

## **The Benefits of Community Service Learning**

During the last thirty years in the United States, and the past decade in Canada and worldwide Community Service Learning (CSL) has been increasingly recognized as an effecting teaching methodology which bridges academic curriculum with experiential learning through community service. CSL is recognized as a valuable and flexible teaching pedagogy (Kenworthy-Uren, 2008) that enhances cognitive abilities, and the development of citizenship behaviors.

Professional disciplines, such as nursing, business, social work, child studies, communications, justice studies, and some of the sciences, adopt CSL as a core teaching pedagogy to promote professional conduct, the development of ethical behavior, to deepen cognitive capability, as well as personal development (Calvert, 2011).

Educators recognize that traditional teaching methods do not provide the transformational experience necessary for the deep cognitive understanding and personal development opportunities offered through SL (Eyler and Giles, 1999). While early SL adopters in the United States focused upon of civic engagement (Astin and Sax, 1998), and ethical behaviors (Diamond 2005), the structure of SL community partnerships has evolved to include a myriad of developmental attributes including cultural empathy and understanding (Bringle and Hatcher, 2010), environmental and community sustainability (DeTray, 2005/2006), Rands & Starik, 2009), and leadership capabilities (Brown, Trevino, and Harrison, 2005).

Experiential learning has been a cornerstone of academe for almost a century. The range of pedagogies build upon Dewey's (1933) primacy of experience, which recommends active learning and reflection, includes: lab work, practicums, co-operative work terms, cases, SL projects, volunteer programs and others. Community engagement primarily references SL and volunteer activities. The literature clearly denotes that CSL is not volunteerism. CSL is a credit course based project that is developed by the student, the community partner, and the professor and requires the application of the academic theory. The essence of the CSL activity is designed to promote deep learning, both academic and personal, that challenges the student while benefiting the community partner. Typically, there will be a final report or presentation by the student, and often a personal reflection (Calvert, 2013).

The CSL methodology is flexible, and encompasses a plethora of teaching options ranging from short activities to semester-long consulting projects, it may be team based or individual, and may account for a small or significant portion of the term mark (Taylor and Pancer, 2007). The

level of creativity required of the student will vary (de Janasz and Whiting, 2009), as will the degree of project complexity and the adaptability required due to exposure to diverse socio-economic conditions or cultures (Hartel,2010). Beatty (2010) identified three common models: 1) the professional model, which focuses on career training with cognitive learning goals, 2) the civic engagement model, which focuses on developing active and engaged citizens, and 3) the social change model, which focuses on empowerment and social justice. Proponents of CSL would also add that a key benefit of CSL projects is the enhanced sustainability of the community partner (Calvert, 2012).

Numerous empirical articles have established the credibility of CSL as an effective teaching pedagogy for student development including: cognitive ability (Eyler et. al., 1999), empathy (Bloom, 2008), life skills (Astin and Sax, 1998), civic engagement (Einfeld and Collins, 2008), better teamwork (Govekar and Rishi, 2007), and stronger motivation to study (Flournoy, 2007). Outcomes for students have been linked to development of leadership, communication, and interpersonal skills (Tomkovick, Lester, Flunker, and Wells, 2008), CSR values (Lester, Tomkovick, Wells, Flunker, and Kickul, 2005), and empathy (Lundy, 2007).

Personal development is a core outcome of CSL projects, with the following array identified:

- understanding of power and equity (Leigh and Clevenger, 2013),
- global citizenship (Barker & Smith, 1996; Battistoni, Longo, and Jayanandhan,2009),
- personal transformation (Bringle and Hatcher, 2010),
- enhanced cultural sensitivity (Borden, 2007),
- increased diversity awareness (de Janasz and Whiting, 2009),
- cross-cultural skills and privilege awareness (Dunlap, Scoggin, Green, and David, 2007),
- professional disciplinary skills (Vande, Berg, Balkcum, Scheid, and Whalen, 2004),
- awareness of power differentials and the dimensions of privilege (Camacho, 2004).
- enhanced civic participation social responsibility, and commitment to community service (Parker and Dautoff, 2007),
- enhanced emotional intelligence (Calvert, 2013)

In summary, faculty adopt the CSL pedagogy because they believe it is the optimal teaching pedagogy. While CSL projects take more time for faculty to develop and administer, and are typically time-intensive and sometimes emotionally demanding for students, research confirms CSL is effective, benefiting both students and our communities.