

Theories Behind Community- Engaged Learning

SECTION 1

Part I



1.1.1

What is community?



Community is not a place but more a feeling.

Shared experiences, whether real or imagined, build this sense of community (Chavis & Lee, 2015).

It is important to recognize how a community defines itself. This knowledge will drive the formation of strong partnerships (Wallerstein et al., 2005).

A community is like a **living creature, comprising of many moving parts which reflect the interests, needs, and movements of a specific group of people (CDC, 2020).**

Key questions to reflect on when defining community:

- Who represents the community in Grinnell?
- Who has influence in the community?
- Are key members represented in Grinnell's community-based organizations?
- Who has the time, resources, and ability to participate and/or take responsibility for action items?
- Who is defined as outside the Grinnell community?

No one organization or individual represents an entire community. Rather, communities exist in various and diverse sectors of a locale (Wallerstein et al., 2005). An individual can hold a sense of belonging to multiple communities and this sense of membership can evolve or change overtime (CDC, 2020).

Considering that community formation is driven out a need for belonging, protection, or voice, we all are community members with deep intersections between our identity, motivations, and skills.

Oversimplifying the complexity of communities can lead to the failure of well-intentioned community initiatives (Chavis & Lee, 2015). Understanding a community and its shared identities and networks is the first step to creating community partnerships and relationships integral to community engaged learning.

1.1.2

Community Engagement

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How might we define ***community engagement?***



Community engagement is collaboration across groups of people affiliated by region/locality and specific concerns/interests. It can bring lasting change to a community by promoting well-being and mobilizes other resources, voices, concerns, in the process (Alter et al. 2007).

Citizens are considered engaged when they play an active role in

- deliberation
- discussion
- decision-making and/or
- implementation of projects that will affect them

1.1.2

What is community-engaged learning (C-EL)?

Community engaged learning connects community engagement to academic coursework and is based on the premise that rigorous learning comes from experiencing one's studies, followed by thoughtful analysis and reflection that can affect a student's future actions and perspectives.

Community engaged learning is the opportunity to enhance student learning through **mutually beneficial** classroom/community collaborations.

Partnerships can bring **community expertise** in the classroom or the community can function as the focal point of a **project** or course. Community engaged learning, while student-focused, needs to emphasize community partners and members as a priority in learning and resource creation.



1.2.1

A Brief History of C-EL in the National Narrative

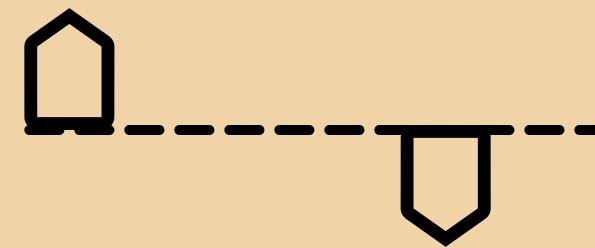
1896-1916
Progressive Movement
John Dewey introduces participatory education into the national conversation

1900-1920
Settlement House Movement
Jane Addams leads the movement in low-income housing, education, & skills-based learning

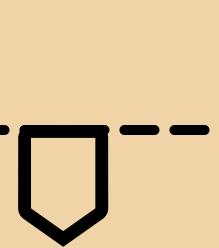
1961-1964
Peace Corps & VISTA
Youth & civic corps begin to grow including the founding of the Peace Corps (1961) & Volunteers in Service to America (1964)

1970s
National Society for Internships & Experiential Education and the National Center for Service-Learning are founded

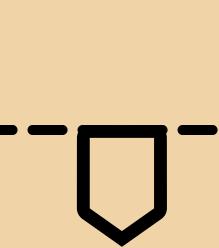
1985
COOL, Campus Compact & National Recognition
(Campus Outreach Opportunity League) and Campus Compact founded & publication of "Higher Education and the American Resurgence" by Education Commission President, Frank Newman.



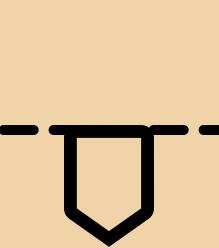
1905
Wisconsin Idea
Early model for civic engagement & social responsibility founded at University of Wisconsin, Madison



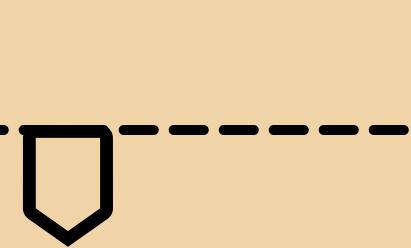
1933-1939
New Deal
National Youth Administration is founded, supporting employment and educational opportunities for young citizens



1960s-1970s
Civil Rights Movements
Student-led dismantling of traditional departments & relationships to civic action in the university.



