

Definition

Defining community-engaged learning and academic service-learning.

Community-engaged learning courses integrate several key features, including community placements and reflection assignments, into academic for-credit courses. While there are many variations on community-engaged learning, the dominant pedagogical approach of community-engaged learning courses emerges from the pedagogy of “service-learning.” Academic service-learning is a “course-based, credit-bearing educational experience that allows students to (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (Bringle and Hatcher, 1995).

Reciprocity is a key tenet of all community-engaged learning; the university-community partnership should be beneficial to all parties. Academic service-learning, for instance, focuses equally on the student and the community agency. Placement activities are designed by U of T faculty and staff, in collaboration with the community partner, to address a need identified by that agency while aligning closely with the stated learning outcomes of the academic course. Placements serve as an experiential text or primary source material from which students can draw new frames of reference, perspectives and knowledge.

It is this notion of reciprocity that many use to distinguish community-engaged learning from other forms of experiential learning. For instance, according to Andrew Furco (1996; see diagram below), internships, co-ops and practicum placements focus

primarily on the student, for whom the priority is vocational learning and the development of skills for a specific profession. The activity or project students undertake is driven more by professional standards and accreditation than by the needs of the community organization or residents. Volunteerism, at the other end of Furco's continuum, focuses primarily on community organization requirements rather than the learning goals of the volunteer.

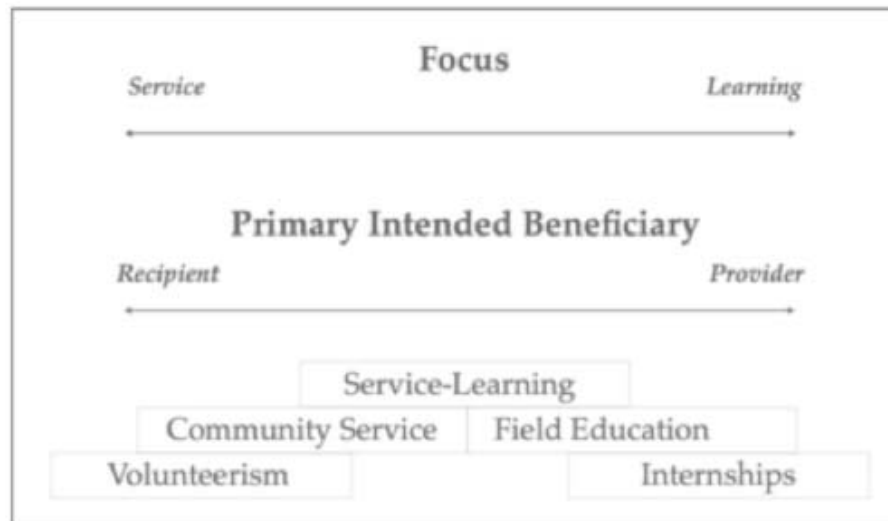


Diagram - Experiential education continuum (Furco, 1996)