

**Conceptualizing Your Community-Based Learning Project:
Decision-Points for the Initial Stage of Project Design***

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Abstract

In the spring of 2000 we carried out a community-based learning project for an introductory undergraduate course about the sociology of gender. Based on this experience, student evaluations, discussions with our partner organization, a review of the CBL literature in Sociology, and inductive reasoning, we developed a set of five questions important to consider in the preliminary planning of a community-based learning project. These questions are as follows: Among the goals of the project, are there primary and secondary goals or are they given equal weight? Is participation in the project mandatory or voluntary? Should the CBL component of a course be concentrated in one site or dispersed across many sites? How similar or different should each student's individual participation in the project be? How central should direct client/community interaction be to students' activities? In this paper, we discuss each question and outline some of the advantages and disadvantages of various decision-paths. The aim is not to advocate one kind of project over another but rather to give other project planners a tool to help them better consider the options that lay before them in project design.

Conceptualizing Your Community-Based Learning Project: Decision-Points for the Initial Stage of Project Design

INTRODUCTION

Community-based learning (CBL)¹ projects are increasingly common in U.S. universities, particularly in sociology. Following the pedagogical visions articulated by John Dewey and later by C. Wright Mills and others, CBL is thought to fit well with both the substance and methodologies of sociology, as well as the activist undertone of many sociology departments. (e.g. Hironimus-Wendt and Lovell-Troy 1999, Ostrow et al. 1999). Project examples abound and reflect the variety of forms that CBL can take. Some projects entail long-term internships or volunteering, while others may involve survey administration, short excursions into a community or organization, or participant observation (see, e.g. May 2000).

The results of such pedagogical projects are often mixed. While many benefits have been noted (e.g. Everett 1998, Marullo 1998, Myers-Lipton 1998, Parilla and Hesser 1998), so too has the inability for some projects to achieve their intended aims (Eby 1999, Hironimus-Wendt and Lovell-Troy 1999, Strand 1999, Parker-Gwin and Mabry 1998, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Sally 1994). Hondagneu-Sotelo and Raskoff (1994), for example, outline common pitfalls of CBL projects, including the difficulty many students have in linking their experiences in the community with those in the classroom and the tendency for students to assume a 'white-knight' syndrome, whereby students take themselves for saviors to the detriment of social science learning. Perhaps most discouraging, some research documents how students may use their experiences with community projects to further harden, rather than break, prevailing stereotypes (ibid., Eby 1999). In short, it has proven difficult to fulfill the civic and academic potential of CBL projects.

The mixed results from CBL experiences in the classroom and the difficulty of balancing academic and civic demands may arise in part because several key issues in project design are left implied in the literature. While some research acknowledges issues like how to structure and evaluate students' participation, there is little systematic

guidance about these issues and how they pertain to the structure of a CBL. The answers to a set of core questions structure the remaining particulars of course design and provide guidelines when inevitable demands require reworking of the course as it is being taught.

In the spring semester of 2000, members of the “Sex, Sexuality, and Gender” course offered through Princeton University’s Sociology Department experimented with a unique community-based learning project. This project focused on gender among Latino immigrants, was required as part of the course, and included distinct types of projects ranging from direct volunteering to research papers. The experience did not provide the remedy to the frustrations of some CBL projects; we too faced many of the same pitfalls and failings noted by others who have tried to integrate similar projects into their courses. Nevertheless, our experience generated lessons that others can use to think through their own efforts to better utilize CBL in their own courses.

In this paper, we present a list of questions and analysis to aid in CBL project design, based on hindsight from our own experience, student evaluations, discussions with our partner organization, and a review of relevant literature in Sociology. Aimed at CBL project managers and instructors, our reflections are intended to complement existing resources by outlining some of the key decision points involved in preliminary project design. The questions are: Among the goals of the project, are there primary and secondary goals or are they given equal weight? Is participation in the project mandatory or voluntary? Should the CBL component of a course be concentrated in one site or dispersed across many sites? How similar or different should each student’s individual participation in the project be? How central should direct client/community interaction be to students’ activities? These questions are a part of every CBL project design but have not been explored and discussed explicitly in the current literature. While there are numerous useful resources on-line and elsewhere that provide helpful suggestions and guidelines for project management, few works systematically examine the various decisions, such as these, that underlie the design of these projects, especially in sociology courses. Our aim is to help fill this gap and make the process of incorporating CBL into sociology courses easier and perhaps more fruitful.

We begin in the next section with the story of our own project, describing its origins, our partner organization, and the structure of student participation and evaluation.

The following section then outlines five decision-points in the initial design of a CBL project and the advantages and disadvantages of pursuing different paths based on our experiences and published literature. The paper concludes with a summary of what we have learned and a few thoughts for future consideration.

OUR PROJECT

Origins

Our project began as most community-based teaching efforts do, from a desire to break from conventional modes of teaching and bring sociological ideas – in our case, gender -- “to life.” In our minds, gender is particularly susceptible to being taken for granted and therefore is a topic well suited for an experiential learning approach in an undergraduate course. Furthermore, the professor sought to bring a cross-cultural perspective to the course to help emphasize and illustrate the dynamics of gender in the U.S., particularly as it is socially constructed among immigrant and native born people. To this end, the professor of the course sought and received a grant from Princeton's Program in Latin American Studies to integrate issues related to Latin American immigrants into her introductory gender course. Hoping to combine these pedagogical goals, we decided to pursue working with organizations addressing the needs of the relatively new and growing Latino immigrant population in Central New Jersey.

