

Principles of Quality Academic Civic Engagement for the Civic Engagement Cornerstone at Pacific University

What is Civic Engagement at Pacific University?

When the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences revised the general studies curriculum and approved a Cornerstone requirement in Civic Engagement, they stipulated that civic engagement courses and projects:

- be approved by the Center for Civic Engagement
- serve the common good
- involve students in experiential learning outside the classroom and the teaching lab
- engage students with the campus community or the broader world
- include appropriate orientation, preparation for the project, and opportunity for thoughtful reflection
- share the results of the project with the campus community through appropriate means devised in consultation with the Center for Civic Engagement.

In addition, CE course designation and CE project proposals ask about learning objectives, partnership development, and demonstration of learning. Over time, as more faculty have sought to offer civic engagement courses or help their students fulfill the requirement, there has been confusion as to “what counts” as civic engagement.

This document is intended to clarify “what counts,” establish standards for civic engagement at Pacific University, and to provide guidance for CE course and project proposals so that we can strive for excellence in civic engagement and have a basis for assessing our work. It is based on ample scholarly research investigating how civic engagement experiences improve learning outcomes and can be sustained in academic institutions and their surrounding communities, as well as on our experiences at Pacific. A shorter version will be made available for students developing independent CE projects. This document will also be used to revise the proposals for CE designation and independent CE projects.

Principles of Quality Academic Civic Engagement

Civic engagement course and project proposals are evaluated by the Center for Civic Engagement and CE Faculty Committee based on quality principles, which, implicit in the criteria for CE as stated in the course catalog, are made explicit here. Please note that the scenarios provided are only brief examples and in all cases whether an activity would be considered civic engagement depends on a thorough examination of the context (which we evaluate through the proposal processes).

Serve the common good

Serving the common good means actively working to make something in our world better by identifying and addressing issues that have widespread relevance to the population at large.

Principle #1: Relevant Problem-Solving

CE projects address a significant social, political, or environmental issue in the community (such as immigrant rights, education, pollution, injustice, or invasive species removal) through actions that can make a difference on those issues, including service, advocacy, awareness-raising, action-oriented research, electoral participation, and political involvement. Civic engagement

goes beyond being nice to others or pursuing interests that are enjoyable to oneself or others, such as participating in clubs or the arts. When CE projects focus on working to address particular problems and use students' knowledge and skills in a specific way to ameliorate a problem, students can better see the contribution they are making and are better able to articulate that contribution in terms of specific academic issues or concepts.

Examples:

- **NO:** Acting in a community theater program. While this contributes positively to the community and requires time investment, it does not by itself sufficiently address social or environmental problems in a substantive manner.
- **YES:** Facilitating a community theater program for youth. Nice to have *and* connects to social issues such as self-esteem, youth crime prevention, and school enrichment.
- **NO:** Helping athletes on crutches get around campus. This effort builds positive campus climate, but does not ameliorate any significant social or environmental issue.
- **YES:** Working with the senior center to help homebound senior citizens get groceries and raise awareness of elder isolation, lack of mobility/independence, or nutrition in aging populations.

Principle #2: Public Interest

CE projects work for the public interest, not private gain, leading to more just and equitable societies and a more sustainable world. Students may help individuals, groups, and organizations in need, but CE projects should always connect the specific tasks being undertaken to social or environmental issues that affect a larger population. These issues are usually identified in the mission of non-profit agencies, and are frequently cited in program descriptions of public/governmental organizations. Private sector businesses may be indirectly served through civic engagement (such as name recognition as an event sponsor, or through affiliation with a non-profit organization that supports business development), but they should not be the primary beneficiary of civic engagement efforts (since by definition they are for profit first). Faith-based efforts that serve the public interest are suitable for civic engagement, but faith-based efforts that primarily serve to proselytize or help only those within a faith group are not. The CCE does not support civic engagement activities that inhibit social, economic, or environmental sustainability.

