

Community Service-Learning Program 2007-2008 Evaluation Report

November 2008

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2007-08 Evaluation-at-a-Glance

Overview...

- 15 different instructors integrated a CSL component into 25 courses in 11 departments
- 499 students were registered in the 25 courses with a CSL component
- 298 students chose to participate in CSL
- 67 community organizations hosted students
- 227 CSL student surveys, 155 non-CSL student surveys, 23 instructor surveys, & 41 community partner surveys were completed
- positive impressions of CSL among most students, instructors & community partners

CSL students...

- had positive experiences with community organizations: 70%
- would consider continuing to volunteer with these organizations: 40%
- rated CSL useful for:
 - increasing empathy for particular populations: 80%
 - understanding the role of community organizations: 77%
 - understanding complexities of community issues: 72%
 - recognizing how their abilities can contribute to social change: 68%
 - increasing awareness of the kinds of knowledge generation: 67%
 - understanding the community experience: 59%
 - understanding course material: 49%
- reported that they had been able to integrate CSL into their courses: 64%

Instructors...

- rated CSL useful to students for:
 - encouraging participation in the community: 91%
 - connecting course material to community experiences: 91%
 - developing critical thinking skills: 83%
 - improving communication skills: 83%
 - contributing to social change: 78%
 - developing leadership skills: 73%
 - developing research skills: 68%
 - enhancing students' abilities to understand course material: 61%
- rated CSL useful to themselves for:
 - enhancing the classroom environment: 86%
 - enhancing their relationships to students: 56%
 - contributing to their teaching skills: 39%
- reported that:
 - they had been able to integrate CSL into course goals: 73%
 - CSL had changed their teaching approach: 68%
 - they had developed new teaching resources related to CSL in their courses: 48%

Community partners...

- rated CSL useful to students for:
 - encouraging participation in community: 85%
 - improving communication skills: 79%
 - understanding the community: 78%
 - contributing to social change: 72%
 - developing critical thinking skills: 69%
 - developing leadership skills: 62%
- rated CSL useful to themselves or their organizations for:
 - developing relationships with students: 83%
 - developing volunteer mentoring skills: 82%
 - contributing to social change: 65%
 - building organizational capacity: 63%
 - learning new forms of community engagement: 61%
 - developing relationships with the university: 53%
 - networking with other community organizations: 33%
- reported that:
 - they had been able to integrate CSL into their organizations: 87%
 - they had had positive experiences with CSL: 81%
 - key benefits of CSL to community organizations were helping to make community issues & non-profit organizations' work visible, & enhancing their abilities to stretch limited resources

Spotlight on growth...

- marked increase between 2005-06 & 2007-08 in:
 - # of courses with a CSL component: from 13 to 25
 - # of CSL students: from 136 to 298
 - # of CSL community partners: from 42 to 67
- less satisfaction with community experiences among students
- continued need to:
 - maximize a good fit between course, placement, student & particular tasks
 - clarify & monitor accountability of students for completing CSL commitments
 - revisit placements & expectations of all parties
 - enhance instructors' capacities to maximize the value of CSL to students' learning

Background

Following a developmental pilot phase, the Community Service-Learning (CSL) Program was officially launched at the University of Alberta in 2005. Based in the Faculty of Arts, the Program has facilitated and coordinated integration of CSL into 54 Undergraduate, 8 Graduate, and 6 combined Undergraduate / Graduate courses in 19 departments between Fall 2005 and Spring 2008.

Since 2005, curricular CSL has been extended in three ways:

- a community service-learning <u>theory-and-practice</u> course (CSL 300), which incorporates CSL in a regular term course
- a spring immersion course (CSL 350 & 360 taken simultaneously), which incorporates CSL in an intensive course built around contemporary social issues (currently, facets of the oil boom in Alberta.¹
- a Certificate in Community Service-Learning, which formally recognizes students' CSL participation on their university transcript

In 2007-08, 15 different instructors in 11 University of Alberta departments incorporated CSL into 25 undergraduate and graduate CSL courses. A list of courses can be found on the CSL website at http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/arts/CSLHOME.cfm. Sixty-seven (67) community partners hosted community placements in 2007-08.