At Princeton, CBL projects begin with a meeting with the staff of the Community-Based Learning Initiative (CBLI). A somewhat recent addition to Princeton's academic program, CBLI was created in 1998 to help professors incorporate CBL into their courses by establishing links with potential partner organizations and matching courses with appropriate organizations. Notably they also provide financial support for a graduate student assistant for each course including a CBLI component.² In the spring of 2000, we were one of two Sociology courses out of 10 courses total in the University involved with CBLI. Most courses including a CBL component were

interdisciplinary and policy-related. The Latin American studies grant also allowed for additional graduate student to assist with the CBLI component of the course.³

As course-organizers, we met with staff from CBLI in November, three months before the course was to begin. CBLI already had established contact with one organization that seemed like a possible match for us: Latinas Unidas (“Latino Women United”) or LU, directed by Nidia Fernandez, MA, MDIV, and based in the YWCA of neighboring Trenton, New Jersey. LU serves the growing Latino immigrant population of Trenton by offering social support and life skills training to women (e.g. personal and family counseling, job interview training, prenatal care courses) and ESL courses to the Latino community at large (men and women).

In many ways Latinas Unidas was an ideal partner; but in others it posed challenges to our project. Practically a one-woman show, it was small and had worked with volunteers before, but only a few at a time. In addition, its clients by and large did not speak English, and we did not anticipate that many of our students would speak much Spanish. However, Ms. Fernandez was excited and believed in the pedagogical philosophy underlying CBL. From her days as a student in Princeton’s Seminary, she also felt that many Princeton students were provincial and that her organization could both offer the students a fresh perspective on life and gain from their efforts. We decided to pursue the partnership.

Project Design

Our project began to take shape in December, when we first met with Ms. Fernandez about her organizational goals and needs. She quickly identified grant-writing, community outreach, and publicity as her most immediate concerns, in addition to needing some assistance with LU classes and in the office. With these needs prominently in mind, we ultimately designed a project that included four options for students, each of which pertains to the study of gender in a different way. The four options were:

- 1) Research papers, related to the main areas in which LU operates, with the idea that students could work in teams to gather background information

about these topics that could be useful to Ms. Fernandez in the grant-writing process. Six students decided to work on this type of project and worked in three teams on the following topics (which they selected with our guidance): a) Latinos in the Trenton Labor Market, b) Welfare, Gender, and the Immigrant Experience, c) Parenting Issues and the Second Generation Conflict.

2) Publicity development, with the idea that students could create innovative, up-to-date, and high quality publicity materials to promote LU and its programs throughout Trenton and to funding agencies. Four students worked on this project and produced various fliers, a promotional bookmark, and a new pamphlet.

3) Publicity distribution, in which students were to work in conjunction with the publicity development group and to analyze the community and then plan and organize the distribution of the publicity materials. Four students chose this project and contacted over 60 establishments throughout Trenton, distributing the new publicity materials to a host of these by mail or in person.

4) Volunteering, whereby students committed to going to LU on a weekly basis to assist with child care or the development and teaching of ESL classes. Four students chose this component.

Later in the semester, in response to the desires of nearly all students and Ms. Fernandez for more information about the community and LU's clients, we also added another piece to our project: the administration of a survey to 35 of LU's clients. This decision was also motivated by our perceived need to offer more guidance and an alternative project to two students who were struggling with the research projects they had proposed. They helped manage survey design and data entry and produced the final report.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

At the start of the course, we introduced students to the project and asked them to choose one of the four projects as their focus for the duration of the course. The introductory handout given to students is included as Appendix A. As those materials indicate, participation was mandatory and entailed a full forty percent of each student's course grade.

We required the students to first develop a short proposal outlining their motivations for their project, specific plans, time-line, and division of labor (given that most students were working in teams). Once the project got underway, they submitted a weekly journal (1-2 pages) describing both their progress for the week or, in the case of volunteers, their "field notes" (to entail 50% of each journal entry's content) and their reflections on their activities in light of course readings and lectures (the other 50%). The two CBLI graduate student assistants gave them regular feedback on the journal entries with the dual-purpose of responding to organizational issues and helping them link gender studies to their CBL experiences.

In addition to these specific activities, students had two related assignments. First, in an effort to ensure that all students had some direct client contact regardless of what part of the project they chose to do, we also asked each student to attend one of the Saturday-morning ESL courses offered by LU over the course of the semester. Second, at semester's end, each team wrote a final paper (7-10 pages) and gave a presentation about their project to their peers, Ms. Fernandez, and representatives from Princeton's CBLI program. Students working on research papers submitted those as their final papers, while other students working on community outreach or as volunteers wrote papers summarizing their respective experiences and lessons learned. Those working on the client survey turned in a report of key results from the perspective of gender as discussed throughout the course.

Summary: Generalizing From Our Project

Our project was unique in significant ways. It was a mandatory and central part of the course, focused on a Latino immigrant population, and involved different types of projects and requirements. Furthermore, two graduate student assistants were dedicated part-time to assisting with the CBL aspect of the course, in addition to the support provided by the professor and the teaching assistant who conducted weekly discussion sections with the students. Together we designed and managed the project beginning a few of months before the semester started, with little assistance from Princeton's CBLI program but with ample institutional resources available from the University. The class itself was relatively small as well, with only 20 students.

While our experience was unusual in certain respects, it was typical in others. Our project was complex but did not require the amount of work that the human resources devoted to it suggest; the work shared by the two CBLI graduate student assistants could have been completed by one student. In addition, we sensed that the students in our class (2 men and 18 women) were not exceptional for a Sociology class. They had a bimodal distribution of motives for taking the course, some being particularly engaged in the course material and others showing only mild interest. The majority of students had no exposure to Sociology or gender studies before the course began.

FIVE DECISION-POINTS FOR EARLY STAGE OF PROJECT DESIGN

Perhaps the key commonality between our CBL experience and others' is the struggle we faced in designing the project. Our project design was not only complex but also continuously a work-in-progress. It was the culmination of many decisions made both before and during the project and in response to new challenges and opportunities; the introduction of the client survey midway through our project is a case in point. Though few other articles explicitly discuss some of the tricky issues and tradeoffs encountered in deciding on a CBL project design, our sense is that we are not alone in having faced them.