Examples:

- **NO:** Tutoring a friend in math class. Supportive of peers, but not closely connected to the needs of a larger population—seems to be mainly for the friend's benefit.
- **YES:** Tutoring an individual student at a high-needs school. Connects directly to the bigger social issue of academic achievement—and especially to disproportionate academic achievement among certain populations (e.g. low-income students) or in certain subject areas (e.g. STEM).
- **NO:** Helping a business recover from a fire. This effort can be a great way to bring the community together, but the primary beneficiary is private profit.

- YES: Helping a community recover from a natural disaster by clearing road ways and removing debris, thereby repairing public infrastructure and shared resources.
- NO: Running the youth group at church. Serves only the youth within a particular faith group.
- YES: Running the youth group that is open to all in the community and uses a church basement for space. Partners with a faith-based group to meet a public interest but does not limit services based on faith.

Involve students in experiential learning outside the classroom and the teaching lab

Meaningful experiential learning is substantive in both duration and in learning potential.

Principle #3: Meaningful Learning Opportunities

The CE experience should offer deep learning potential. The nature of work performed should be intellectually stimulating (and often involves emotional stimulation as well), and while mundane tasks are sometimes necessary to support a particular cause, they should be combined with other kinds of tasks in order to have a high-quality CE experience. Substantive learning opportunities are created when students have direct and focused engagement on the issue or topic of concern. Direct engagement such as conversation, interaction, observation, interview, research, or synthesis of information is necessary to reap the benefits of this kind of experiential learning. Student learning is facilitated by an intensity of experience in which students experience something new to them, something about which they are particularly passionate, and/or something that presents a real challenge.

Examples:

- NO: Stuffing envelopes in the conference room at a non-profit site. Helpful, but with limited opportunities for learning without additional context about the issues.
- YES: Creating a newsletter for a program and stuffing newsletter envelopes for a mailing while working at the front desk and engaging clients in discussion. Includes the mundane, but also opportunities for learning.
- NO: Data entry for a non-profit organization that does not include contextual information. This effort could be really helpful to an organization but may not provide extensive opportunities for learning.
- YES: Data entry for a non-profit organization that includes opportunities to understand the source of the data, how it will be used by the organization, implications for the issue or community, and so on.

Principle #4: Depth of Experience

CE projects should be in-depth enough for students to learn from the experience and make an authentic contribution. Though measuring hours is not necessarily the best way to indicate substance, it is an indication of depth of experience. At Pacific a CE experience that counts for the Cornerstone requirement is about 40 hours, or the equivalent of one semester credit hour. That hour approximation can include all aspects of the CE project, including preparation and reflection, provided that substantive learning opportunities exist throughout that time. When it comes to CE projects that culminate in some sort of event for which practice or preparation is necessary (such as a performance), to count for CE credit there would also need to be enough

actual engagement with the community that students can learn more about the problems or issues they are addressing—thereby learning more about the issue as well as its connection to what they are studying. Likewise, a fundraiser should include opportunities for students to learn about the issue for which funds are raised.

Examples:

- NO: Singing performance at a community celebration for Black History Month. Wonderful community contribution, but actual engagement time is relatively limited, even though practice is required.
- YES: Community interviews developing oral history around the role of song in social movements, culminating in a community performance to which interviewees are invited. Involves a way for students to learn more about the issues and have a positive community impact beyond performance.
- NO: Collecting canned food for a local food pantry. Provides a needed service in the community, but is limited in opportunities for learning about the issues of food insecurity.
- YES: Community supper at which canned goods are collected and there is an informational presentation and dialogue about local food security.

Engage students with the campus community or the broader world

Civic engagement entails taking action in one's community and working within the systems of that community to affect change on some level.

Principle #5: Reciprocity

CE projects should be mutually beneficial for students and community partners or campus organizations. CE projects should address community needs and problems, whether that community is on campus or off. Students and faculty should be able to identify how their work is making a contribution to the individuals, groups, and organizations they work with, and not primarily a self-serving effort—even if that effort generates learning. While many CE projects involve observation, students should also be taking action in some way that is useful to others or works toward some kind of change.

