Community Service-Learning Program Evaluation Report for 2009 – 2010

June 2011

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Contents

A T A G L A N C E

COURSES / INSTRUCTORS
33 courses in 20 departments
• CSL required in 17 courses,
27 different instructors
• 8 taught a CSL course for
the first time

- Overall positive impression: 89%
- Would recommend CSL to peers: 89%
- Would participate in CSL in the future: 89%
- Changed teaching approach: 12% (of new)
- Effectively incorporate CSL into course: 67%

CSL STUDENTS
287 registered in CSL
component of course
Of 224 completed surveys:
• 88% in a CSL course for
the first time

- Overall positive CSL experience: 81%
- Would recommend CSL to peers: 80%
- Learned a lot in the course: 79%
- Able to connect CSL with course objectives: 73%
- Agreed adequate partners to choose: 65%
- Agreed placement was a good fit: 80%

Non-CSL STUDENTS
237 registered in CSL
courses
Of 170 completed surveys:
• 89% in a CSL course for
the first time

- Overall positive impression: 61%
- Would recommend CSL to peers: 49%
- Learned a lot in the course: 76%
- Understood CSL & course connection: 61%
- Agreed adequate partners to choose: 42%
- Would participate in CSL in the future: 46%

COMMUNITY PARTNERS
 94 community partners
Of 25 completed surveys:
• 12 were first time CSL
mentors

- Overall positive impression: 92%
- Would recommend to colleagues: 100%
- Not familiar with CSL before: 55% (of new)
- Agreed CSL staff gave helpful info: 75% (of new)
- Able to integrate CSL into work: 72%

Introduction

The 2009-10 academic year was the fifth year of evaluation for the Community Service-Learning (CSL) Program at the University of Alberta. It was characterized as a year of growth as well as a year of further discovery about the impact of CSL on students' learning. This report highlights key findings relevant to the implementation and outcomes of CSL in the 2009-10 academic year gathered from evaluation data from students participating in the CSL components of courses, students not participating in the CSL components of courses, instructors, and community partners. In addition to key findings, this report shares information related to a key objective of the 2009-10 academic year: exploring how students make the connection between information gathered from university and community settings. Finally, this report seeks to integrate current with previous data to allow for contrasts and comparisons between and within five years of evaluation data.

The format of the 2009-10 report has been shortened to promote the accessibility of evaluation data. To those of you who are past or current CSL students, instructors, or community partners, or those of you who are newly exploring community service-learning concepts, we hope you enjoy the following evaluative information which further supports CSL as an engaged and meaningful approach to teaching and learning, and gives further evidence of the CSL Program at the U of A as an effective and supportive overseeing body of CSL opportunities in this community.

For further inquiries into previous CSL evaluation reports or CSL opportunities through the U of A, please refer to our website at http://www.csl.ualberta.ca.

Sincerely,

Kendell Banack
CSL Evaluation Coordinator

Evaluation Methods and Response Rates

Data from the 2009-10 academic year were gathered at the end of the fall and winter terms from instructors, CSL students, non-participating CSL students, and community partners involved in CSL courses. Evaluations were distributed to students and instructors in their respective classes during the last two weeks of the regular semester. Surveys were distributed to community partners by mail on the last week of classes with a reminder email and attached form-fillable electronic survey distributed shortly after. Please refer to the figures below for survey response rates (expressed in percentages) from 2005 to 2010.