What we most want to share with our colleagues considering CBL projects of their own is *not* an evaluation of the success or failure of our own project design but

rather what we wish we had at the start of our project: a guide for thinking through some of the various options that lay before us from the outset. In the remainder of the paper, we outline 5 major decision-points that underlie CBL project designs, regardless of complexity. These decision-points were derived inductively from our own experience, but the discussion of them relies on multiple data sources: three interviews with Ms. Fernandez during the planning stage of the project and two interviews once the project had finished; a questionnaire completed by 14 students giving their general evaluation of the project; the individual reflections students incorporated in their final project reports (N=20); and a systematic review of 22 articles and notes published in *Teaching Sociology* from 1993 to 2000 concerning CBL projects.

We readily admit that each project designer may not face the full range of choices represented by the framework outlined here; the degree of relevance of one question or another will depend upon each instructor's individual and institutional circumstances. Factors such as the institutional capacity of a college or university, the human and financial resources available to an instructor, the number and kind of students in a course, and the geographic location of the school all bear upon the kinds of choices that an instructor faces (see for example Corwin 1996, Parker-Gwin 1996). Nevertheless, arguably most projects face these decision-points, implicitly or explicitly, at some point in their development. The questions are:

- Among the goals of the project, are there primary and secondary goals or are the goals given equal weight?
- Is participation in the project mandatory or voluntary?
- Should the CBL component of a course be concentrated in one site or dispersed across many sites?
- How similar or different should each student's individual participation in the project be?
- How central should direct client/community interaction be to students' projects?

Clearly these questions do not speak to every aspect of project design and management. For example, other handbooks and articles provide suggestions for ways to monitor and evaluate student participation in a CBL project (e.g. weekly diaries, types of student presentations or project reports) and for integrating students' community-based experiences and their coursework (e.g. use of films and speakers, types of complementary academic readings) (Ender et al. 2000, Wright 2000, Everett 1998, Lowe and Reisch 1998, Marullo 1998, Parker-Gwin and Mabry 1998, Corwin 1996, Parker-Gwin 1996, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Raskoff 1994) . We also do not address the issues of how to choose which organization(s) to work with and evaluate the impact of the partnership on them.

For each decision-point, we explain its importance and then analyze it according to some of the potential benefits and drawbacks that one decision or another may produce. In each case we present an example from our own experience and at times use hypothetical examples to illustrate the consequences of various decision paths. The table at the end of each decision point shows a list of advantages (“+”) and disadvantages (“-“) to the options discussed. These lists are the result of inductive reasoning based on our own experience, including student evaluations and interviews with Ms. Fernandez, and on the experiences of others, as expressed in published literature. Wherever possible, we include citations of articles that discuss some aspect of the issue at hand.

We evaluate these decisions from the perspective of three interests: the instructor, the students, and the partner organization(s). Dividing the impacts of CBL design this way is intended to make explicit the balancing act involved in these kinds of projects. Most are designed to benefit all interests in some way and to not burden any one of them unduly. Yet, each interest may represent different motivations for carrying out a CBL project and often face different constraints on their participation (Cox 2000). For example, instructors may emphasize the academic links and benefits to the exercise, while partner organization(s) may emphasize the contributions and assistance to the organization or community; students may care more about their grade and/or other courses. All interests undoubtedly face their own time limitations to participation and/or management. Recognizing these sorts of differences and similarities – whatever they are – from the outset of project design is important for setting the goals of the project and for

increasing the likelihood of meeting those goals. Therefore we make this division a fundamental aspect of each part of our analytical framework. Identifying and explicating these interests may over-state the differences among them and simplify the multiple competing interests within each, but these are arguably natural interest groups or stakeholders given standard pedagogical structures.

We begin by discussing a critical question about the goals of any CBL project, which significantly influences the way that instructors approach the other questions outlined in this paper. Then we turn to discuss four other questions and end with a short summary and some final thoughts.

1. Among the goals of the project, are there primary and secondary goals or are they all given equal weight?

Every CBL project has many goals. Often they are broken down generally into academic and civic responsibility, but other instructors may delineate more specific objectives. For example, May and Koulish (1998) outline a set of academic goals for their project that reflects the range of objectives underlying these types of endeavors. Their goals include "sharedness," the use of multiple forms of knowledge by students, individual accountability, and growing professionalism. Calderon and Farrell (1996) note that their project was motivated by goals aimed at various *levels* as well; they recognized the goals of the project from the perspective of the college, the department, and the students. In our own case, we had three primary objectives: contribute meaningfully to our partner organization, help the students better understand gender, and help the students appreciate and understand social contexts distinct from their own (Latino immigrant communities and inner-city Trenton).

In our view, the critical question is not only the content of various project goals but also the priority or rank assigned to each goal. Making the priorities of the project clear is a critical first step in project design, although little attention has been directed at this issue in existing sociological literature. A decision about goal ranking provides a consistent guidepost for the various decision-points that arise, expectedly or not, throughout the course. Taking the extra step to define and also make explicit the ranking

of goals could prove a boon to the management of the different interests that converge in CBL, as well. When priorities are clear, the expectations held by the main stakeholders involved (e.g. instructors, students, and partner organizations) are often clear as well. In turn, all groups may be more satisfied with their experiences than they might have been otherwise.

To help illustrate this point, consider a stylized example of a CBL project in an introductory urban sociology course. The stated goals may be twofold: to help students understand the course material and to make a contribution to an urban community organization. If the instructor decides to prioritize the academic goal over the contribution to the organization, then s/he may decide to include more activities that are arguably easier to incorporate into class materials and discuss in an academic fashion. These activities could involve, for example, participant observation in an urban community (e.g. having students hang out on a street corner or take a specific bus line) or an activity like participating in a urban park clean-up day and writing up field notes about that experience. A project that reflects a decision to prioritize the practical contribution of the CBL project to the organization would take a different form, such as on-going student participation in a community needs assessment survey. The implications for students, the organization, and the instructors are different in each of these scenarios. But in each case, the instructor/manager that begins with a clearer notion of the desired outcome can more efficiently and perhaps effectively go about designing the project.