1980s
Market-centered Degree Pushback
Pre-professional majors are replacing traditional liberal arts degree



1990s
Student Civic Roles Expand
Americorps founded, institutionalizing of engaged learning in the modern university begins



A Fuller Picture of Community Engagement History in Higher Education

In the 21st century, community-engaged learning has worked to **acknowledge the power hierarchies inherent to community partnerships**. Reflecting inequalities found both within and outside higher education, the present and future of community-engaging learning is to work with community experts and members on terms that respect and acknowledge the historical politicization of knowledge.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) supported civic engagement through methods comparatively different to traditional colleges and universities oriented to a white middle and upper class student body. In educating students about the history and mission of HBCU's, focus on community-building, Black solidarity, and social progress have been ingrained into the educational system. Through the celebration and acknowledgment of both inequalities and accomplishments of figures of color, students are taught the history of civic engagement, often within their first year (Hurtado, 2020).

1.2.1 A Brief History Continued



1.3.1

C-EL and the Liberal Arts



“In what ways have people lived together, and how should they live together?”

A liberal arts education equips students with the language and knowledge to **convey ideas, analyze and formulate issues and solutions, observe and experiment, and express creatively.**

A larger question found in the humanities, “In what ways have people lived together, and how should they live together?” (Grinnell College).

Community-engaged learning seeks to act as **a bridge between the college and the local community.** How can the Grinnell College community live with the larger Grinnell community? As the College is an integral part of the region, coursework can become better embedded in the social, economic, and cultural networks of the town. This embeddedness, when done with careful planning and equitable execution, can allow students to further the skills gained through a liberal arts education.

In rural America, where many liberal arts colleges are located, high poverty levels are commonly found due to changing economic industries and subsequently, fewer employment options. Therefore, “It is crucial that we sensitize students to the **realities of rural areas and small towns** and that working in civic engagement activities in such places can be, very different...” (Schon, 1983). It is in such climates, nonprofits and universities can act as vehicles for the community to address its unique needs and challenges (Goodman, 2014).

Community engaged learning is evolving as less driven by individual faculty interests, which tend to vary, but more by the strengths and obstacles of the place in which the college is situated, to the **“particularities of place”** (Heffner et. al, 2006). Viewing this education as part of student and faculty life, learning can be **fully integrated between personal, academic, and civic dimensions of growth.**



