Criteria for the Community-Based Learning Designation
2010-2011

Background

In recent years, the Johns Hopkins University (JHU) has placed emphasis on fostering a sense of civic engagement and social responsibility within its undergraduate students. Specifically, the vision statement of the Zanvyl Krieger School of Arts and Sciences states: “More than ever we must look outward to the rest of the university and beyond...by educating with passion and commitment not only those students we bring to Baltimore but those already living and working here, and by investing in and partnering with educational and cultural institutions in Baltimore, Washington, and the state of Maryland.” The Center for Social Concern (CSC), a student affairs office that houses student volunteer groups and other community engagement initiatives at the university, responded to this need for expanded community engagement and increased academic learning enriched by real world experience. CSC launched its Community-based Learning (CBL) Initiative in the fall of 2008 to provide a rigorous community-engagement model within the context of an academic course.

CBL is a pedagogical model that integrates community service and academic classroom learning. The initiative envisions a future with community-based learning courses offered in both undergraduate schools, in multiple departments and representing a wide variety of subjects. In 2008 and 2009, two AmeriCorps*Volunteer in Service to America (VISTA) members served one-year terms as CBL Coordinators to facilitate the development of a CBL program for the JHU Homewood campus. CSC also established a CBL Working Group in the fall of 2008 to lay the structural foundation for the CBL program, and comprises: JHU faculty members currently or interested in teaching community-oriented courses; faculty, administrators, or staff with extensive knowledge and connections within the Baltimore non-profit community, or experience with CBL; and students with a dedicated interest in CBL.

As one of the working group goals, this document will lay out a set of criteria for courses to be designated as CBL. The purposes of developing these course designations include:

- To increase awareness of the number of CBL courses offered to undergraduates
- To allow undergraduates to search more effectively for CBL courses on the online course schedule
- To establish standards and procedures within the College of Arts and Sciences for the development and labeling of CBL courses and to connect those standards and procedures to those already established by the Krieger School of Arts and Sciences
- To support the University's goals related to civic engagement and social responsibility

What is Community-based Learning?

Community-based learning (CBL) is a pedagogical model that connects classroom-based work with meaningful community involvement and exchange. Within the context of equitable partnership, community organizations and students mutually benefit from the CBL experience both by meeting course objectives and addressing community-identified goals. Students may engage with groups
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including, but not limited to: nonprofits, government agencies, grassroots collectives, and other educational institutions.

The principles of CBL include:

- Faculty, students, and community groups collaborate toward mutually pursuing community-identified goals and academic course objectives.

- Courses provide adequate reading, reflection, and evaluation through research and other coursework; faculty meet their course objectives by preparing students for community entry, providing meaningful outlets for critical reflection, and presenting methods of rigorous evaluation.

- Academic credit is given for classroom and community learning, demonstrated in preparation, research, evaluation, and reflection.

Designating an Undergraduate Course as a Community-Based Learning (CBL) Course

For an undergraduate course to be formally designated as a community-based learning (CBL) course on the online course schedule and in University publications, the course must meet certain criteria. Specifically, the syllabus or other written course materials must clearly indicate the following:

1. Community-based experience is integral in the course design.

2. Course design includes critical reflection [on the relationship between academic course content and the community engagement experience.]

3. Academic credit is given for classroom and community learning, as demonstrated in the student’s preparation, research, evaluation, and reflection.

4. The student and community interaction must be sufficient to meet the desired community and academic outcomes.