Project managers can also decide to give all or some goals equal weight. When the goals are given more equal weight, project design requires a different approach aimed at striking an even balance between or among goals. This was the approach we attempted in our own experience. For example, in an effort to ensure that our students' efforts made real contributions to Latinas Unidas, we included projects such as publicity development and distribution, which were more challenging to link to gender studies than were other activities, like research papers or the client survey. We tried to help the publicity group members see the gendered aspects of the work they did (e.g. thinking about gender messages in advertising or thinking about the spatial organization of men's and women's community networks), but the course content was not focused on these aspects of gender as much as it was on the themes related to other student projects. Ms. Fernandez,

however, found the publicity projects the most useful of all of the students' contributions. We would not have included this type of project among the student options if we had made academic gains the highest priority.

The point is not to recommend one type of priority ranking over another. The decisions to prioritize academic goals over civic ones (or vice versa) or to treat all goals equally lie in the hands of project managers/instructors and depend on available opportunities and resources. Rather, we want to highlight that it is critical to recognize that various approaches have different implications for instructors, students, and partner organizations. In turn, clarifying this issue from the outset may make project design more coherent and may result in more satisfied stakeholders in the end.

2. Is participation in the project mandatory or voluntary?

After determining both the content and priority of a project's goals, another issue to consider is whether student participation in the project should be mandatory or voluntary. Table 1 outlines some of the relative merits and demerits of both choices.

This question has received more attention in the literature than the other questions we discuss in this paper. One key issue raised in the literature is the selection bias that voluntary programs often introduce (Ender et al. 2000, Parker-Gwin and Mabry 1998).⁴ Another theme centers on the ethical concerns related to mandatory programs and the risk that “unwilling” students may pose to often vulnerable populations (Ender et al. 2000, Marullo 1998). Other authors emphasize the flexibility of voluntary programs to both instructors’ and students’ time and learning styles (Ender et al. 2000, Parker-Gwin 1998) and the greater ease with which mandatory programs can be incorporated into the course (Everett 1998). These works implicitly point out how this decision can depend on the human resources available to manage the project.

(Table 1 about here)

In our case, we made the project mandatory and furthermore, central to the course. This arrangement may have simply introduced selectivity at an earlier point, namely in

the students who took the course. Eight students dropped the course after the first week, and it is possible that their reasons related to the requirements of the CBL project. As both mandatory and central, the project took a lot of time, on the part of instructors and from the perspective of students. In their evaluations at the end of the course, some students said that they wished it had been voluntary or said they were not interested in doing another course with a CBL component, though it was evident that this reaction partly had to do with the amount of work that we required, not with its mandatory quality. That said, another student said that she appreciated the fact that something she liked to do (volunteer) was "*institutionalized*." From our perspective, it was in fact easier to draw on the experience in class discussion and lecture because all students were participating in the CBL project. For example, we were able to invite Ms. Fernandez and an immigration scholar to class for guest lectures and to show a film about immigrant experiences, and draw on the students' perceptions of LU and its clients. These choices would have been possible regardless of the project being mandatory, but we feel the impact of these additions to the class was increased as a result of the students' participation. In these and other ways, our experience illustrates some of the advantages and disadvantages of one choice, though, as other authors have pointed out, voluntary programs also involve benefits and risks.

3. Should the CBL component of a course be concentrated in one site or dispersed across many sites?

Another key question that has received little explicit discussion in the existing literature pertains to whether students are dispersed across organizations or concentrate their activities on one. On one hand, the question revolves around logistics, or the resources and time available to the instructors and organization(s) by virtue of their respective institutional capacities. The decision also is guided strongly by what the instructors hope the students and organization will gain from the course and the experience, an issue related to the earlier question about setting and prioritizing goals.

For example, in our case we chose to work with one organization, with the hope that doing so would further facilitate incorporation of students' experiences into course

discussions and lectures. We also thought that the management of the project would be easier from our perspective than it would be if we had to handle relationships with many organizations. By and large, this was true. Notably, both of these advantages meshed well with our other decisions to make the project mandatory and central and to try to give all of our goals equal weight. Making the case that our project could make a real difference for our partner organization(s) was easier by virtue of the fact that we had all students directing their energies towards one organization. One clear disadvantage to this approach was the risk of overloading Ms. Fernandez, already over-burdened with her own work. However this problem may be minimized for others who work with larger organizations or those with stronger volunteer infrastructures.

(Table 2 about here)

Given our focus on this particular population, another option would have been to find more than one organization that works with Latino immigrants in the area. If students had been divided between two organizations and client bases, for example, students may have learned more about how community organizations work and may have been able to bring in a more comparative view on the local Latino community than they did in our case. Another possibility might have been not to concentrate on one single population but instead to seek out many organizations that serve different minority women throughout the area (e.g. programs for teen mothers, LU, and a sexual abuse center). This project design introduces yet other advantages and disadvantages. In both alternative schemes, for example, students could have self-selected to the organizations that best fit their interests and time availability (e.g. one organization is closer to campus than another). Table 2 outlines these and other merits of this decision.

4. How similar or different should each student's individual participation in the process be?

A fourth and related decision-point is whether and to what degree students' own participation should differ from that of their peers. Should each student be asked to do

the same kind of project or interact with the partner organization(s) in the same way? What kinds of advantages and disadvantages are posed by offering students different ways to participate in the project? This question is the focus of this section and Table 3. Again, the resources available to instructors partly determines this decision, as does the way that the project goals are prioritized.