1910 Town Band Float in 1949 Grinnell Day Parade, Drake Community Library (Grinnell, Iowa) Archives

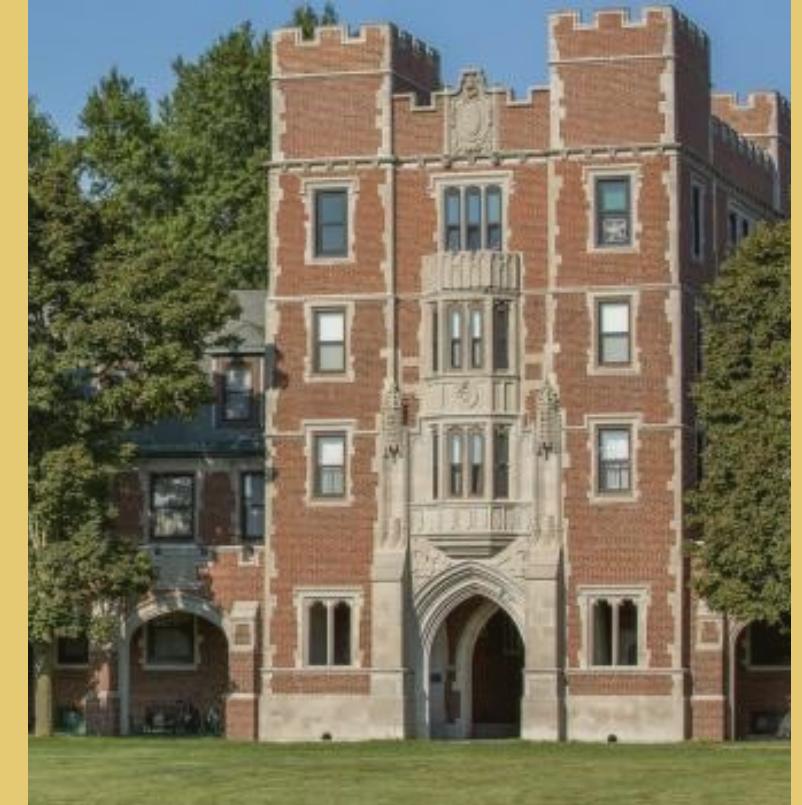
1.3.2

C-EL & the Liberal Arts

The Tradition of the Liberal Arts & Community-Engaged Learning

Liberal arts institutions center on

- **critical thinking:** the epistemic, or the coming to and utilization of knowledge
- **moral and civic character:** the eudemonic, or the realization of the student, which brings overall well-being
- **using knowledge to improve the world:** the civic, where the ability to responsibly express individual freedom and contribute to the public good



Fractured Climate for Civic Engagement

The goal of the liberal arts is to cultivate an ethos which creates life-long civically minded individuals. However, on most liberal arts campuses, students experience a **fractured climate**: "Students themselves are expected to integrate, cumulatively and developmental, what institutional structures and operations formally divide" (Harward, 2007). The classroom is understood as the singular site of academic learning, despite the rhetoric of the development of the whole student and their responsibility to the locale in which they learn.

Active Participation Through C-EL

Personalized pedagogy can be mistaken for the decolonial transformation that critical community engagement seeks. However, it less that liberal arts should be decolonizing the university, but more so, focus on the actual operation of a decolonizing university (Paperson, 2012).

Therefore, community engaged learning acts as an excellent vehicle for true student engagement, because such courses and projects require active participation and thus have the greatest potential to "**transform attitudes, behaviors, dispositions**" (Harward, 2007). Evidence suggests that the more the student is involved, the more they understand how the issues they study relate to the world outside the academic classroom. This challenges students to reflect on their own responsibilities and roles in the larger mosaic of civic life.

Furthermore, students report that they are surprised by how much they learn in a space where the emphasis is on experiencing what is being studied instead of simply studying the material (Heffner et. al, 2006).

1.3.3

Power Dynamics in Campus-Community Collaborations

As higher education has functioned under systems of oppression in a space where social change is celebrated, it is important to identify what kind of power dynamics have existed specific to community engagement (Havis, 2020). These power dynamics embody the historically accepted politicization of knowledge in community-engaged learning.

In Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire introduces the concept of **banking education**. Banking education is the traditional relationship of teacher/professor and student, where freedom of thought for the student essentially does not exist and the student is expected to absorb information from the instructor. In community engaged learning, students and community members are participants and co-creators in the learning process.

When considering how to be more inclusive in community engaged pedagogy, the solution, according to Freire, is not to integrate identities into a structure lacking diversity, but to **transform the structure itself** (Freire 1970, 74). Continuing to create opportunities for students to see themselves in the curriculum, and play an active role in the course, is a central step to decolonizing a way of learning that has followed the power structures of the system in which it exists.



1.3.4

Power Dynamics in Campus-Community Collaborations

Moving Beyond the Binary of Knowledge Through C-EL

It would be too simple to say that there are those with accepted knowledge and those who are suppressed. It is often the **intersections of identities** that will limit or celebrate the knowledge holder.

For example, indigenous ways of knowing have consistently been dismissed in higher education settings, though such biases fall under several categories of traditionally suppressed knowledge including institution over community, urban over rural, and theory over practice. Recognizing the complexity of knowledge recognition is an integral step to creating equitable partnerships.

Traditionally Accepted Knowledge Holder

Teacher

Institution

Urban/
Suburban

Theory

Traditionally Suppressed Knowledge Holder

Student

Community

Rural

Practice

1.4.1

Critical & Power-Aware Engagement



Much of the academy seeks to move from traditional 'service learning,' and continue to move towards **critical community engaged learning**. This differentiation is one that understands service components in higher education as sustainable and transformational rather than short-term and ameliorative.

Students should be able to understand and reflect on why their service may be needed in the first place, looking at root causes of community issues and needs (Mitchell, 2012).

The next step is for critical community engaged learning to confront settler-colonial-slave frameworks. Decolonizing critical community engaged learning requires faculty, staff, and students to reflect on how higher education contributes to the power structures C-EL attempts to deconstruct through experiential learning:

"We must be attentive to the ways social justice inserts discourses of decolonization without regard for '**how decolonization wants something different than those forms of justice**' (Santiago-Ortiz, 2019)."

