HOW-TO GUIDE: A PLAN FOR DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY ENGAGED COURSE

IOWA

Office of Community Engagement

Project Development	**– Identification of community partner(s)** *Ideally faculty should work with community partners through already established relationships. If seeking out new partners, consider working with colleagues who already teach community-engaged courses or utilize other campus networks to connect with community partners. Think about the course you are teaching and the kinds of issues that could be addressed through your course. What community organizations are impacted by these issues?* *Question for consideration: How equitable are we when considering who we work with as community partners?* **– Hold initial meetings between faculty and community partners** *Points to accomplish include: Listening and learning from one another: community partner goals and project/partnership objectives, explanation of course objectives, roles & responsibilities, project milestones, communication methods, next steps.* *Question for consideration: How can we best balance community partner expectations with course objectives and requirements?* **– Develop project / scope of work /project agreement final deliverable descriptions** *Based on initial meetings and conversations between community partners and faculty/relevant staff, faculty draft the project description/scope and description of final deliverables (e.g. report, mobile app, etc.) in collaboration with community partner. The project should address and advance shared goals and objectives between the community partner, faculty and students. Include potential evaluation/assessment mechanisms for the partnership. Expect multiple drafts before a final project description and relevant details are finalized. The project description and scope of work can be included as part of a larger project agreement between the faculty/course and community partner.* *Question for consideration: Community-engaged learning literature suggests that when students are involved, at least in part, during the planning stages, they feel increased ownership, motivation, and engagement in community-engaged learning projects. Should the final scope of work, or even the overall project itself, be left to students to negotiate with community partners?*
Syllabus Development	**– Develop/update syllabus to reflect community engagement project work and timeline, collaborating with community partner if possible** *Community engagement research suggests that engaged-learning courses "incorporate student engagement with classroom content, while concurrently addressing issues in the community" and that the syllabus is an opportunity to provide details regarding* **time commitment, required activities, safety considerations,** *and* **behavioral expectations.** *Collaborating with community partners during syllabus development enhances the connection and partnership between the community and faculty, and promotes the concept of reciprocity in the project. The syllabus provides insight for community partners into the course materials and instruction that will help students complete their engagement project. The syllabus may also serve as a blueprint for community partners regarding important events and activities related to the project.* **At the very least, the course syllabus should always be shared with the community partner***.* **– Include basic project details in the syllabus**

− *Project-specific syllabus items might include: project description, description of final deliverable, community partner contact information, relevant community links, etc.*

− **Include timeline for initial meetings and correspondence with community partners**

The syllabus should identify when the students will first correspond or meet with the community partners. This might be a prearranged visit on a specific date, or a deadline for students to initiate the dialogue and setup a visit. Ideally, all students visit their partnering community, but videoconferencing is a good substitute.

− **Include milestones and checkpoints to ensure progress throughout the semester/year toward the completion of the project, and leave time for final revisions**

Dividing project work into sections with assigned deadlines can help ensure that the project is completed successfully and can help prevent procrastination that ultimately detracts from the quality of the work. It can also demonstrate that students are understanding and applying course material. Progress updates, drafts, and mid-semester presentations are opportunities for project partners to provide feedback.

One important deadline is the due date of the final report/deliverable draft. A general rule of thumb is that students turn in final drafts two weeks before the end of the semester to allow time for final revisions.

Questions for consideration: Who is accountable for the quality of the final deliverable provided to community partners? What happens if the community partner is not pleased with the final product?

− **Schedule time for students to provide feedback and reflect throughout the course and at the end of the semester**

Community engagement best practices suggest students complete reflections and evaluations of their community engagement experience. Consider utilizing various methods for encouraging evaluation: 1) a "pre-survey" at the beginning of the course to gauge students' expectations and pre-project understanding of the course and community engagement; 2) a "midpoint reflection" to identify any issues and allow students to respond in real-time about their project; and 3) a "final survey" to learn about student experiences. Additional reflection activities include a personal journal, where students can express thoughts and feelings about the community experience throughout the semester (could be written or video) or weekly activity and reflection logs.

− **Include safety and behavior expectations**

Student safety is a primary concern for community-engaged courses. All faculty should review UI guidelines for students traveling to community partner visits: https://uiowa.edu/riskmanagement/field-trip-guidelines-faculty-and-staff. The syllabus should include appropriate policy statements and information about reporting concerns or issues.

UI faculty, staff, and students should maintain a professional level of conduct for community-engagement projects. Similarly, faculty should expect professionalism and appropriate behavior from community partners.