In 2007-08, CSL was required in 7 courses and optional in 18. Overall, 60% of students registered in the 25 courses participated in CSL. In courses in which CSL was optional, 52% of students opted to participate.

Surveys of students and instructors are carried out in class during the last two weeks of each term, resulting in high response rates for these two groups. In 2007-08, 77% of students registered in CSL courses completed surveys - 76% of CSL students and 77% of non-CSL students. All but 2 instructor surveys were completed. Community partners are surveyed by mail following completion of each term, and they are offered the option of completing a survey on-line rather than mailing it back. In 2007-08, 62% of community partner surveys were completed, a higher response rate in than in previous years. Note that participants are asked to complete surveys for *each* course. This means that participants who are involved in more than one course in either a term or during the year are asked to complete a survey each time. Therefore, the number of surveys can be larger than the number of unique participants. Findings should be interpreted in light of this. We are currently modifying our survey instruments in order to better account for these overlaps.

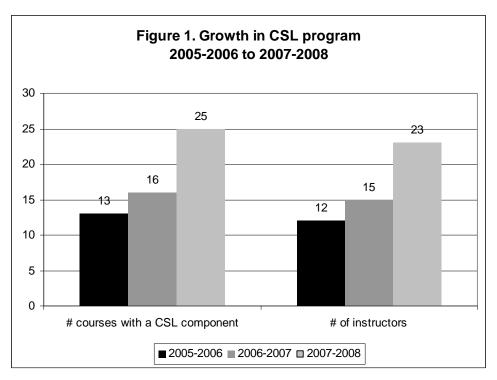
This report provides a summary of the 2007-08 data, along with comparisons with previous years where relevant. The CSL Program experienced marked growth in the 2007-08 academic year. We therefore place a spotlight on growth.

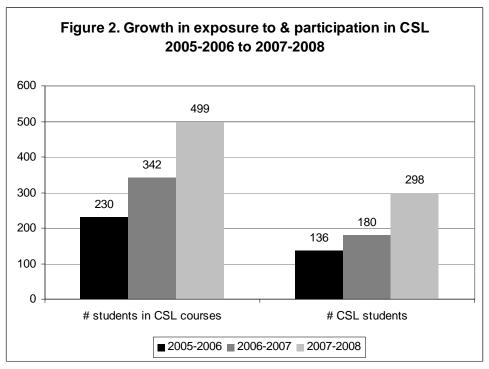
Program growth

The CSL Program has grown dramatically since its official launch in fall 2005. This is true in terms of the number of courses with a CSL component, the number of instructors incorporating CSL into their teaching, the number of students exposed to CSL in courses, and the number of students actually participating in CSL. As Figures 1 and 2 indicate, the number of courses and

¹ Evaluation of CSL immersion courses is reported separately and not included in the annual report.

instructors has almost doubled from 2005-06 to 2007-08, while the number of students registered in CSL courses and number of CSL participants has more than doubled.





The largest growth was attributable to the take up of CSL in the Women's Studies Program and the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies. This pattern has been sustained in the current academic year (2008-09). We are also seeing continuing growth this academic year, as continuing and

first time CSL instructors incorporate CSL into 22 Undergraduate², 4 Graduate, and 3 combined Undergraduate/Graduate courses.³

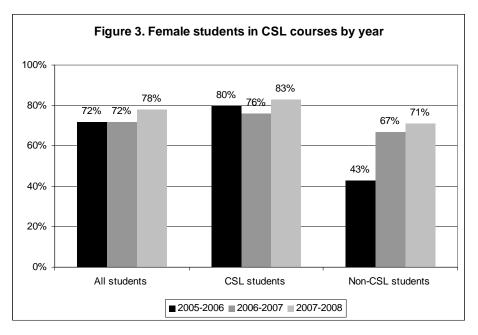
It should be noted that the growth in number of students registered in CSL courses cannot be attributed specifically to student demand, since many students are not aware that a course has a CSL component until after the beginning of term. At this time, the U of A course calendar does not indicate whether or not a course includes CSL. Additionally, the proportion of students opting for CSL may underreport or underestimate interest in CSL, since some instructors place a cap on the number of students who can participate in CSL. Survey data indicate that some students would have chosen CSL had they had the option.

Description of participants

Students

The profile of students is consistent across the three academic years for which survey data have been collected, according to sex, age, and years of post-secondary education completed.