Five Year Response Rate Comparison by Year

Five Year Response Rate Comparison by Stakeholder
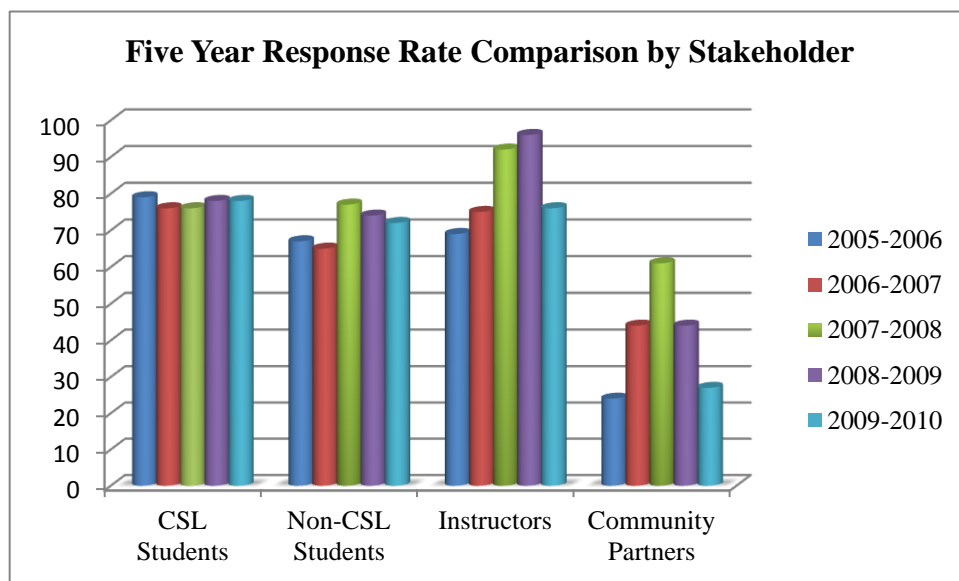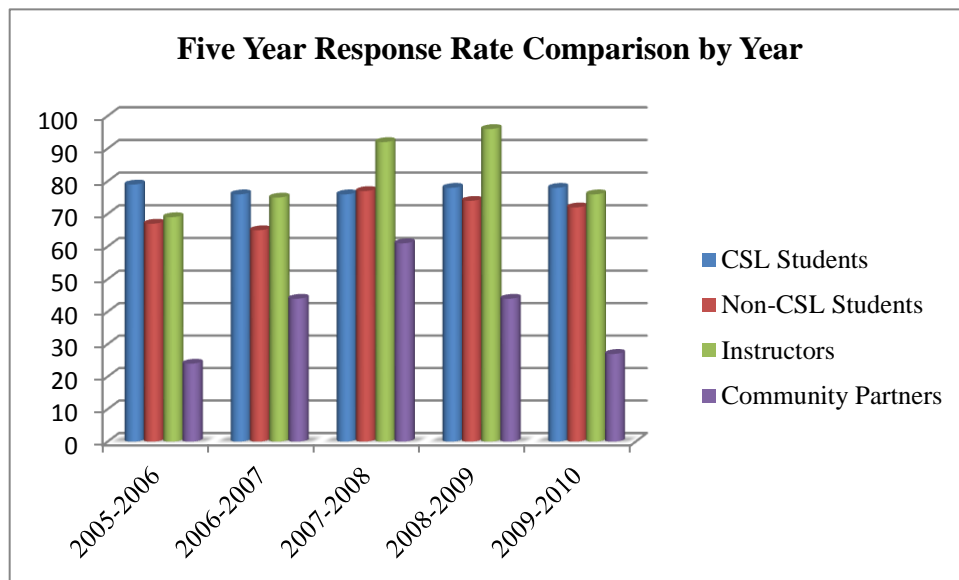
Description of Participants

Since the Program's inception in 2005, the number of participating students, associated instructors, community partners, courses with a CSL component, and departments offering at least one course with a CSL component have more than doubled. Courses and community organizations associated with the Program seem to be increasing both in number and in diversity as new CSL courses demand additional and fitting community placements. Following this overview of demographic then general findings is a more in-depth exploration of how students make the connection between information gathered from university and community settings.

Students

There are two groups of students associated with the CSL Program. First are the *CSL Students* defined as those students who participate in the CSL portion of a course and engage in a community project under the guidance of a community partner. Second are the *Non-CSL Students* defined as those students who enroll in a course with an optional CSL component and elected not to participate in the CSL component of the course, meaning that Non-CSL Students do not engage in a community projects outside of the classroom. In some courses, there is a cap on the number of CSL students permitted, therefore some Non-CSL students may have wished to participate in the CSL component of the class. Please refer to Table 1 for the number of CSL and Non-CSL students from 2005 to 2010.