Project Management	− **Introduce project to students**
	Regardless of whether students begin work on the project within the first week of class, it is important to introduce the overall project to students at the beginning of the course to ensure they consider the project and keep it in mind throughout the duration of the semester.
	− **Establish project management expectations**
	*Generally speaking, students can be considered the project managers of the course project(s). Clarifying roles that faculty and community partners will play in the operation overall project is important to ensuring everyone, particularly students, understand who the players are in their community engagement course. Faculty should establish regular check-ins with students **and community partners** to review how the project is progressing and identify any challenges or opportunities that need to be addressed.*

− **When applicable, assign project roles for group projects**

For group work, assigned roles can help ensure that certain aspects of the project are being addressed. Examples of individual roles for group projects include: project manager, communication lead, designer, editor, technical support, etc.

− **Establish a communication plan between students and project leads.**

*A default recommendation is for students to hold a Zoom videoconference or in-person meeting with community partners once every week to two weeks when classes are in session. This is negotiable based on faculty and community partner preferences. **Over-communication is better than under-communication.** 24-hour notice should be given when cancelling meetings. Faculty should attend initial meetings with students and community partners, but may determine students. Consider providing a meeting agenda template to students*

Classes and groups should identify a communication lead person that primarily responsible for correspondence with the community partner in order to avoid duplicate messages and an overwhelming number of e-mails.

− **Schedule and plan initial visit or call with students and community partner**

It is encouraged that all students physically visit their community partner. Inviting your community partner into the classroom also provides an opportunity for the community partner to experience your classroom. In some cases, it is only possible for students to meet with community partners via Zoom.

Visits typically require the following administrative tasks: 1) make vehicle reservations and identify drivers; 2) schedule a pick-up time and location; 3) recommend appropriate attire (typically business casual); 4) ask about special diets and arrange meals.

Question for consideration: Will students need class time to prepare questions and talking points prior to the meeting?

− **Track project hours**

Ideally faculty and students keep track of hours spent working directly on their community-engagement projects. A spreadsheet for tracking hours can be provided. Total hours per student can be provided at regular intervals or upon project completion.

− **Review and approve for any change in scope, in collaboration with community partners and students**

The scope of a project may change after the initial start date. This is often because something happens on the community partner side, but students also sometimes deviate from the original scope. In order to manage expectations about the final deliverables, faculty should work with community partners and students to ensure everyone approves revisions to the project scope or final deliverables.

− **Concerns and challenges**

The best way to address concerns and challenges that may arise through open, professional communication between all parties involved. Community engagement is about building relationships, and any hurdles that arise throughout the course are more easily addressed when strong relationship have been built between faculty, students and community partners. Reach out to campus partners that may be able to assist and provide suggestions or feedback on particular options to solve the problem (e.g. Office of Outreach and Engagement, Center for Teaching and Learning, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion).

− **Media and promotion**

Students should expect that media, particularly local media, may want to cover their projects. The Office of Strategic Communication is available to meet with students (and community partners) to discuss best practices for working with media.

Local media can also be a good resource for student projects. Press releases might also be sent to announce public input activity related the project (such as a public forum). Encourage students to be use press releases as appropriate. Similarly, students can use social media can both promote the project and as a resource.

Project Completion and Evaluation

− **Schedule final presentations**
Students are encouraged to make final presentations in the partnering community. Alternatives include video conferencing (Zoom), or inviting the community partners to campus. Final presentation dates should be scheduled as early as possible. It is recommended that this be completed at the beginning of the class and included in the syllabus.

− **Review and edit final reports as necessary**
A general recommendation is that final report draft deadlines should be set at least two weeks before the end of the semester. This give faculty time to review documents and to have students make any necessary revisions. Final reports/deliverables/"products" should be sent to faculty before being sent to community partners, to review for any major errors or issues.

− **Assign final surveys to students**
Final student surveys should be completed within the last few weeks of the project. These surveys provide opportunity for reflection and gather data about student experiences and the role of community engagement in their learning.

− **Assess/Reflect with community partners and discuss next steps**
Community partners should be provided a formal opportunity to assess the community engagement project, whether that is through a survey, a formal interview, or both. It is also encouraged that faculty meet with their community partner after the completion of the project to discuss next steps for the project and the partnership. Maintaining these relationships is not only crucial to the community-engaged teaching process, but it's also a good way to learn about project implementation and may lead to future collaborations or community-based research opportunities.