(Table 3 about here)

As our project design indicates, we allowed for substantial variation in the way that students participated in the CBL project. Students self-selected into the different components (though the survey project was an exception), which not only involved different types of activities (e.g. designing fliers, doing a literature review, caring for children) but also different issues (publicity, labor force participation, child care). One clear advantage of this approach was that it allowed us to assist LU in various ways and arguably more effectively. This decision made sense also in light of LU's small size and our decision to focus all of the class' energies there; LU could not absorb all students as weekly volunteers, for example. From an instructor's point of view, though, it was clear that students gained different insights, depending on their project. Students in the research component seemed to learn more about immigrant communities and gender in general; the publicity and distribution component learned more about the immigrant community; and the students in the volunteer component gained "hands on" experience about the organization of a non profit. These conclusions are reflected in students' final evaluations, especially in the comments of the distribution group, one member of which wrote that "*(my project) had very little to do with gender and was only about immigration,*" and in those of the volunteer group, a student of which wrote that "*I had a very difficult time trying to find gender-relevant observations thru my volunteer work.*" That said, some students also expressed new appreciation for what it takes to manage a community organization and for the flexibility required to work well with them. Overall, the implications of this particular design for project success are not clear but rather depend upon the instructors anticipating differential impacts and being able to give more

individual guidance to students and draw across experiences to the benefit of the project for all students.

As a counter-example to our project design, consider a case in which everyone in a course about social stratification course is asked to volunteer for 2 hours a week at the local soup kitchen. Because students are all working on the same project and may coordinate among themselves for rides, etc., there might be more exchange among students about their experiences than there was in our case - a benefit on most accounts. All students could also be evaluated in the same way, thereby reducing confusion about differing expectations among students and easing the management burden of the instructors and possibly the partner organization. An alternative design could include one common goal but many different jobs, thereby combining the class cohesion and clarity of purpose fostered in the soup kitchen example with the benefits of having various activities, as noted in our own case. Designing, carrying out, and analyzing a community survey might be an example of this approach. The possibilities are multiple, and as Table 3 outlines, the decision made on this point may involve particular advantages and disadvantages.

5. How central should direct community / client interaction be to students' projects?

Many CBL projects in sociology partly aim to expose students to communities different from their own and to ensure some amount of direct client interaction. Beyond that, however, there is relatively little discussion about how much students' projects or learning experience should revolve around this interaction. This section speaks to some of the advantages and disadvantages of having students' experience rely primarily on interaction with the clients, compared to students whose activities or projects do not. Notably, the issue about whether or not the level of client interaction among students participating in a course's CBL component should vary is distinct and closely tied to the previous question.

(Table 4 about here)

In our case, the students whose projects primarily relied on direct client interaction faced particular problems and opportunities that other students did not. For example, one student who was volunteering weekly in LU's child care center noted in her final presentation and evaluation that her experience made her appreciate how difficult and time-consuming participant-observation research can be; she felt she needed much more time at the organization in order to begin to make conclusions. She wrote, "*We often read of the thorough, time-consuming, variable-accounting methods employed by real sociologists for conducting their research. But to sample this experience first hand, if only slightly, gave me a new respect for the difficulty and obstacle-oriented reality of field research.*" While frustrating for her, this lesson is important and was not central to the experiences of students working on the publicity campaign, for instance. For them, their client interaction at the ESL courses, albeit superficial in one sense, complemented their other activities (e.g. sensitizing them to the barrier that language poses for the social and economic integration of immigrants) and, according to this group of students, made them more engaged in their own contribution to LU.

The experience of another student whose project aimed to collect and analyze the life stories of a few LU clients revealed further advantages and disadvantages of projects that depend closely on direct client interaction. We felt ambivalent about allowing this project, given the student's lack of training in qualitative research. In fact she did not gain substantial insights from the interviews she did and turned to work on the survey project. Additionally this project was hard on the organization, which had the job of matching clients with the student (especially given the language barriers) and helping to mediate the organization of the interviews.

Clearly the lessons learned and barriers faced in any one project depends partly on the skills and personality of individual students, but some of the differences between projects requiring high and low levels of client interaction provide additional food for thought for project designers. Table 4 summarizes this issue further.

SUMMARY AND FINAL THOUGHTS

We have presented a list of questions important to CBL project design that have not received systematic attention in the literature on CBL thus far: Among the goals of the project, are there primary and secondary goals or are they given equal weight? Is participation in the project mandatory or voluntary? Should the CBL component of a course be concentrated in one site or dispersed across many sites? How similar or different should each student's individual participation in the project be? How central should direct client/community interaction be to students' activities? In our estimation, the first question about how instructors choose to prioritize their goals for the CBL project merits initial and primary consideration. All the other decisions flow from the choice made at that point. In each question, the human and institutional resources available to instructors and to the partner organizations also are critical factors determining the decisions that make most sense for them. We have strived to show that each of these decisions involves advantages and disadvantages for each of the three primary interests inherent in a CBL project: the instructor(s), the students, and the partner organization(s).

While by no means comprehensive, these five decision-points are central to any CBL project design and are important to consider during initial planning. The answers given to these questions help guide decisions about more specific, logistical, or management concerns about CBL projects and courses involving CBL. On this point, it is important to note that decisions central to courses without CBL components take on new meaning once an instructor decides to incorporate a project of this type. In other words, every decision underlying a course may require re-evaluation in light of a CBL project and the particular dynamics such a project introduces. The role of students in designing their participation in a course and the way instructors evaluate students are two such examples.