Change-making may be the focus of critical community engagement, but decolonized C-EL identifies that defining change is itself a power that has been dominated by a White majority.

1.4.2

Privilege & Bias in C-EL

Identity & Community Engagement

To create more critical approaches to community engaged learning, exploring identity is central; the identity of the instructor, the students, and the community partners.

It is when identity is at the forefront that the complexities of social issues are most understood and power structures can be transformed (Mitchell 2017). Bringing this whole self into the class gives authentic space to reflect on the intersections of one's values, foundations, and passions and how such identities connect and differ. Stronger relationships spanning traditional hierarchies are built as a direct result (Peterson, 2018). When faculty offer opportunities for students to connect their experiences in the field to their own backgrounds, experiences, and beliefs (Mitchell et. al, 2012), students can use this lens to be more critical thinkers as civic members of society.

When considering integrating community-engaged components, there are two central questions that should be reflected upon:

- (1) Who are my students?
- (2) How do I know such information ?

Faculty and students should then ask themselves:

- Why am I interested in community-engaged learning?
- What can I do to affect change on the issue of focus?

The Whiteness of C-EL & the Privilege of Time

Despite the social justice orientation often found in community engaged learning, the demographics of the students which either choose to enroll and/or have the privilege to enroll, lack diversity. The whiteness of higher education impacts all sections of academic experience, from what literature is studied, to the applications seen in service learning. "Nearly every community-campus partnership is well-meaning but imbalanced, rife with challenges related to the unequal distribution of wealth, resources, power, and access" (Peterson, 2018). It is the students who do not need to work several jobs or commute long distances that have the time to engage with their community. It is often the students who already play a role of power and leadership on campus that will be found engaging with the community.

Higher education reflects institutionalized inequalities, and community engaged learning is no exception. Moreover, "The invisibility and normative privileges of witness shape service learning and are reinforced by service learning, particularly when so many practitioners in the field assume 'an ideal type'...one who volunteers her time, has high cultural capital, and gains from contact with the 'other'" (Mitchell et. al, 2012). Faculty can fall into this trap as well as being too nervous to discuss racial assumptions of white students in service settings.

1.4.3 Understanding Self & Context in C-EL

Unlearning Our Geographic & Historical Perceptions

Often, we need to unlearn our perceptions of our surrounding regions and neighborhoods because such perceptions come from information traditionally taught from narratives which have omitted and/or suppressed inclusive cultural narratives (Creative Reaction Lab).

Listening and supporting more diverse narratives is a mission that builds stronger partnerships because it is passed of value and knowledge sharing, not on assumptions of people and places.

History & Roots Causes

A critical historian questions why modern day inequalities or biases exist. When considering community engaged learning, take the time to learn about the region you wish to work with.

Initiatives which lack context on the heritage of the area they working with can, even with best intentions, create projects that are misdirected or even harmful.

There is a history to each and every social inequity, and in order to make small steps towards change, one must appreciate and honor the past in the present. Modern challenges can often reveal deeply ingrained patterns connected to race/ethnicity, class divides, and/or binary gender limitations.

The Social Justice Tour

Grinnell College offers a unique resource for its faculty, students, and staff, the **Social Justice Tour**. Run by the Service & Social Innovation (SSI) Team in the Center for Careers, Life, and Service (CLS), it functions as an interactive in-person and virtual tour of the Grinnell region.

The social justice tour is co-created narrative of a community's history and lived experience. It challenges dominant epistemologies, ways of knowing, that shape relationships and decisions about how we create change.

The tour builds a community-aware consciousness that is inclusive, contextually and power aware, and honors deliberative dialogue. Inherent is a deep respect for the complexity of human beings and their communities. The tour seeks to recognize the courage, self-awareness, and humility it takes to enter into change-making relationships.



First Schoolhouse in Sugar Creek Township
(1898), Poweshiek History Preservation Project



Renfrow Children in 1909
Publisher Poweshiek History Preservation Project

1.4.4

What was happening as Grinnell College's early formation occurred?

Iowa's documented history shows a complexity of social justice and colonization, similar to much of the Northeast and Midwest more broadly- progressive at times, but reacting to larger movements for industry and expansion. Grinnell and Iowa experienced growth due to major factors that influenced much of the Midwest: migration, immigration, agriculture, and transportation.

