

Civic Learning & Civic Learning + Engagement Course Attributes

2021, Institutional Working Group on Progress in Community Engagement (rev. 4/2021)

About the Attributes

Civic learning intentionally prepares students for informed, civic engagement by providing opportunities to develop civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through learning and practice. (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 1). Without any form of application, civic learning is a didactic venture. However, when it is explored through the practice of engagement with intermediary organizations (including public, non-profit, or private sector entities) or members of the broader public, it can offer students a high impact (Kuh, 2008) learning experience known as **civic engagement** (alternatively called service-learning or community-based learning). Recognizing the distinction between civic learning (didactic learning) and civic engagement (engaged learning) and yet valuing both sorts of learning experiences, two course attributes are offered:

- 1) **Civic Learning Attribute** – Largely didactic classes that offer students the opportunity to think critically about complex issues, consider differing points of view, and reflect on the capacities necessary to participate with others to improve the quality of life for people and sustainability of the planet (adapted from National Task Force, 2012, p. 15).
- 2) **Civic Learning + Engagement Attribute** – Classes that involve students in mutually-beneficial community engagement with intermediary organizations or members of the broader public. These community engagements offer students the opportunity to improve the quality of life for people and sustainability of the planet (adapted from National Task Force, 2012, p. 15; Working Group, 2020).

Elements of Civic Learning and Engagement at the University of Pittsburgh
Civic Engagement (Civic Learning + Engagement) is working to make a positive difference in the civic life of a community. It includes many different paths of action – both political and non-political- such as volunteering, voting, lobbying for a politician, community gardening, tutoring, writing to an elected official, conducting research alongside community members about the challenges we face, and more.
Equity: understanding that inequitable policies and systems impact groups of people differently and ultimately lead to disparities between groups and communities.
Civic Practice: taking actions (both political and non-political) that work to make a positive difference in the life of a community.
Civic Collaboration: collaborating with others in ways such as building diverse, representative coalitions; negotiating across differences and seeking consensus; co-producing knowledge and/or solutions; and participating in collective decision-making.
Critical, Civic Empathy: developing the motivation to make a positive difference in the life of a community by moving beyond oneself and into the perspective of another person. Critical civic empathy begins from a consideration of the position, power, and privilege of all involved.
Strengths-based Orientation: respecting and appreciating the assets, strengths, and self-determinism that exist within a community.

Characteristics of Engagement:

Community engagement is the collaborative development and delivery of initiatives through reciprocal partnerships between members of the University and members of the broader public (Working Group, 2020).

Community-engaged learning classes facilitate student learning through involvement in reciprocal, respectful community engagement and critical reflection upon that engagement that helps the student to develop a reflexive

praxis that draws connections between the course content, their community-based experiences, and their own role in civic action.

Intensity:

For those classes that use engagement as the means through which civic learning is exercised, the intensity of the engagement varies across implementation modes. It may comprise a:

- Significant component of the class structure in which students are engaged in a direct service activity or undertaking a facilitated project in collaboration with community partners.
- Full immersion in which students are taking their coursework in a community setting and completing direct service or a facilitated project in collaboration with community partners.
- Sub-module or unit within a larger semester-long class in which one or more class meetings or assignments are community-engaged.

Characteristics of Engagement:

Regardless of the intensity of the community-engaged experience, class proposals demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Facilitated or vetted community engagement (vs. students left to develop their own experiences without University assistance)
 - Faculty either pre-plan a structured community engagement experience with community-based partners (including either intermediary organizations or direct contact with members of a community) or
 - Students identify service opportunities through existing University resources (such as PittServes and Pitt Assisted Communities and Schools) and faculty vet those opportunities to determine they are appropriate for the class learning outcomes and to ensure respectful and reciprocal engagement
- Structured, facilitated reflective component that helps students to examine the interlinkages between the community experience and course learning, gain mastery of course concepts, and reflect on their personal/professional development in light of community experiences
- Intentional design of the community engagement element that fosters
 - Reciprocity – shared respect and equitable exchange of knowledge, perspectives, control, and resources between university and community partners (Janke & Clayton, 2011 and modified from Kendall 1990) and
 - Mutual benefit – all partners achieve outcomes that are just and meaningful to them, according to their respective motivations for participating (Janke, 2013).