**Table 1. Number of CSL and Non-CSL Students from 2005 - 2010**

	Number of Students						
	Total Students in CSL Courses			CSL		Non-CSL	
Year	Total Students	New Students	Percent of Students Participating	Total CSL Students	New CSL Students	Total Non-CSL Students	New Non-CSL Students
2005-2006	230	--	59.1%	136	--	94	--
2006-2007	342	--	52.6%	180	--	162	--
2007-2008	499	--	59.7%	298	--	201	--
2008-2009	551	505	54.8%	302	265	249	--
2009-2010	**524**	**464**	**55%**	**287**	**253**	**237**	**211**

Notation: --   missing data regarding how many were new to CSL

➢ **Profile of CSL Students**

A portrait of CSL students at the U of A over five years is presented below. In 2009-10, the average age of CSL students was 22, ranging from 17 to 37. The average years of post-secondary education was 3.0 and the majority of CSL students were female (73%). In addition to an increase in the number of participating students, the CSL student demographic seems to be evolving. There has been a continual decrease in the average age and average years of post-secondary education of CSL students and a subtle, yet promising movement towards equilibrium in the male to female ratio among the CSL student population. Although there were significantly more female than male students participating in CSL in 2009-10 (73% female), male participation in CSL has increased by 32% since 2005.

Profile of
CSL Students

Age of CSL Students

Gender of CSL Students

Years of Post-Secondary
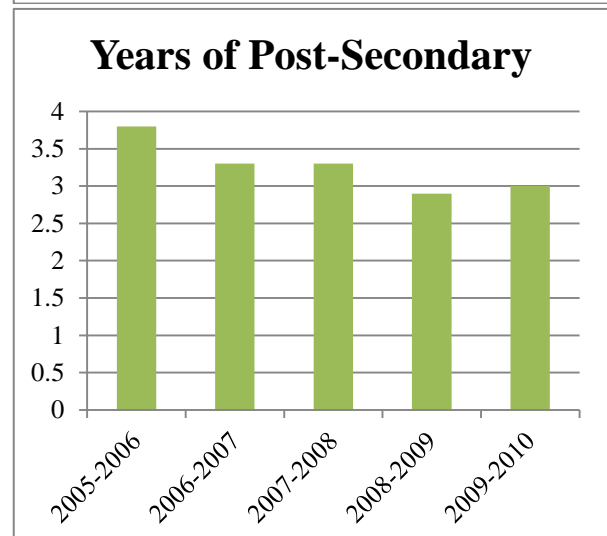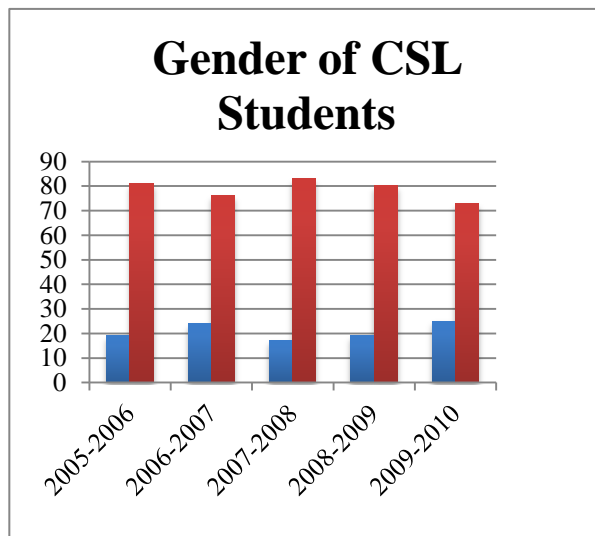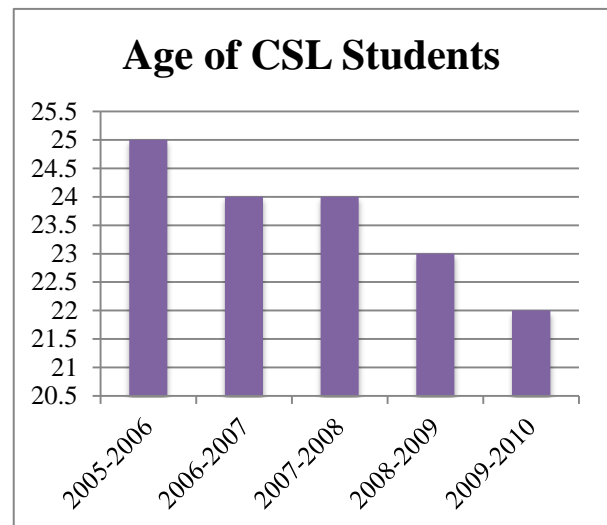
➢ **CSL Students Working Towards the CSL Certificate**