Sex: In 2007-08, 78% of survey respondents who reported their sex according to categories provided identified themselves as female, 22% as male, and 2% as other than female or male. A majority of students who completed surveys in CSL courses were female, and a majority of the students who opted to participate in CSL were female. Figure 3 shows the proportions of female students in CSL courses, as well as broken down by CSL and non-CSL students, for the past three years, based on survey respondents.



Age: The age range of CSL students has been broader than that of non-CSL students each year since 2005-06. In 2007-08, the age range of CSL students was 19 to 53, compared to 18 to 42 for non-CSL students. The median ages of CSL and non-CSL students, however, have been very similar across the three years, at 23 or 22 years old. Table 1 shows the age range, mean, and median ages for all survey respondents, CSL students and non-CSL students.

² Includes CSL 480, Individual Study in CSL, in which two students are registered.

³ These numbers do not include immersion courses CSL 350 & 360, to be offered in Spring 2009.

Year	Participants	Age Range	Mean Age	Median Age
2005-06	All students	19 to 60	24.61	23
	CSL students	19 to 60	24.96	23
	Non-CSL students	20 to 42	23.97	22
2006-07	All students	18 to 58	23.64	22
	CSL students	19 to 58	24.32	23
	Non-CSL students	18 to 37	22.77	22
2007-08	All students	18 to 53	23.37	22
	CSL students	19 to 53	23.76	22
	Non-CSL students	18 to 42	22.79	22

Table 1

Post-secondary education completed: The number of years of post-secondary education completed was the same for CSL and non-CSL students each year, and similar across the three years, at 3 or 4. Table 2 shows a summary of these data.

Year	Participants	Mean years completed	Median years completed
2005-06	All students	3.8	4
	CSL students	3.87	4
	Non-CSL students	3.69	4
2006-07	All students	3.26	3
	CSL students	3.31	3
	Non-CSL students	3.21	3
2007-08	All students	3.22	3
	CSL students	3.32	3
	Non-CSL students	3.08	3

Table 2

Paid work during the term: In 2007-08, the median number of hours of paid work per week during the term was identical for CSL and non-CSL students, at 10. Comparative data for other years are not readily available, because of changes in our survey tool over the three years. Table 3 shows the range, mean and median hours of paid work for all students, CSL and non-CSL students.

Table 3

Year	Participants	Range	Mean hours paid work / week	Median hours paid work / week
2007-08	All students	0 to 168	11.58	10
	CSL students	0 to 50	11.95	10
	Non-CSL students	0 to 168 ⁴	11.05	10

Volunteer positions: In 2007-08, 84% of CSL students and 72% of non-CSL students reported that they had volunteered during the previous three years. As Table 4 shows, among students who had held at least one volunteer position during the previous three years, the median number for CSL students was 3, compared to 2 for non-CSL students.

In 2007-08, 16% of CSL students and 28% of non-CSL students indicated that they had held no volunteer positions during the previous three years.

Year	Participants	Mean # volunteer positions past three years (among those with at least 1)	Median # volunteer positions past three years (among those with at least 1)	Mean # volunteer positions this term (among those with at least 1)	Median # volunteer positions this term (among those with at least 1)
2007-08	All students	3.07	2	1.59	1
	CSL students	3.18	3	1.54	1
	Non-CSL students	2.88	2	1.73	1

Table 4

In 2007-08, among students who indicated that they had volunteered during the term in which they completed the survey, the median number of positions held was the same for both CSL and non-CSL students. (See above table.)

Of the 84% of CSL students had held at least one volunteer position during the previous three years, 53% of them indicated that they were not involved in any other volunteer work outside of CSL during the term. For the 16% of CSL students who had not volunteered during the previous three years, CSL may have fostered interest in community engagement for the first time. These data suggest that CSL may provide an opportunity for students who have volunteered previously to sustain their volunteer work while they are attending university, when they otherwise might not because of the demands of balancing studies with continuing commitments including paid work^{5,6}.

⁴ One student reported 168 hours, which amounts to 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

⁵ A large proportion of students work to pay for school.

Comparative data for other years are not readily available, because of changes in our survey tool over the three years.