Examples:

- NO: Observing physician assistants at a clinic. Does not involve students taking action in any way; the clinic does not benefit from the student's presence except perhaps indirectly in developing a professional pipeline.
- YES: Providing patient education workshops at a clinic. Provides a service for the organization from which their clients directly benefit. Could be supplemented with observation, but that is not the primary focus.
- NO: Hosting a benefit concert on campus on a day when multiple other events are planned. Creates more work for university personnel and potentially inhibits the success of other programs.
- YES: Working with Student Activities staff to add a fundraising component to an existing event. Enhances campus programming in a way that does not create additional conflicts or burdens for staff.

Principle #6: Respectful Collaboration

CE projects should entail respectful collaboration with campus and community organizations. Supervising CE students, responding to their requests, scheduling their work, and other kinds of support for civic engagement efforts can take a considerable amount of time and effort invested on the part of campus and community organizations for CE students. While the partners should be benefiting in some way from this support, CE faculty and students should nevertheless be mindful of the impact of their actions and requests on partners. CE faculty should work with partners in advance (when possible) to discuss CE students' activities, plan supervision, and determine guidelines for incidents such as absence, tardiness, or rule violations that can disrupt partner operations. CE students should adhere to partner rules and policies, and generally "do no harm" in their work on campus and off. If the CE project involves work with clients or organizational staff who come from a different background from students (in terms of race, religion, socio-economic status, etc.), students may need training in diversity issues before beginning their work. While challenging the status quo and existing systems is a critical component of civic education, CE faculty must work with students to ensure that CE projects do not put staff in compromising positions or jeopardize future CE activities and partnerships.

Examples:

- **NO:** Sending students without announcement to various campus offices or community organizations to get help with their CE projects. Can create frustration and tension for university or partner staff, even if they support the students' efforts.
- **YES:** Discussing potential CE activities with unit managers on campus or community partners prior to the semester. Sets expectations about how students approach them and how they can reasonably assist students.
- **NO:** A student missing scheduled tutoring time and insisting upon making up hours at the site so that he or she can get a good grade.
- **YES:** Faculty member, community partner, and student all agree on an attendance policy in advance and understand whether make-up hours are possible.

Include appropriate orientation, preparation for the project, and opportunity for thoughtful reflection

Civic engagement should be integrated into academic courses with an opportunity to learn from experience through reflective learning techniques.

Principle #7: Academic Integration

CE projects should have clear and direct integration with academic concepts. In CE courses, the civic engagement component should be woven into the curriculum through readings, assignments, class activities, and assessment techniques that connect the CE experience to the academic concepts of the course. The more deeply CE is embedded into a course, the more difficult it is to separate civic engagement from the rest of the course because they are intertwined. Civic engagement should not be an "add-on" to a course that lacks connection to other course activities. In independent CE projects, students should connect the project to academic concepts learned in other courses and/or use the CE experience as an opportunity to intellectually engage in learning about new concepts. It may be helpful for students developing CE proposals to consider first what their learning objectives are, and then how the CE experience can help them meet those objectives. With effective academic integration, students

are adequately prepared for the CE experience, understand its context in their learning, and are equipped with the knowledge needed to embark in their civic engagement work.

Examples:

- **NO:** Tacking on a volunteer requirement to an existing course and leaving the rest of the course exactly the same as it was without the requirement. Does not integrate the CE component effectively or use CE as a learning tool.
- **YES:** Including the CE experience in class discussions, readings, written assignments, and other elements of the course. Connects CE with multiple learning objectives for maximum learning.
- **NO:** An independent project in which a student performs community service at a food bank, focusing only completing hours.
- **YES:** An independent project in which a student serves at a food bank, researches local food security, and hosts a panel discussion on campus about ways to solve the hunger problem.

Principle #8: Reflection on Experience

The process through which students learn from experience is reflection. Reflection takes many forms, but it is an academic exercise guided by faculty and not merely a log of time spent. High quality reflection is structured, occurs regularly (e.g. before, during, and after the CE experience), challenges students to apply the CE experience to other course concepts, and includes feedback and assessment. While free journaling is one form of reflection, it may not on its own be structured enough to help students draw connections between academic concepts and the CE experience. Reflection should be rigorous, analytical, creative, and/or emotional, and reflection should also be the basis for additional class activities such as discussion or role playing. Students can benefit greatly from the opportunity to discuss their CE projects with others and reflect on their experiences together. When possible, community partners should also be included in the reflection to strengthen and deepen the experience for everyone. Through reflection students can assess and critically analyze their civic engagement experience and make connections to their coursework and careers.