Out of the 287 CSL students, 65% indicated they were aware of the CSL Certificate and 15% indicated they were working towards the CSL Certificate. Of students reporting working towards a CSL Certificate, 58% were female with a mean age of 22.3 years (range = 19 – 28) and a mean of 2.62 years of post-secondary education (range = 1 – 8). Compared to CSL students, on average CSL students working towards a CSL Certificate fall within a tighter age range (19 to 28 rather than 17 to 37) and are more evenly divided between females and males (42% male rather than 27% male).

CSL Instructors and Courses

In 2009-10, 27 instructors offered a course with a CSL component. This indicates a 125% increase in the number of instructors involved in CSL since 2005. In addition, 33 CSL courses were offered at the U of A in 20 different departments, indicating a 154% increase in the number of CSL courses offered and a 186% increase in the number of departments involved in CSL since 2005. A sample of courses containing a CSL component in 2009-2010 include French 298 – Advanced French II, Music 303 – Piano Pedagogy I, Political Science 299 – Citizenship for Democracy, English 199 – Essentials of Writing for Engineering Students, and Sociology 518 – Qualitative Methods in Social Research. Please refer to Table 2 for additional information related to the number of CSL instructors, courses, and departments involved in CSL from 2005 to 2010.

Table 2. Number of CSL Instructors, Courses, & Departments Offering a CSL Course

Year	Total Instructors	*New Instructors*	Courses	*CSL Required in Course*	Departments
2005-2006	12	--	13	*2*	7
2006-2007	15	--	16	*5*	11
2007-2008	15	*10*	25	*7*	11
2008-2009	23	*11*	27	*10*	14
2009-2010	**27**	*8*	**33**	*17*	**20**

Notation: --   missing data regarding how many were new to CSL

Community Partners

With 94 community partners associated with CSL from 2009-10, the number of community partners has more than doubled since 2005. With 287 CSL students this academic year, the ratio of community partner placements to students was approximately 3 to 1. The maximum number of students per community partner was 8 and the minimum was 1.

Table 3. Number of CSL Community Partners

Year	Total Community Partners	*New Community Partners*
2005-2006	42	--
2006-2007	57	--
2007-2008	67	--
2008-2009	86	*46*
2009-2010	**94**	*12*

Notation: --   missing data

General Findings

➢ **Overall satisfaction with CSL Program, courses & experiences consistent with previous years**

- **CSL Students:** Overall positive impressions of CSL
   o 80% of CSL students reported a positive or very positive overall impression
- **Non-CSL Students:** Slightly lower overall impressions of CSL
   o 59% of Non-CSL students reported either a positive or very positive overall impression of CSL
- **Instructors:** Overall positive impressions of CSL
   o 89% of instructors reported a positive or very positive overall impression of CSL
- **Community Partners:** Highest overall impressions of CSL
   o 92% of community partners reported a positive or very positive overall impression

➢ **Students, Instructors, and Community Partners perceive CSL to contribute to CSL students' learning in multiple areas**

- 79% of students reported learning a lot in their CSL course
- Data suggests that students, instructors, and community partners perceive CSL contributing to students learning in several domains. These domains are consistent with the pedagogical goals of CSL as well as the pedagogical goals of academic courses. This

includes the perception that course material enhances understanding of community experiences and vice versa. Please refer to Table 4 for information regarding the value of CSL to students' learning in multiple domains across stakeholders.