Learning Outcomes:

Classes that carry either the “civic learning” or “civic learning + engagement” learning attribute include the equity outcome below and at least one of the four remaining learning outcomes described here:

	Civic Learning	Civic Learning + Engagement
Equity	Students will become familiar with relevant disciplinary frameworks for explaining how inequitable policies and systems impact groups of people differently (including race, gender, income, sexuality, religious practice, ability, or any combination of these characteristics).	Through active engagement with communities, students will recognize social systems that affect communities and describe how their community engagement (and the work of their community-based collaborators) addresses inequitable policies and/or systems that impact the communities they engage.
Civic Practice	Students will identify the civic knowledge and skills necessary for civic action -- utilizing both political and non-political processes.	Through active engagement in communities, students will employ civic knowledge and skills necessary for civic action -- utilizing both political and non-political processes.
Civic Collaboration	Students will defend the need for civic collaboration ¹ in civic action.	Through direct work with communities and/or neighborhood-based partners, students will select and apply concepts and methods of civic collaboration to positive civic action.
Strengths-Based Orientation	Students will identify and demonstrate the differences between strengths-based and deficits-based approaches to civic action in and with communities and/or neighborhoods.	Students will actively engage in community partnered work that is strengths-based, emphasizing community self-determination.
Implicit Bias & Civic Empathy ²	Students will become aware of how their implicit biases impact their civic empathy ³ and ability to take civic action.	Through active engagement with communities, students will evaluate how their implicit biases have shaped their civic empathy and resulting civic action.

¹ Civic collaboration may include actions such as:

- Building diverse, representative coalitions
- Negotiating across differences and seeking consensus,
- Co-producing knowledge and/or solutions,
- Participating in collective decision-making.

² The concept of critical civic empathy (Mirra, 2018) is underpinned by three ideas: 1) It begins from a consideration of the position, power, and privilege of all involved. 2) It foregrounds the role of personal experience in the context of public life. 3) It is committed to equity and justice through dialogue and civic action. Additionally, empathy is a powerful counterbalance to the shame some people feel when they recognize their implicit biases. “Empathy increases shame resilience because it moves us toward connection, compassion, and courage—the opposite of the fear, blame, and disconnection that result from shame” (Ivey-Colson & Turner, 2020).

References

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- Working Group on Institutional Progress in Community Engagement (2020). Definitions. University of Pittsburgh.

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PROPOSAL CHECKLIST (rev. 4/2021)

Civic Learning Attribute:

Required proposal materials:

- Course syllabus that highlights or annotates ways in which the class meets the following two criteria:
 - #1 Class offers students the opportunity to think critically about complex issues, consider differing points of view, and reflect on the capacities necessary to participate with others to improve the quality of life for people and sustainability of the planet.
 - #2 Class includes the equity outcome and at least one of the other civic learning outcomes required for the attribute and these are clearly denoted within the course syllabus.

Civic Learning Attribute + Engagement:

Required proposal materials:

- Course syllabus that highlights or annotates ways in which the class meets #1 and #2, below
 - #1 Class involve students in mutually-beneficial community engagement with intermediary organizations (including public, non-profit, or private sector entities) or directly with members of the broader public, that contributes to the quality of life for people and sustainability of the planet
 - #2 Class includes the equity outcome and at least one of the other civic learning outcomes required for the attribute and these are clearly denoted within the course syllabus.
- An addendum that describes the community engagement experience as detailed in #3 and #4, below
 - #3 Description of the community engagement experience:
 - What work is being undertaken
 - With whom
 - Intended outcomes of the engagement
 - Which of the following best describes the intensity of the engagement (please refer to the attribute description for more details about each intensity-level below)
 - a. Significant component of the class structure
 - b. Full immersion.
 - c. Sub-module or unit within a larger semester-long class
 - If you have taught this class previously as a community engagement experience but are revising the structure/partnership, you may use details from that course iteration to use as a model, articulating what aspects may change in the future. If your community engagement experience has yet to be finalized, please provide as much of the descriptive details requested above as you can at this time.
- #4 Explanation of how the community engagement component exhibits the required characteristics (please refer to the attribute description for more details about each of the engagement characteristics below)
 - Facilitated or vetted community engagement
 - Structured, facilitated reflective component
 - Reciprocity
 - Mutual benefit