Examples:

- **NO:** Journaling about a student's likes and dislikes in the CE experience. Does not connect to academic concepts; may provide only surface level learning; may be difficult to assess.
- **YES:** Journaling about a student's likes and dislikes along with a critical analysis of how the CE work connects to course readings, specific learning objectives, or other elements of the class.
- **NO:** Reflection takes place at the end of the semester only with a final paper submitted during the exam period.
- **YES:** Reflection takes place throughout the course, with periodic opportunities for class discussion, question and answer, check-in, reflective writing, and so on.

Share the results of the project with the campus community through appropriate means devised in consultation with the Center for Civic Engagement

For purposes of assessment and demonstration, civic engagement projects should generate results that can be shared with others.

Principle #9: Appropriate Assessment

CE projects should be assessed in a way suitable to their design. As part of academic integration, the CE experience can be assessed in numerous ways, including through written analysis, essay, oral presentation, and contribution to class dialogue. In addition, due to the nature of CE experiences, creating opportunities for student self-evaluation and, when appropriate, site supervisor evaluation, is encouraged. Community partners should have an opportunity to provide regular feedback on projects or services provided by individual students and whole classes. Utilizing both formative and summative assessment techniques can potentially catch issues before they become problems. Products offered for assessment should reflect the depth of academic integration expected in the course or project.

Examples:

- **NO:** Creating a flyer for an event. Does not provide sufficient substance for assessment of learning.
- **YES:** Creating a flyer for an event that is part of a portfolio that also includes reflective journal assessments, a reading analysis, and an explanation of the event in light of academic concepts. Provides multiple lenses for assessment that includes academic concepts.
- **NO:** Receiving no feedback from a community organization about the outreach materials a class is developing until it is too late to make changes.
- **YES:** Regular, open communication with community partners to provide feedback and assess student progress on the outreach materials they develop.

Principle #10: Public Citizenship

CE projects should be shared with the campus community to provide inspiration, information, and documentation. Civic engagement is a public process of working to create change, though sometimes the details of that work are private (such as how one votes in an election). Isolated and invisible efforts are not likely to garner the collective energy that is needed for large-scale systemic change, whereas public displays of civic engagement can inspire others to take action, and/or demonstrate how to get involved. Individual students or whole classes can engage in public acts of citizenship by sharing their projects on the CCE website, taking photos or video, utilizing social media to engage audiences, holding events that feature their work or opening up class presentations or discussions to the campus community and community partners. Students can also work with community partners to discuss how their work could be shared at the partner site, in joint publications, or with the general public. Sharing CE projects also creates opportunities for a more informed citizenry at large and a campus in which students can educate each other about the causes important to them. In addition, CE projects should be shared with the campus community and community partners so that they become part of our history as a university and we have a record of students' civic engagement efforts over time.

Examples:

- **NO:** Students do a civic engagement project and present their project at the end of the semester to their own classmates only.
- **YES:** Inviting other students and faculty, as well as community partners, to class presentations at the end of the semester.
- **NO:** A student doing an independent civic engagement project writes a culminating paper about her topic, which is only ever seen by her faculty supervisor.

- YES: A student doing an independent civic engagement project writes a paper and prepares a narrated slide show that is hosted on the CCE website and shared with relevant community organizations.

Additional Notes

- CE projects (CIV 110 & CIV 111) require students to prepare a proposal outlining their project. The strongest proposals leave no doubt that quality will be achieved through the project by clearly articulating the project and its academic connections. In addition, students must justify why they want to do a CE project rather than take a CE course, a question which they often struggle to answer. Students who can fulfill their requirement through usual course means should, there is such great benefit from students collaborating on and sharing civic engagement experiences in a class-based environment and faculty receive no workload credit for CIV 110 & CIV 111 sponsorships.
- As stated in the catalog, courses must be 2 credits or more for consideration for the CE designation. CIV 110 projects can be 0 or 1 credit, but the work is the same either way. CIV 111 projects must be 2 credits because they also meet the DP/IP Cornerstone.