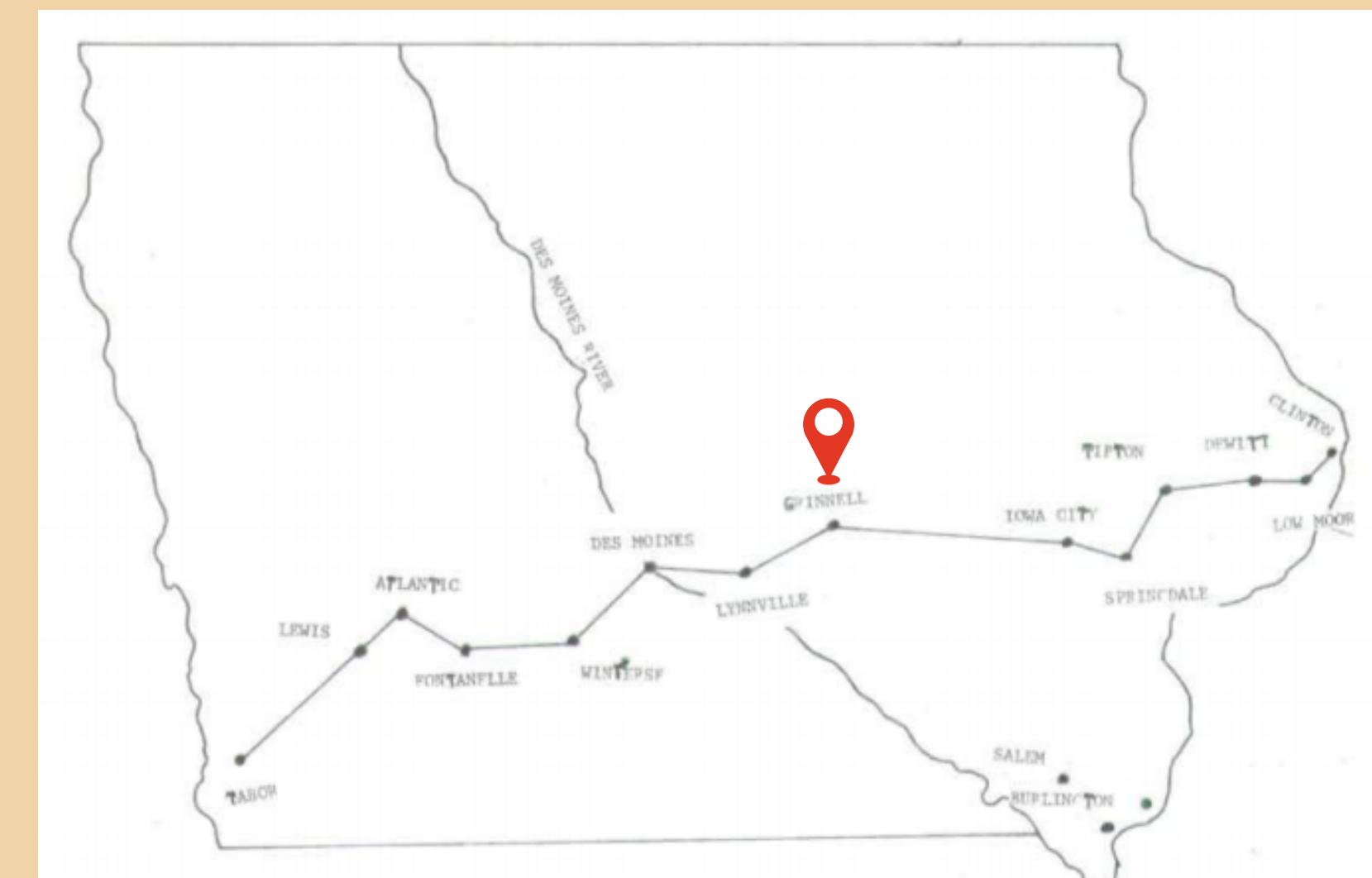
Grinnell College stands on the ancestral land of the Ioway, Sauk, Mesquaki, Sioux, Potawatomi, Oto, and Missouri. The first Europeans to explore what is today Iowa were Frenchmen in the late seventeenth century. White settlement began in the 1830's mostly as family units seeking to establish pioneer homesteads. Iowa's land proved valuable for agriculture.

