone embedded in the organization who can guide cultural and logistical nuances.

· Clarify language and goals. Regular check-ins, shared documents, and clear mutual goals reduce misalignment and ensure reciprocal value.

· Offer compensation and reciprocity. Ask how partners want to be compensated (monetary, materials, or services) and plan accordingly.

Transdisciplinary and Binational Considerations

· Expect misalignment. Different disciplines and cultures have different timeframes, jargon, and expectations. Flexibility and empathy are key.

· Ensure language access. Use champions and multilingual collaborators. Manage expectations around translation and communication tools.

· Prepare institutionally. Account for international travel logistics, insurance costs, risk management policies, and campus administrative timelines.

Student Engagement and Impact

· Incorporate reflective practice. Use positionality statements, value mapping, and guided in-class scenarios to deepen learning.

· Capture unintended learning. Students often gain soft skills such as empathy, communication, and problem-solving not captured in traditional outcomes.

· Recognize gendered insights. Some faculty observed different engagement patterns by gender. Design responsive support structures.

Evaluation and Outcomes

· Tie to learning objectives. Align assignments with Gen Ed or department-approved outcomes to support consistency and accreditation.

· Use creative assessment tools. Mix rubrics, self-assessments, group reflections, and informal check-ins. Avoid over-reliance on surveys.

· Redefine impact. Let students and community partners define impact for themselves. Emphasize long-term community relationships over quick wins.

Institutional and Structural Support

· Recognize the labor. CE&SL is time-intensive. Advocate for it to count toward service, research, or teaching evaluations.

· Clarify administrative processes. Faculty need clearer guidance on travel forms, procurement, legal permissions, and liability insurance.

· Collaborate across roles. Staff bring essential logistical and relational expertise. Include them as equal partners in planning and implementation.

Co-Teaching and Faculty Collaboration

· Align meta-pedagogical vision. Agree on what meaningful engagement looks like, including timelines, grading expectations, and feedback loops.

· Plan for tension. Have a backup plan. Faculty partnerships may falter. Students need a coherent learning experience regardless.

· Build collegial trust. Choose co-teachers with mutual respect and shared teaching philosophies.

Final Reflections and Recommendations

· Start small, go deep. Work with fewer partners but engage more deeply and sustainably.

· Accept imperfection. Things will go wrong. Adaptation, not perfection, is the metric of success.

· Ask for help. Use librarians, instructional designers, and staff as key allies. Build a network of support early and often.