

COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING

Forming Women and Men for Others Through Academic Courses

Community-Based Learning (CBL) is the incorporation of community service within academic courses, together with structured reflection upon that experience and its connection to the course. The service becomes “a text” within the course. It is called community-based when it is required within a course. CBL is experiential education. It can also contain immersion experiences and researching community needs.

As an educational method, community-based learning provides students with fertile ground on which to test theories acquired in the classroom and put them into practice in the community.

Research has indicated that students involved in community-based learning courses agree that their service experience helped them better understand the course, and has benefited them personally. Community-Based Learning is also “values education.” The development and formation of values arise out of a social consciousness of the situation of “the other”, especially the other who is deprived in some way. Community-Based Learning attempts to make students more aware of social injustices, causes them to consider serious civic engagement in society and introduces them to the challenges and possibilities of systemic change. The integration of CBL into an undergraduate or graduate course has five key components:

1. Service activities are required. The number of service hours can vary, but the suggested norm over a semester is 10-20.
2. Clear connections exist between service activities and the academic course.
3. Service activities benefit the people receiving the service, the students, the service partner and the university in a significant way.
4. Students engage in a carefully articulated reflection process around the service, the connection to the course and the way in which the experience has affected them.
5. Assessment of the outcomes of the service experience is done through evaluations by the service agency, the student and the professor.