Table 4. Perceived Contribution of CSL to CSL Students'
Learning in Multiple Domains Across Stakeholders

Domain	Stakeholders		
Pedagogical Value	Proportion of CSL Students	Proportion of Instructors	Proportion of Community Partners
Community placement enhances ability to understand course material	60%	65%	56%
Course work enhances ability to understand community experience	60%	85%	84%
Understand how abilities can contribute to social change	72%	62%	80%
Encouraged community participation	84%	85%	96%
Transferrable Skills Value			
Develop leadership skills	65%	72%	80%
Develop communication skills	69%	77%	84%
Develop critical thinking skills	60%	73%	88%
Develop research skills	--	52%	--

Notation: --   data not available

Linking Theory and Practice

One of the key objectives for the 2009-10 Evaluation Year was to further explore how students make the connection between academic learning and community work. As highlighted above, students, instructors, and community partners perceived CSL to contribute to students' learning in multiple areas. Specifically, two facets of CSL were highlighted in these results. First, connecting classroom and community enhances students' learning of course material and community, and second, experiential learning obtained through CSL extends beyond expected academic learning. CSL seems to facilitate a unique synthesis of experiential learning and classroom concepts leading to these outcomes, such as understanding how abilities can contribute to social change.
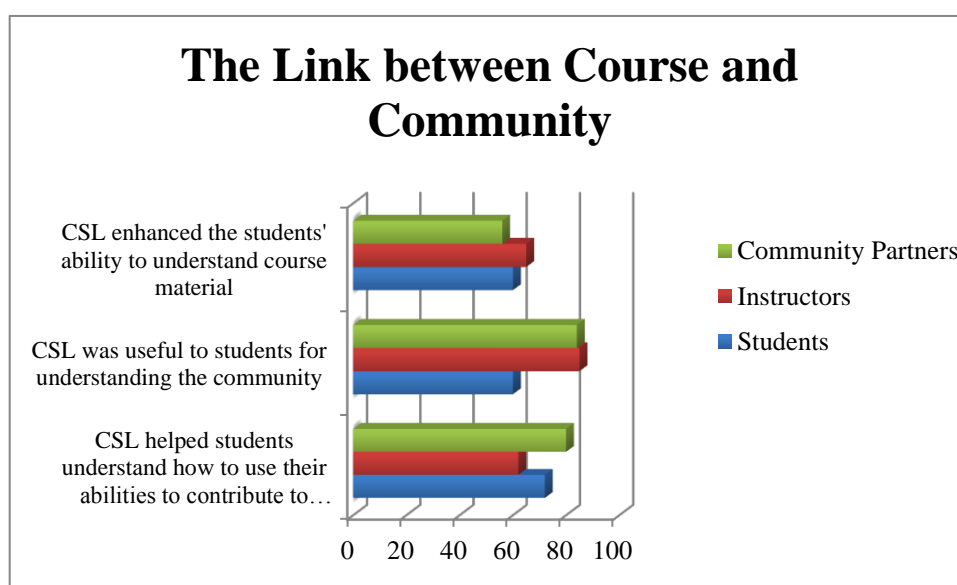
The above figure points to the degree to which CSL was useful to CSL students' understanding of course material, the community, and also the degree to which students understood how to use their abilities to contribute to social change from the community partner, instructor, and student perspectives. Students and instructors rated the impact of CSL on ability to understand course material slightly higher than community partners. As 20% of community partners responded, "I do not know" in response to this question it seems this is an unknown area for community partners. In comparison to perceptions of how CSL impacts understanding of community and how abilities contribute to social change, community partner ratings are slightly higher than those of students and instructors. Community partners seem to be more closely connected to the community-based components of CSL whereas instructors are more closely connected to the course components of CSL. The two highest overall ratings were students' perceptions of CSL's impact in the areas of community context and social action. These findings highlight the positive impact of CSL on academic learning, but also on CSL as shaping students into increasingly engaged and aware community members.