Instructors

CSL experience: 10 instructors reported teaching CSL for the first time in the term in which they completed the survey.

More than half (52%) of instructor surveys indicated that they were "not at all familiar" (30%) or "not familiar" (22%) with CSL as a pedagogical approach before teaching it for the first time, while just 31% were "familiar" (22%) or "very familiar" (9%) with it.

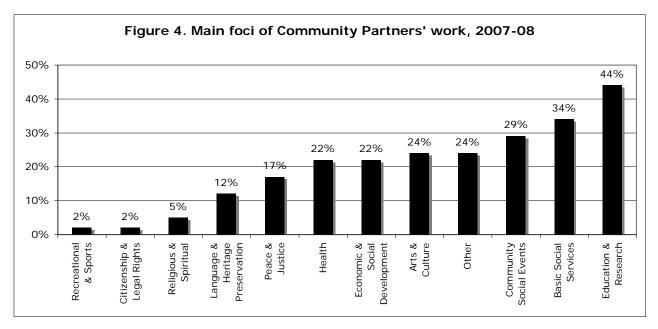
Interest in experiential learning pedagogy: Nearly all instructor surveys (95%) indicated they were either "interested" (30%) or "very interested" (65%) in experiential learning pedagogy.

All instructor surveys indicated that teaching should be linked to social change "to some extent" (27%) or "to a great extent" (73%).

Personal involvement in social issues: Interestingly, of those instructors who responded to a question about their own involvement in community organizations that address social issues, 36% said "not at all involved" (14%) or "not involved" (23%); 27% were "neutral"; & 36% said "involved" (27%) or "very involved" (9%).

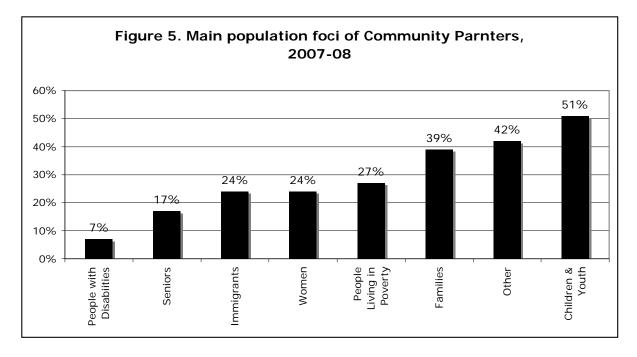
Community partners

Community organizations' work: Figure 4 shows the main foci of community partners' work. Many respondents reported multiple foci. "Other" included: child protection / victim services, environmental stewardship, housing, leadership & youth, mentoring, psychosocial education, research, seniors lodges, youth decision making.



⁶ This raises interesting questions: Does CSL foster an instrumental orientation to students' volunteerism, by 'paying' them to volunteer in return for credits? Or have they found 'ordinary' volunteering not as satisfying as 'engaging'?

Figure 5 shows the main populations supported by community partners. Many respondents reported multiple populations. "Other" included: Aboriginals, artists / activists (range of populations), general public, church groups, farm producers, LGBTQ&A, people with mental illness, Spanish students, seniors' families, women & men with eating disorders, young adults.



Overall, 75% of community partners reported that class is one of the main disadvantages that their organizations address; 35% reported gender, and 30% reported race and age.

Community mentors' non-profit experience: Community mentors reported considerable experience in the non-profit sector. 38% had been working in the non-profit sector for 1-5 years, 25% for 6-10 years, 25% for 11-15 years, and 13% for between 16 and 27 years.

Experience with volunteers: Community organizations varied considerably in the number of volunteers they had involved during the previous year (range: 2 to 3500 volunteers). More than three quarters (78%) of community partners had supervised students before (range: 2 - 120 students).