For instance, consider the pedagogical question about how much students should design and direct their activities or learning in a course. The fact that in CBL courses students' activities involve and impact a third party – the partner organization(s) – changes the nature of this calculation. For example, students may have a stronger sense of ownership in a project that they design (a positive), but it may end up being less useful to the partner organization (negative). In our own case, the client survey was imposed by

us as instructors to some degree, and few students were truly engaged in it. Yet it ended up being particularly useful to LU. The research projects, on the other hand, were more student-directed but were not as immediately useful to LU. Of course, without proper supervision, student-directed projects could also prove more burdensome or even harmful to partner organizations than projects strongly guided by the instructors or the partner organization(s).

A second example of a common issue that assumes a new twist in the face of a CBL project is the way that instructors evaluate and monitor student performance and learning. Students' experiences in a CBL context are arguably more difficult to anticipate and control than classroom-based experiences; in turn knowing exactly on what to evaluate students is not always straightforward. Also students' CBL experiences may differ as a result of a project design that includes different types of projects or levels of client interaction, as in our case. Allowing for such variation has benefits, as we have noted above, but determining fair means of evaluating all students was not easy.

We offer the preceding set of questions as a tool for project designers to use to create a project more efficiently and, hopefully, more effectively. Recognizing that all situations are unique in some way – whether in terms of resources, types of students or institutional capacity -, we hope that together these questions can help instructors map out project designs that best fit their particular goals and situation.

¹ We use “community based learning” (CBL) to describe a wide range of projects that involve structured interaction between secondary educational institutions (primarily colleges and universities) and community organizations. CBL projects include field trips, observational projects, service learning projects, community based internships, community based research, community based courses, and community based programs. (This definition draws heavily on the definition of community based teaching and learning developed by the eight participants in the “Community Academy Partnerships” group at the workshop on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning held in July 2000 at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA. This workshop was sponsored by the ASA, the ASA Section on Undergraduate Education, the Carnegie Academy for the Advancement of Teaching, and the American Association of Higher Education.). We use “Community Based Learning Initiative” (CBLI) to refer specifically to the community based learning program that exists at Princeton University.

² Additional information about the Community Based Learning Initiative at Princeton University is available at: <http://www.princeton.edu:80/%7Ecbli/main.html>

³ The CBLI program provides \$1000 to each class including a community-based learning project, to pay one graduate student for assistance on the project. In our case, Program in Latin America Studies provided

another \$1000 for the other assistant's time on the project, in addition to funds to help cover other aspects of our project.

⁴ Ender et al. (2000) study concludes that women, non social science majors, students who do not commute to class, and students who are not employed are more likely to participate in service learning projects. Parker and Mabry (1998) argue that self selection into service learning might vary by course type, but overall find a higher participation of women and students with prior volunteer experience.

Table 1: Mandatory or Voluntary Participation?

Option	Instructor		Students		Partner Organization(s)	
	+	=	+	=	+	=
Mandatory	Incorporation into class and grading criteria might be easier (Everett 1998)	<p>Increases course management load (Ender et al.,2000)</p> <p>May lead to selectivity in who takes the course</p> <p>Lack of professional reward for added work (Marullo 1998, Sweet 1998)</p>	<p>May promote class cohesion and friendship</p> <p>May add to everyone's understanding of academic concepts</p>	<p>Some students might not enjoy participation</p> <p>Increases time devoted to that one class over other classes and activities (Runbland 1998, Parker-Gwin and Mabry, 1998)</p> <p>May create conflict among students lacking the social skills to work together (Marullo 1998)</p>	Potential contribution may be greater from having more volunteers	<p>Unwilling students may pose risk to the organization(s) or clients (Marullo 1998; Ender et al., 2000)</p> <p>Management load could be great (Runbland 1998)</p>
Voluntary	<p>More likely to involve only highly motivated students</p> <p>Fits well with the different learning styles of students (Ender et al. 2000)</p>	<p>May be harder to bring experience into lectures and class discussions</p> <p>Evaluation may be difficult</p> <p>May lead to selectivity in who participates in the project (Ender et al. 2000; Parker-Gwin and Mabry 1998)</p> <p>Students' commitment may be lower.</p>	<p>Course option for students who cannot otherwise participate in community service</p> <p>Allows flexibility in time devoted to the course (Ender et al. 2000, Parker-Gwin and Mabry, 1998)</p>	<p>Experience remains marginal to class experience.</p> <p>Might feel isolated. Participating students may not have other students to talk to about their projects.</p> <p>May get the impression that the instructor is not committed to the project.</p>	More likely to involve only highly motivated students	<p>Student commitment may be lower or students may be less reliable</p> <p>Contribution might be lower from having less volunteers</p>

Table 2: One Site or Many Sites?

Option	Instructor		Students		Partner Organization(s)	
	+	=	+	=	+	=
One site	<p>Incorporation into class might be easier</p> <p>Facilitates the sense of a “class project” or “common goal” with students</p> <p>Interaction with the organization might be easier</p>	<p>Little ability to compare across organizations and populations</p>	<p>May be easier to organize visits among themselves</p> <p>May be easier to work in groups on different aspects of the project.</p>	<p>May not like the organization selected</p>	<p>Contribution may be greater</p>	<p>Can place stress within the organization if there is not enough infrastructure to manage large numbers of students</p>
Many sites	<p>More examples and comparisons from different populations</p>	<p>Knowledge of individual sites or populations might be more limited.</p> <p>Not enough time to explore in depth various examples during class</p> <p>Logistical management could be difficult (e.g. transportation) (Marullo 1998, Porter and Schwartz 1993, Everett, 1998)</p> <p>Design of the specifics of the project (e.g. students’ tasks) might be more difficult</p>	<p>More options to chose according to their interests, talents (like language) or logistic restrictions (e.g. distance)</p>	<p>Might feel isolated in their experience.</p> <p>More difficult to find transportation and organize visits</p>	<p>Receives motivated students for that organization (given that students "choose" them)</p>	<p>Potential contribution may be compromised by a limited number of volunteers</p>

Table 3: Uniform or Variable Participation?

