



THE UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING

ADAPTING COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING FOR FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

This resource is intended for faculty already teaching community-engaged (particularly service-learning) courses, who need to think about how to run those courses for fall in uncertain circumstances. For those interested in exploring community-engaged pedagogy for the first time, see the resources at our [website](#).

First Considerations

Many leaders in education are suggesting that our course design must [acknowledge students' collective trauma, grief and uncertainty](#). Recognizing the emotional load students may be carrying and their differential access to resources, broad-band, working spaces over the past spring and possibly into the fall is critical. I strongly encourage faculty to work with the CTL and other faculty development units to consider Universal Design for Learning principles, and to learn about recommendations for balancing synchronous versus asynchronous teaching, using transparent assignments, and carefully considering assessment in the current situation.

As community-engaged instructors, we face significant challenges and real opportunities. Community-engaged pedagogy is among the most difficult to transition to remote delivery, and will continue to be difficult even when classes return to campus, as many community partners may not welcome students into their schools and programs. Community partners of project-based service-learning may also be impacted in terms of capacity. Many of us are uncertain as to the exact format or delivery method of our courses and that makes course design even more challenging.

Yet even as the design challenges are formidable, community-engaged learning offers so much to this moment. Students need to connect their learning to their lives and to the challenges they are seeing in the world; they need agency; they need to be able to imagine and prepare for their futures. Community-engaged pedagogy does this by illuminating to students the contributions of their disciplines towards the "wicked problems" they encounter. The [elements of service-learning](#) -- investment of time and effort, interaction with faculty & peers about substantive matters, experiences with unfamiliar contexts, periodic and structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning and opportunities to reflect and integrate learning (Kuh and O'Donnell 2013) – can still be brought to bear, even if in modified form.

Redesigning for Fall

It's clear that the UVM Strong Committee hopes to have students on-campus and participating in-person and in the field as much as possible, while following CDC, state and local requirements. In contrast to the summer, where all classes and activities are remote, faculty should assume that UVM policy will not be the barrier for students' participation in community-engaged activities in the fall. Thus, the first consideration for community-engaged courses is the capacity of the community partners and the community sites.

Communicate with Community Partners

Talk to your community partners first before assuming you can offer your SL course in the same format as in the past. The effects of the pandemic have been spread unequally across sectors, and organizations have been affected very differently. Childcare, for example, is only beginning to open very gradually, and the guidance and support from the state is controversial. Community partners may not know now what the fall will look like, so you may need to wait and consider your back-up plans as you do so. But most importantly, do not assume partners can jump on to collaborate on short notice, or that students can find placements or projects on their own. You will need to thoroughly support any projects or service that is possible.

If you cannot work with community partners as in the past, or are uncertain whether you will be able to, read on to consider alternatives:

The first thing to seriously consider are your learning objectives. In backwards design, we are always starting with the end point, so begin by examining your learning outcomes for the community-engaged portion of the course. With your learning objectives as your north star, you'll be better positioned to ask yourself what you can and can't accept as legitimate changes to the course.

Changes to Consider

These changes are arranged from the easiest to the most challenging, if your students are unable to work with community partners, either because they cannot go to sites/placements, or partners have less capacity and withdraw from partnering with the course.

Change the delivery of the community-engaged component

Depending on the type of service-learning, you may be able to switch to remote delivery to meet your regular community partners' needs.

Direct service: maybe students can continue tutoring via Zoom, or make phone calls to seniors they would have talked with in person.

Project/Consultant model: Students can switch to Teams or Zoom meetings with the client/partner, and continue with the project. Students should be able to get into the field to take measurements or make observations as needed.

Community-based research: Again, students can switch to Teams or Zoom meetings with the partner, and collaborate to collect data remotely or within current social distancing protocols.

Change the mode of service-learning

The most common recommendation coming from other universities is to switch the mode of service-learning with your existing partner, from direct service to project/consultant model or the research model. For example, rather than tutoring in person, students could work on policy briefs, social media plans, surveys/interviews of organization's clients about their needs, research on best practices in that sector in the current period, etc. This could require a significant re-working of course content to support the new work students are doing.

Courses could also move to indirect service. This includes activities like sorting food and making food deliveries, which have been consistently expressed as [needs by the United Way](#). There are also many remote indirect service opportunities, ranging from transcribing documents to reading maps to identifying animals on wildlife cams; a list [here](#) is organized by discipline.

Reduce the demand of community partners, but maintain the service-learning work

If you cannot switch the type of service-learning and still meet your learning goals, you can continue with existing design and consider some of the following ideas:

- Use community partners' existing data for research
- Use data previously gathered by students and analyze
- Revisit previous projects with particular partners & re-do them
- Evaluate & extend previous projects, to reduce partner effort
- Add UVM-based partners to the partner mix
- Have two student groups work on the same project, can compare results afterwards
- Relax expectations for working with official organizations (for example, if students are interviewing seniors at a care facility over the phone as the SL project, allow students to interview their own grandparents instead).

Note: For all of these recommendations, it may be wise to increase student engagement across their different sites/partners, so that they learn from each other. Especially if students get fewer hours, or if the projects are smaller, they can learn from more total experiences, even if they were not all direct. And if some experiences were within UVM offices, giving students access to others' differing experiences expands their understanding.

Move from Service-Learning (SL) to Civic Learning (CL)

If community partners simply do not have the capacity to engage with students, even in a less-intensive manner, faculty can develop an engaged component without specific partners within the framework of the CL designation. Civic Learning courses can include courses with civic engagement components, community cases, and courses with work preparatory for service-learning. Some examples would include supporting voter registration or Census participation; creating social distancing messaging for students; volunteering with City of Burlington efforts, participating in the Vermont Folklife Center's Listening in Place Project, and studying Burlington or UVM's response to COVID-19.

CELO will gladly re-designate SL courses as CL up to the beginning of classes, and also receive new CL designations on short notice. (Request a designation or designation change [here](#).)

Overall Design Considerations in all Formats

- Recognize student grief & trauma, and acknowledge the reality of the current crisis; consider UDL design and reach out to CTL and WID for resources
- Scale back and simplify; less is more in a crisis
- Scaffold all community-engaged work more closely; use project management tools to support group work, especially if teaching online.
- Monitor & track student progress more closely, with weekly check-ins, especially if teaching online or with reduced contact hours.
- Set up buddy systems and small group time within the class structure, to support students.
- Expand the critical reflection components of the course to support students in navigating uncertainty or uneven experiences.
- Put special attention to developing community between students if in an online teaching situation, using synchronous and asynchronous tools to support student connections.
- Don't hesitate to reach out to us in CELO; we are happy to help & connect faculty to others in similar situations.

What we offer:

- Rapid designation changes (SL to CL; drop SL or CL designation) until the beginning of classes
- Resources for reflection in context of COVID
- Individual and group consultations
- Support for community partner outreach: convene faculty/partner conversations, gather input from partners to inform guidelines, etc.

www.uvm.edu/celo

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