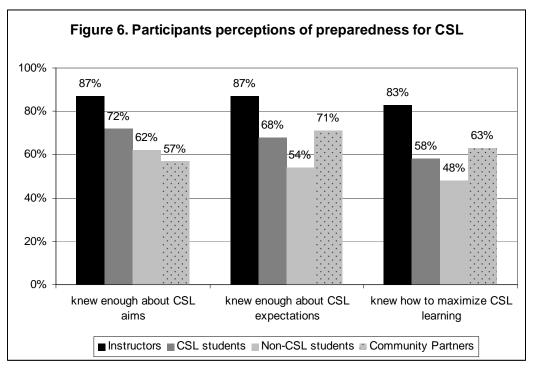
Participants' perceptions of preparation for CSL

The CSL Program provides information about CSL, and support for participation, in a variety of ways, including:

- information sessions for instructors who want to know more about CSL before deciding to participate
- orientation workshops for instructors and community partners prior to the start of term
- beginning of term information to each class that has a CSL component
- information sessions about the non-profit sector for CSL students
- mentoring and project building workshops for community partners who are hosting students
- syllabus building workshops for instructors intending to teach a CSL course

 information and assistance as requested by individual instructors, community partners, and students

In 2007-08, a majority of instructors, CSL students, and community partners agreed that they had enough information about the aims and expectations of CSL, and about how to connect course or organizational objectives to CSL. A majority of non-CSL students also reported they had enough information about the aims and expectations of CSL. It is clear, however, that the proportions in each group varied considerably. Much larger proportions of instructors than CSL students and community partners felt they knew enough. It is interesting that much larger proportions of CSL students than non-CSL students agreed that they had enough information or knowledge in each area, since students generally hear about CSL at the same time in classes at the beginning of term. See Figure 6.



Nearly all (91%) instructors and 69% of community partners also reported that the CSL Program had provided information or assistance that was helpful to carrying out their respective roles.

Asked if there was anything that the CSL Program could do in the way of additional support, more than three quarters (78%) of instructors said "No" or did not respond. Instructors who responded commented:

A trouble-shooting workshop or listserve would be helpful. A timeline / checklist for preparation & the term (like that provided to students) that includes workshop dates, evaluation dates (or period), etc. to assist with planning.

End-of-term wrap-up / "how'd it go?" session.

RAship or TAship to help administer contacts / paperwork - could probably have one for every 3 or 4 classes.

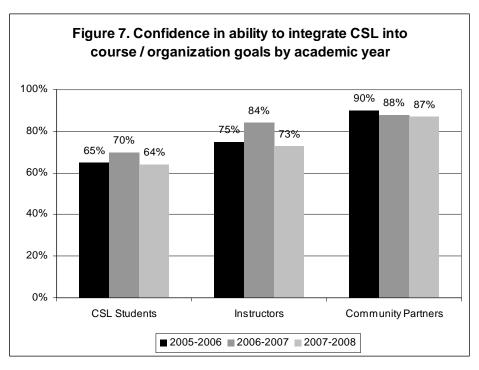
Specific academic work on CSL of relevance to my area.

Community partners' comments suggested that it would be helpful to have better knowledge of course expectations and a more organized schedule for students. Several also suggested that

mentoring CSL students is a strain on their resources and that money, grants, more time, and relief staff for mentors what would make this job easier. Almost half (45%) of community partners reported that hosting CSL students was different from the way in which they usually work with volunteers. They indicated that they spent more time with CSL students personally and in supervision, felt more responsible for them because they want to ensure the goals are met, and added that it is more challenging to link with a course.

Confidence in ability to integrate CSL

In 2007-08, 64% of CSL students, 73% of instructors, and 87% of community partners, agreed that they had been able to integrate CSL into their courses or organizations. Figure 7 shows the proportions of CSL students, instructors and community partners who thought they were able to integrate CSL into the course or organizational goals over the past three years.

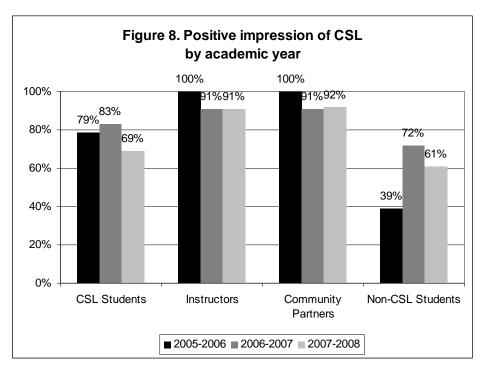


In 2007-08, 70% of instructors (up from 55% in 2006-07) agreed that they had enough time to integrate CSL into their courses. Of the 13 instructors who had taught a CSL course before, 54% reported that their ability to integrate CSL had increased, 31% said it had stayed the same, and 15% said it had decreased. Instructors who said that their ability to integrate CSL into their courses had decreased attributed this to problems with CSL placements – either the placements were not a good match for the course or were not timely for integrating the learning into the course.