How do students make these connections between course material and community experience leading to these outcomes? To answer this question, we explored the specific strategies and assignments that helped students make the link between classroom and community.

➢ **Understanding Course Material**

Students were asked, "What specific aspect(s), if any, of community experienced helped you to understand the course material?" From the resulting data, a few themes emerged:

⇒ Opportunities for reflection in both the course and community

⇒ Exposure to unfamiliar settings and diverse populations

⇒ Immersion in the "real world"

⇒ The applied, "hands on", practical approach to learning

⇒ Engaging with others and learning from their perspectives

⇒ The alignment between the course and community experience

⇒ The personalization of course material

Direct quotes from students:

> When I did writing (journals) about CSL, I incorporated my CSL experience with what we did in class . . . .

> The experience helped personalize the course material and make it relevant.

> The hands on learning with students made it so we tested our learnings from classroom to real subjects

> Reading about social issues are one thing, but the combination of textual and practical is greatly beneficial to be able to grasp the complexity of human issues.

> Many of the personal stories of the women at the shelter mimed those characters in the books and movies we studied.

> The inmates explained some of the laws and processes of incarceration that we talked about in class

Instructors were asked, "What was the most effective strategy you used for integrating CSL into your class this term, and what pedagogical purpose did the strategy serve?" The prominent theme is highlighted below:

⇒ Providing structured and unstructured opportunities for reflection, such as:

  ▪ Class discussions

  ▪ Journals of CSL experiences

  ▪ Readings specific to CSL

  ▪ Class presentations

  ▪ Group projects

Direct quotes from instructors:

> They [the CSL journals] encouraged the students to reflect on the CSL to combine CSL readings, class discussions and theory. They gave me the opportunity to see what's going on at the placements and to see how the students deal with it.

> The group projects were surprisingly useful; students got to compare their placements (the work they did, the environment, the organizations structures, the kinds of clients, the physical spaces) and to reflect on how different organizations constituted "community."

Community partners were asked, "What, if anything, did you do to support students to link their community experiences to their course material?" A few themes emerged from responses to this question:

⇒ Providing information related to the community and course work

⇒ Facilitating discussions of learning

⇒ Allowing unstructured time for students to research and explore linkages

⇒ Directly mentoring students

⇒ Working on community projects that aligned with course material

Direct quotes from community partners:

> Encouraged them to bring up things that they are covering in class in our discussions.

> Allocated research time so that linkages could be made between their studies and the activities they were asked to perform.

➢ **Understanding the Community**

Students were asked, "What specific strategies/assignment(s), if any, enhanced your ability to understand your community experience?" From the resulting data, a few themes emerged:

⇒ Opportunities for reflection in both the course and community

 ▪ Class discussion

 ▪ Discussion in the community with mentors and community members

 ▪ Course assignments (blogs, class presentations, weekly journals, reports, readings)

 ▪ Presentations to community partners

Direct quotes from students:

> Journaling - I reflected deeply about what had happened and that helped me get something out of it. Writing, I find, is a very effective way to reflect in an effective way.

We wrote journals on our CSL placement and also had presentations. It made me reflect more on the subject.

Reflective papers made me think critically about my contributions to my placement and material covered in class.

Reflective papers helped me to look back and connect lectures and the text with my volunteer experiences.

I gave presentations at a staff meeting where I reflected and shared my experience.