Grinnell (the town) was officially founded in 1854, after the founder of Grinnell College, J.B. Grinnell. Grinnell College was established in its current form in 1909, also after J.B. Grinnell. He was a state politician and abolitionist of his time, who is known for his role in the Underground Railroad and public education in Iowa. Grinnell understood and spoke out against the injustices of slavery, while women's rights and his encroachment on indigenous lands were disregarded during his time in office and as a formative civic and educational leader.

When the Civil War began, Iowa sided with the Union, though White Supremacy groups of prominence were in conflict with the state's allegiance. Nevertheless, Iowa had both escaped and free Black men and women settle in Iowa, as well as an influx of Western and Eastern European immigrants. The railroad played a large role in migration to Iowa and supported its economic growth as well.

Despite Iowa's legacy in anti-slavery, the state had a law, similar to legislation in the South, to prevent Black settlement. The 1839 Laws of the Territory of Iowa required that Black Americans register with the clerk's office and pay a five hundred dollar bond along with several other civil liberties compromised. Not always enforced, it remained an obstacle for many.

19th Century Historical Context



Map of Underground Railroad through Iowa

1.4.5

Current Community Issues



What is the Grinnell community invested in solving?

What modern challenges stem from the historical context of this region?

Some issues include:

- Access to **childcare**
- Access to **healthcare**
- **Workers rights** ie. meat packing industry workers
- **Racial disparities** (consider Grinnell's population is 91% White)
- Challenges of **small businesses** and **small economy**
- Limited access to **internet** & **cell-service** in a rural region
- **Natural disaster** readiness and relief resources

Practicing Community- Engaged Learning

SECTION 1

Part II



1.5.1

Engaged Learning & Research in Action

Community-Engaged Learning (Working Definition)

Grinnell College tentatively defines community-engaged learning's inclusion of community-based projects or components as:

- Generating reciprocal classroom/community relationships;
- Offering students a sense of the immediate context of course content (usually within IA or a 60 mile radius of the College);
- Stimulating critical, reflective thinking about how knowledge, skills or insights accrued through the course may be of benefit or impact the local community;
- Helping students contemplate how community relationships, insights, or skills built in the class may be utilized in pursuit of the larger common good.

Community-Based Participatory Research

Community-Based Participatory Research brings community members and partners into the research process, making them active participants in data collection and/or information dissemination.

- Like community-engaged learning, community-engaged research requires the development of community trust, shared values, co-creation and negotiation, and a commitment to addressing local assets and needs. Community-academic research should be community-driven.
- Initiatives may be shaped by factors including participant accessibility and availability, community history, and local dynamics.
- CBPR can include Grinnell student support or may function as a faculty-community co-creation.

1.5.2

Partnership Mindset & Values



Suggested Principles for Community-Engaged Partnerships

When forming intentional partnerships, the Grinnell College community subscribes to and practices the certain key principles in all service, social innovation, and volunteer work. These principles guide in creating and sustaining healthy, reciprocal relationships.

Partnerships form to serve a specific purpose and may take on new goals over time.

Partners actively strive to understand each other's needs and self-interests, and develop a common language.

The partnership builds upon identified strengths and assets, but also works to address needs and increase capacity or growth of all partners.

The partnership seeks to balance power and share resources among partners.

All partners have input in establishing clearly articulated principles and processes for the partnership.

Partners seek to agree upon a mission, values, goals, measurable outcomes, and accountability for their partnership.

There is feedback among all stakeholders in the partnership, with the goal of continuously improving the partnership and its outcomes.

Partners share the benefits of the partnership's accomplishments.

Partnerships can dissolve and may need to plan a process for closure.

1.6.1

Engaged Learning as a Praxis of Service & Social Innovation

Service & Social Innovation: One Necessitates the Other

At Grinnell, we emphasize the importance of both **service**, which meets immediate needs, and **social innovation**, which analyzes why those immediate needs exist and challenges the systemic issues at play.

Both service and social innovation are essential. Service without social innovation can enable systemic inequities. Social innovation without service can mean someone's essential needs are not met.