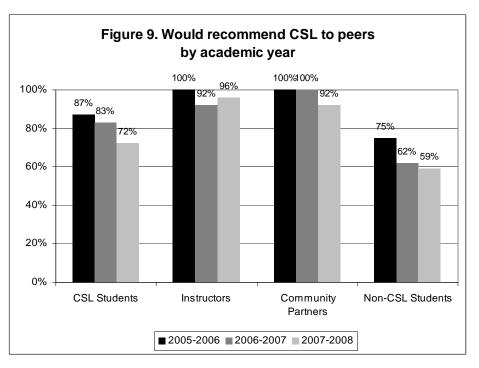
Almost three-quarters (74%) of community partners (down from 83% in 2006-07) agreed that they had enough time to integrate CSL into their organization's work.

Satisfaction with CSL

In 2007-08, large proportions of all types of participants had positive impressions of CSL: 69% of CSL students, 61% of non-CSL students, 91% of instructors, and 92% community partners. Figure 8 shows comparative data over the three years.



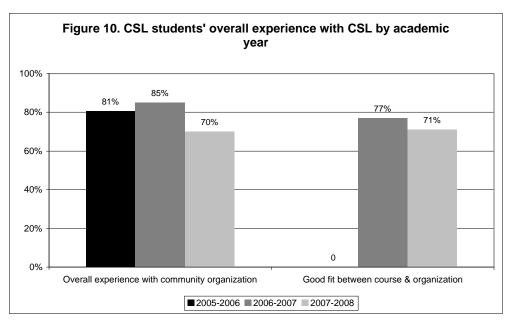
Almost three-quarter (72%) of CSL student and almost all instructors (96%) and community partners (92%) said they would recommend CSL to their peers or colleagues. In addition, over half (59%) of non-CSL students also said they would recommend CSL to their peers. See Figure 9 for comparative figures for the past three years.



In 2007-08, 70% of CSL students reported positive experiences with their community organizations, down from the previous two years, and almost the same proportion (71%) agreed that there had been a good fit between the course and the community organization where they carried out their placement. See Figure 10. While overwhelmingly reporting positive impressions

of CSL, some instructors also commented on problems with the fit between a course and the particular community organization or project.

High proportions of students continue to report satisfaction with their CSL experiences. Notably there was a decrease in the proportion of students with positive ratings across the four indicators of satisfaction in 2007-08.



Participants' perceptions of the contributions of CSL

To students

In 2007-08, large proportions of CSL students perceived that CSL had made a positive difference to their learning in each of five key areas considered important to the CSL Program. Figure 11 summarizes these data along with comparative figures for 2006-07. It is notable that the percentage of students agreeing that CSL had contributed in each of these areas dropped over the previous year.

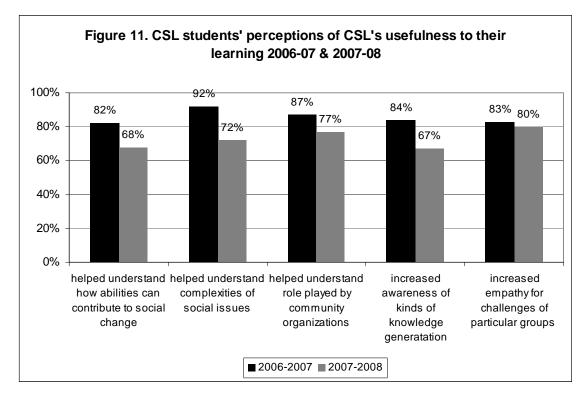
Asked to provide examples of connections they made between their course work and their community placement, CSL students' comments tended to fall along a continuum, shown in Figure 12.

When CSL really works, the differences it makes to students go beyond tangible learning outcomes, as illustrated in the following comments:

I learned a lot about the challenges facing the non-profit sectors especially in relation to funding concerns. This tied into a lot about what we were talking about in class.