Community partners were asked, "What, if anything, did you do to support students' understanding of the community?" Prominent themes are highlighted below:

⇒ Sharing information

- About non-profit organizations generally
- About the specific organization
- About the specific community needs the organization serves

⇒ Promoting contact

- With themselves as *community partners* by making themselves available
- With *staff* at the organization by means of introductions
- With *community members* at the organization by means of introductions
- With *other students* at the organization by creating peer groups

⇒ Engaging in dialogue specific to students' learning

- Discussed students' project and goals
- Discussed students experiences and learning

⇒ Organizing structured gathering times

- Orientations
- Meetings
- Weekly check-ins
- End of term follow-ups

⇒ Encouraging participation and engagement in the organization

Direct quotes from community partners:

I explained how important it is for farms who are unable to compete in a global market to have local support which leads to sustainable communities.

Provided ongoing dialogue with the students in terms of their experience, what they enjoyed, what they were learning, etc

Orientations, weekly short check-ins, end of term follow-up. Encourged CSL students to form relationships with clients & staff

We did a brief orientation about different NGOs working in the Edmonton area, as well as with the larger Alberta Community. We also spoke a fair bit about the challenges faced by NGOs in different types of projects - and how their work would impact the sector.

Discussed basics during orientation and had in depth discussions with individual students on topics pertaining to their project.

Conclusion

The 2009-10 academic year was the fifth year of evaluation and a year of growth for the CSL Program at the U of A. This report sought to highlight key findings relevant to the implementation and outcomes of CSL in the 2009-10 academic year while providing context for this data using contrasts and comparisons between and within five years of evaluation data. The number of CSL students, Non-CSL students, instructors, departments, and community partners involved in the CSL program has increased. In addition, the CSL student population seems to be evolving towards a lower average age, fewer years of post-secondary education prior to participation, and increasing male participation. Overall, CSL students, Non-CSL students, instructors, and community partners indicated overall satisfaction with CSL Programming, courses, and experiences. In addition to overall satisfaction, CSL has been indicated to contribute to students' learning in multiple domains that extend the boundaries of learning of typical university courses.

The key objective of the 2009-10 academic year was to explore how students make the connection between information gathered from university and community settings, or rather, how they make the link between theory and practice. CSL students, instructors, and community partners offered insights into how this connection is made and reinforced. Overall, a combination of structured and unstructured opportunities to both act and reflect provided by both instructors and community partners seem to create the ideal condition for students to integrate knowledge.

Future Directions and Recommendations

1. Work Towards a Sustainable CSL Program: As the stakeholders associated with CSL continue to increase in number, consider how to create a sustainable CSL administrative body.

2. Standardize Reporting Procedures: Reporting procedures vary from year to year. Consider creating a template for reporting procedures to promote data comparisons and contrasts between years of evaluation. Consistent reporting strategies could include a record of the instructors, courses, and community partners involved in CSL each year in the Annual Evaluation Report.

3. Standardize Data Collection: Consider collecting standard demographic information from all stakeholders, such as gender and age, to promote understanding of trends in the body of CSL participators.

4. Consider Two Types of CSL Students: It is possible to consider two classes of CSL students: those who chose to participate in CSL and those who were mandated by the required component of their course. Consider whether it is of interest to differentiate these two groups of CSL students and compare evaluation data.

5. Facilitate Effective Communication: Consider strategies to increase communication between participants. Suggestions include providing a trouble-shooting workshop or listserv, facilitating an end of the term wrap-up which would include instructors, students, and community partners, advocating for TAs to relieve the burden on instructors, and standardizing a section of every course syllabus with a CSL component (for example, providing a rationale of CSL, expectations, and other information which would help to unify students, instructors, and community partners' perceptions of the goals of CSL placements and courses). Possibilities for effective communication begin when students select courses. Consider facilitating the reporting of whether or not a course has a CSL component in the University of Alberta course calendar.

6. Communicate Important Evaluation Results: Much of the data reported in CSL Evaluation Reports have direct implications for CSL implementation by both instructors and community partners. For example, specific strategies for providing structured and unstructured opportunities for students to both act and reflect would be helpful for both instructors and community partners. Brainstorming ways to increase communication between the CSL administrative body and CSL stakeholders, and between stakeholders themselves would promote the sharing of relevant information.