Option	Instructor		Students		Partner Organization(s)	
	+	=	+	=	+	=
Uniform participation	Easier to design, organize and set grading criteria Interaction with the organization(s) might be easier	Any unpredictability or failure is more likely to compromise the success of the whole project.	The assignment is probably clearer and easier to follow Feel they are doing the same job and investing the same effort	Might generate competition across students	Easier to organize and incorporate students	May not need students in a particular capacity. May have other work that does not get done
Variable participation	Easier to achieve various goals More examples and comparisons across experiences	Lessons learned might vary across projects. Increases course management and supervision load	Can choose according to interests, talents or collateral requirements (e.g. athletic team or lab courses) Might feel their contribution to the organization is unique and important	Might feel isolated Might generate conflict when comparing across grades and tasks	Can help in organizations' varying needs	Requires more involvement in planning the project. May get less out of the partnership because students do a lot of little things rather than one big project

Table 4: Interaction with Community Service Client Population Central or Marginal?

Option	Instructor		Students		Partner Organization(s)	
	+	=	+	=	+	=
Interaction central	Students can get first hand testimony of topic	<p>Might reinforce stereotypes (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Sally, 1994)</p> <p>Logistical problems related to interaction (e.g. language barriers and distance in our case)</p> <p>Students might need special training (e.g. in qualitative research methods)</p> <p>Might need more time to gather relevant data, resulting in a trade-off in course content</p>	<p>More likely to feel their work has a direct effect for the clients.</p> <p>More interaction with the instructors for the course on a personal basis.</p>	<p>Students might not enjoy interaction</p> <p>Interaction may be stressful for some when clients are from a different culture or speak a different language</p> <p>Too time consuming</p>	<p>Students might be more motivated</p> <p>Clients and organization more likely to benefit.</p>	<p>Unwilling students may pose risk to the clients</p> <p>Might need to train students.</p> <p>Might disrupt normal activities with clients</p> <p>Confidentiality issues with clients</p> <p>Some organizations might not have enough infrastructure so as to take every student into volunteering</p>
Interaction marginal	Might need less supervision from instructors	<p>Students might not get a rounded sense of the topic</p> <p>Might reinforce stereotypes (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Sally, 1994)</p> <p>Might lead to misleading “empirical” conclusions (students might infer more than they should from their limited interaction)</p>	<p>More flexibility in completing the assignment</p> <p>Less time required.</p>	<p>May feel less involved in the project</p> <p>Might be difficult to find sociological relevance in the interaction.</p>	<p>Might take less time to organize, facilitate and manage</p> <p>Tasks that they need help with may not be those that involve interaction with clients (e.g. grant writing, administrative labors, or collecting statistics)</p>	<p>Students may take the experience less seriously and be less reliable.</p>

Appendix A

Introductory handout given to students at start of project

Assignment 2

The Latina Experience in Princeton and Trenton

Purpose:

This assignment is intended to do two things for students, professor, and preceptors. The first is to increase our awareness of how gender is socially constructed by learning about an immigrant community. We will learn about how different gender relations are in the immigrants' home countries from those in the U.S. We will also learn that gender relations can change as a result of changes in social structures, in this case through migration. The second goal of the assignment is to give something back to the community that provides so much unseen support to our lives in Princeton. We will do this by conducting useful research and creating useful products for *Latinas Unidas (LU)*.

Description:

There will be two components to this assignment. In one of them students will be preparing a research report in one specific topic useful to Latinas Unidas for their grant writing. The second component will consist of specific community service projects. In this case students will be working on activities targeted to directly help Latinas Unidas. Students will choose to participate in either the community service projects or the research report. If a student wants to volunteer permanently (that means on a weekly basis) in any of the activities at Latinas Unidas, he/she would be exempted from the participation in any of these two projects.

In addition to their participation in either the research project or the community service project, all students will be required to serve as an assistant for the English as a Second Language (ESL) Classes in Latinas Unidas at least one Saturday during the semester.

Participation in Assignment Two constitutes 40 % of your course grade

I. Research Components

To assist LU's proposal-writing efforts, students will write a series of briefing papers on various topics that pertain to LU's activities in the Latino community. The papers should include solid overviews of the recent literature on the main issues related to each topic (why it's important to focus on the topic, its intended impacts, etc), up-to-date statistics, good sources, and information about what other services may or may not be available to the Latino community in Trenton/Mercer County in that particular area. Therefore, these research efforts will probably include not only "library work" but also phone calls/discussions with other social service agencies and officials about community needs and current service availability. The reports can vary in length, but probably will run about 7-10 pages. They need to be easily accessible, so students should include bullet points, summary tables, etc. appropriately. The main topics Latinas Unidas is interested in include:

- General statistics of Trenton Latinos, Mercer County, New Jersey, National comparisons, across ethnic groups, gender, etc.
- Language Use and Learning English
- Parenting Issues and School: Families and youngsters adjustment, generational conflict.
- Life Skills: health issues, use of social services, knowledge of the law, etc.
- Employment: Job searches, Unemployment, Welfare use, etc.
- Particular case studies: students can interview various clients about their experience in the US and the role LU has had on it, and provide LU with summaries of and quotes from these interviews.

**An important part of the research component is keeping track of helpful sources, both on the internet and generally. Another desirable product is a research guide, to assist LU's future research activities. We may want to ask a student to specifically handle this part of the project, serving as the research-resources coordinator.

Grading for this component

Students working on the research project will be graded on four products:

- Research Proposal.** Students working on the research projects will identify which portions of the research project they will be individually responsible. After identifying their responsibilities students will prepare an outline describing the purpose, the components and content of their project, including a timeline for completing the project. This proposal will be due February 21.
- Final Research Paper and Presentation.** Students are expected to write a paper of approximately 15 pages including a literature review, their results and their recommendations to Latinas Unidas. Students will also have to prepare a 10-minute presentation summarizing their findings.
- Individual Concluding Thoughts.** Everyone working in groups must include a 1-2 page section written individually that sums up your own experience and conclusions regarding this project. Attach these pages onto the back of your final paper. Note that these pages are not a part of the page length guidelines listed above.