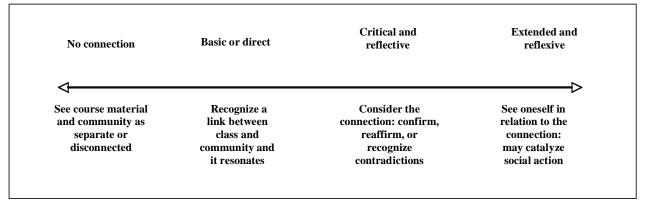
It was a great experience! I like that I was encouraged to pull things I've learned from this class, my placement, and other classes together. Other classes don't seem to encourage that, which strikes me as a major shortcoming of this university.

My community placement helped me to better understand the misconceptions that society, and at a point myself, hold towards these specific youth. I felt that interacting with a marginalized group helped me understand some of the difficulties that these individuals face. It also showed me how community involvement can make a big difference.

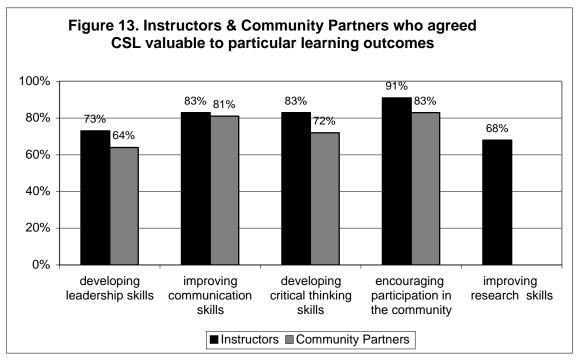


It made me feel obligated and responsible to change things and not just remain in this safe institution.

Figure 12. Continuum of types of connections suggested by students' comments



Instructors and community partners were asked about the usefulness of CSL to students' learning in particular areas considered important in community service-learning learning programs. Figure 13 shows that between 68% and 91% of instructors and 64% and 83% community partners agreed that CSL was useful to students' learning in these key areas. (Community partners were not asked about usefulness to research skills.) These proportions, while remaining high, are also down from the previous year.



To instructors

Instructors were also asked to what extent participation in CSL had been valuable to their teaching. Figure 14 shows that a large number (80%) agreed that CSL had enhanced the classroom environment, and more than half (57%) thought it had helped them develop better relationships with students. More than a third (39%) thought that CSL had helped them to improve their teaching skills.

Asked to provide examples of changes that CSL had made to their teaching, instructors commented:

CSL has helped to enhance my facilitation skills.

I could relate material to concrete experiences, and call on students to do the same.

I talked less. I let students take the lead in discussions more often and was able to help them in thinking through their experiences more than "telling them what to think."

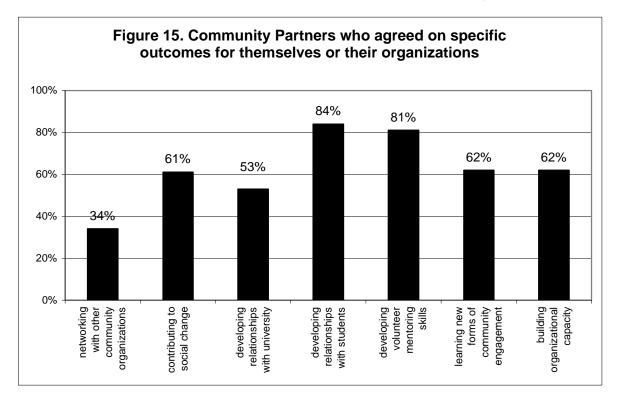
The relationship to students shifted from one of instruction to one based increasingly on conversation.

Instructors also reported integrating new kinds of assignments or learning tools, such as journals, asynchronous on-line discussions, new content modules, more focused readings, and new projects.

To community partners

Community partners were asked to evaluate the usefulness of CSL to themselves and their organizations. Figure 15 shows of the proportion of community partners who perceived involvement in CSL to be useful in particular areas. Notably the largest proportions of partners agreed that CSL was useful in the areas most directly related to their role, namely developing relationships with students (84%) and contributing to volunteer mentoring skills (81%). The Program considers the latter contribution to be important to sustaining positive relationships with community organizations, as well as high quality placements for students.

It is interesting that community partners do not equate developing relationships with students with developing a relationship to the university. Only just over half (53%) agreed that being involved in CSL had helped them develop relationships with the university.



Among the concrete contributions of CSL, community partners reported that CSL had been helpful in promoting their organizations and completing tasks or projects that they could not have got to without additional hands.

Conclusions

A clear majority of CSL students consistently say that they would consider taking another CSL course, and nearly all instructors report that they would consider teaching another CSL course (and many do). Similarly, nearly all community partners say they would consider being involved in CSL again in the future. A clear majority of CSL students, instructors, and community partners also say they would recommend CSL to their peers or colleagues. Interestingly and significantly, a majority of *non*-CSL students in CSL courses also say they would recommend a CSL course to their peers. During the past year, support for the CSL Program remained high overall.

As this report demonstrates, high proportions of participants continue to report their satisfaction with CSL across a range of indicators. Yet as we also note, compared to previous year(s), smaller proportions of participants in 2007-08 reported being satisfied with their experiences. There are a number of possible explanations for these findings. First, one goal of CSL is to foster students' critical reflection about knowledge generation generally and about their own learning. If CSL is successful, it is possible that students who have taken more than one CSL course apply their critical thinking skills in evaluation of CSL courses. Second, the drop coincided with dramatic program growth, and while growth is an indicator of successful program

dissemination and take-up, it is not without challenges. An N-CEL⁷ workshop presentation in February 2008⁸ highlighted potential issues associated with scaling up. In 2007-08, there were a large number of first time CSL instructors and community partners, who may need more experience in order to maximize the potential of CSL in their courses. Third, partnership is the foundation of community service-learning. The CSL Program knows that it is critically important that all parties involved in the CSL partnership - students, community partners, and instructors receive clear and timely support and follow-up to effectively incorporate CSL into their respective roles. Participants' comments indicated that this goal was not always met during 2007-08, particularly with respect to ensuring a good fit between courses and placement settings and projects. Over time, our findings suggest that students' perceptions of a good fit between the course and the organization, along with positive experiences in the community. shape their overall impressions of CSL and their willingness to recommend it to others. Non-CSL students' comments show that their perceptions of CSL are influenced by their observations of what happens for CSL students in their courses. To ensure that partnership coordination remains solid, the Program has hired a full-time Partnership Coordinator, who has spearheaded adjustments to the planning and implementation processes. We will continue to monitor satisfaction and reported contributions of CSL as growth continues during the current academic year, with particular attention to student' and instructors' perceptions of the fit between courses and community partners and projects

During the past two years, we have observed an apparent disconnect between CSL students' and instructors' perceptions of the benefits of CSL to understanding course material and community experiences, respectively. This would seem to be important, since it is this implied two-way learning, or integration of classroom and community learning sites, that is one of the principles of CSL programs. Both students and instructors see the direction of learning in the same way – that is, a larger proportion in each group perceives CSL to be more useful to understanding the community than to understanding the course material. However, a much larger proportion of instructors are surer about the immediate usefulness of CSL to students' learning. On the other hand, as discussed above, our findings indicate that students and instructors value CSL for something other than the possible direct benefits of mutual, or two-way, course-community-course learning.

We are therefore heartened by theoretical work that supports the pedagogical premises of CSL. For example, Butin (2007) suggests that public scholarship is not about making community connections only to *apply* theory through exposure to, experience with, and practice in, the "real world." Rather, he argues, public scholarship adds to the repertoire of strategies that results in successful teaching. He proposes that community engaged *teaching* can aim for different and equally legitimate pedagogical objectives, which we think align well with three kinds of citizens - personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). As one student put it, CSL allows you to examine "*what you're already immersed in*."

Our findings suggest that CSL can also contribute to thoughtful syllabus building and enhance instructors' capacities to *engage* students in learning. It appears that CSL can foster engagement for both students and instructors, insofar as many instructors report that incorporating CSL into courses can be challenging but rewarding. We therefore suggest that CSL is one mode of what we want to call a *scholarship of teaching for engaged learning* - one

⁷ N-CEL is the Network for Community Engaged Learning, a university-wide spin-off of CSL, currently under development.

⁸ Workshop facilitated by Todd Barr, Executive Director of the Trent Centre for Community-Based Education, and chair of the Canadian Alliance for Community Service-Learning.

that fosters reflection on and in the complexities of the communities in which participants live, and how to connect two sites of knowledge generation.

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