These three products will constitute 60% of the grade for this assignment. *The grade for this portion of the project will be determined by: a.) timely receipt of the proposal, b.) timely receipt of the first draft (due date will vary depending on the research project), c.) quality of the final draft, and d.) ethical research conduct (if that is applicable). This portion of their grade will represent 60% of the grade for this assignment.*

- Weekly journal.** The other 40% of the grade for this assignment will be the completion of a weekly journal entry from the beginning of the project to the end of the project. This journal will record reflections by the student about the research experience, the research itself, and their relationship to the readings for the course. Receiving a 100% on this portion of the grade for this assignment will be possible if a student indicates a synthesis of ideas from the readings with the research experience and writes between 2 and 5 pages every week (absolutely no more) (typed, double-spaced). Journal entries from the week before are due to each project precept, starting the week of February 23.

II. Community Service Components

Students will help Latinas Unidas in its effort to recruit more clients and get the organization's name better known in the community. In this outreach effort, students are to develop publicity materials and organize their distribution according to where clients are likely to go, places such as hospitals and clinics, job placement agencies, grocery stores, etc. Students will be expected to do the following:

- Develop a distribution plan, complete with addresses and phone numbers of all key locations
- Develop a new flier advertising LU's programs, appropriate for placement around the community
- Contact locations and distribute the flier and other informational materials about LU

Independently of the general outreach plan, one group of about 5 students can work specifically on outreach for an 8-week program about prenatal care for about 10 women. This is a special program Latinas Unidas will begin soon and needs students to develop recruitment materials and an outreach plan for this.

**Similar to the research guide, another important product stemming from this component is a community resources guide. As students learn about organizations and services in the community, they should generate an annotated contact list that LU could refer to in the future. This list could possibly turn into a resource guide for LU clients as well.

Other projects

Students should feel welcome to take the initiative on small projects, if for example, someone is really interested in helping to improve the ESL curriculum, or to develop a more extended Internet reference page, or even a use-guide for LU's clients, or a list of possible guest speakers for LU's programs.

Grading for this component

Students working on the community service component will be graded on four products:

- a) **Project Proposal and Community based activities.** Students working on the Community-Based Project will identify which projects they will work on, their time commitment to those projects, and the outcome of their work to be evaluated. Students will prepare a project proposal, which will include the purpose of their project, a timeline of their work, the components of their project, a description of the final outcome to be evaluated, and a proposed evaluation mechanism. This proposal will be due February 21.
- b) **Final Paper and Presentation.** Students are expected to write a group paper of approximately 10 pages, including their motivations, a summary of their project, and an executive summary linking to the readings and lecture material. Students will also have to prepare a 10-minute presentation summarizing their activities and final products.
- c) **Individual Concluding Thoughts.** Everyone working in groups must include a 1-2 page section written individually that sums up their own experience and

conclusions regarding this project. Attach these pages onto the back of your final paper. Note that these pages are not a part of the page length guidelines listed above.

These three products will constitute 60% of the grade for this assignment. *The grade for this portion of the course will be determined by: a) how well the students keep to their schedule, b.) follow through with tasks, c.) complete the agreed upon project in a timely manner, and d.) the quality of their work as evaluated by the mechanism agreed upon in the proposal (including an evaluation by Ms. Carter and Latinas Unidas).*

- d) **Weekly Journal.** The third portion of the project will be a weekly journal recording events, activities, and reflections about the community based project and its relationship to the course readings and lectures. Receiving a 100% on this portion of the grade for this assignment will be possible if a student indicates a synthesis of ideas from the readings with the community based experience and writes no more or less than 5 pages every week (typed, double-spaced). Journal entries from the week before are due in each project precept, starting the week of February 23.

III. Volunteering

Students can substitute their participation in either of the two projects described above, volunteering to help Latinas Unidas in any of their programs for the whole semester. In this case students are expected to assist weekly in any of the following activities: ESL daily or weekend classes, Life Skills workshop, Kid care and Parenting classes.

Grading for this component

Students working as volunteers will be graded on three products:

- a) **Project Proposal and Volunteering activities.** Students working as volunteers will identify which project in Latinas Unidas they will work on, their time commitment to those projects, and the outcome of their work to be evaluated. Students will prepare a project proposal, which will include the purpose of their volunteering, a timeline of their work, the components of their project, and a proposed evaluation mechanism. This proposal will be due February 21.
- b) **Final paper and presentation.** Students are expected to write an individual paper of approximately 10 pages, including their motivations, a summary of their activities, and an executive summary linking their volunteer experience to the readings and lecture material. Students will also have to prepare a 10-minute presentation summarizing their activities and recommendations to Latinas Unidas.

These two products will constitute 60% of the grade for this assignment. *The grade for this portion of the course will be determined by: a) how well the students keep to their schedule, b.) follow through with tasks, c.) complete the agreed upon project in a timely manner, and d.) the quality of their work as evaluated by the mechanism agreed upon in the proposal (including an evaluation by Ms. Carter and Latinas Unidas).*

- c) **Weekly Journal.** The third portion of the project will be a weekly journal recording events, activities, and reflections about their activities as volunteers, their experience with LU and its relationship to the course readings and lectures. Receiving a 100% on this portion of the grade for this assignment will be possible if a student indicates a synthesis of ideas from the readings with their volunteer experience and writes no more or less than 5 pages every week (typed, double-spaced). Journal entries from the week before are due in each project precept, starting the week of February 23.

IV. ESL classes

Students are required to assist and help in at least one of the English as a Second Language Classes Latinas Unidas holds every Saturday from 9:00 to 12:00.

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