Service

Meets *immediate* needs

Addresses *symptoms* of larger systemic challenges

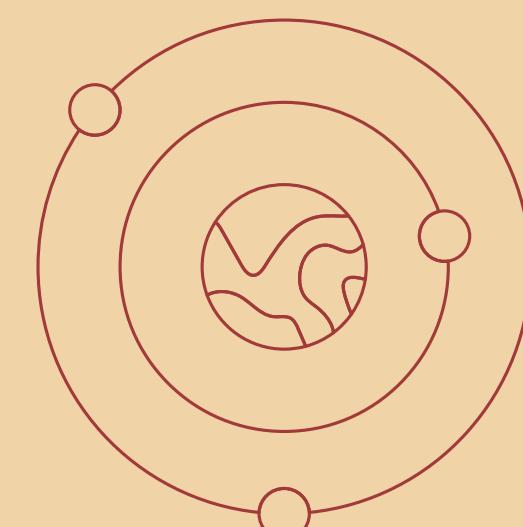
Offers immediate *assistance* to those directly impacted by systemic injustice

Social Innovation

Addresses *long-term* systemic needs

Addresses *root causes* of systemic inequities

Transforms *intersecting systems* so that symptoms no longer need to be addressed through service



1.6.2

Community Engaged Learning Ecosystem

Community-engaged learning is not measurable in traditionally linear ways; progress & success is built on trust & equitable relationships.

Service

Community-Engaged Courses

Engaged Field Trips/Site Visits

Site-based learning/short term service

Inviting community knowledge into the classroom

Coalition building

meets immediate needs
addresses symptoms of larger systemic challenges
offers immediate assistance

meets immediate need while addressing long-term systemic issues

addressing long-term systemic issues
addressing root causes of systemic inequities
transforming intersecting systems

Social Innovation

Community-Engaged Courses

Engaged field trip learning about systems

Faculty-partner relationships

Student position with community partner

Ongoing course-community partnership

Coalition building

1.6.3

How Service & Social Innovation Work Together on an Individual Level

Both service and social innovation seek to alleviate issues facing a community by designing and supporting mutually beneficial partnerships that are community driven and serve the common good.

Faculty, students, and community partners may blend their own personal values, academic interests, and emerging professional skills and goals through community engagement.

One's *identity* is at the forefront of direct service, but also drives the long-term goals one develops through community engaged opportunities.



Potential C-EL Learning Goals

Knowledge Acquisition & Integration

Learners will be able to leverage the unique aspects of a liberal arts education by applying knowledge from multiple disciplines when identifying solutions to community needs and challenges.

Equitable, Power Aware Community Partnerships

Learners will be able to develop the skills necessary to build community partnerships that are self-reflective and actively conscious of the influence and weight of privilege and power.

Reciprocal Community Relationships

Learners will be able to develop and help maintain mutually beneficial community relationships when collaborating with the community to address its needs and challenges.

Interpersonal Professional Competence

Learners will be able to articulate the transferable interpersonal and professional skills gained when working with the community to address its needs and challenges.

Intrapersonal Development

Learners will be able to engage in constructive, realistic self-assessment when reflecting upon their service or social innovation endeavors.

1.7.1

Why C-EL?

Considering Community Engaged Learning as the Path for You

Why participate in and implement community engaged learning?

- creates opportunities for projects and initiatives to be supported
- when done ethically and with transparency, ignites engagement both within the community and university
- creates more sustainable and useful solutions by identifying and supporting local knowledge in problem solving
- builds common ground and networks for further relationship development
- increases trust in the college or university and can improve communication and collaboration in larger ways

What factors pull certain faculty to community engaged work?

If community engaged learning is for you, it is important to **consider your own motivations to participate**. Both traditional academic professionals and engaged scholars have their unique strengths and value knowledge, but the engaged scholar has more committed interest in **communicating the knowledge externally**.

No matter the positionality of faculty, there should be a sense of the public purpose of higher education in one's work (Koritz et. al, 2016).

One may look to two major sets of influences, those that are (1) intrinsic, and those that are (2) extrinsic.

- Intrinsic looks at how work is done and how it may affect faculty, and the autonomy and feedback associated with the work.
- Extrinsic focuses on outside factors like environment and conditions of how the work is done.

It is the balance between the two that seems to determine faculty motivations, between self and social knowledge (O'meara, 2007). Furthermore, it is important to consider what faculty are learning through community engaged work that continually draws them to cultivating partnerships outside academia.

Facilitating student learning and growth

Goal of increasing student understanding of course material, enhancing critical thinking and developing a civic consciousness

Perceived fit between discipline and engagement

If discipline seems to fits into community engaged learning opportunities

Personal/Professional identity

Who one is, what they have accomplished, and their goals for the future

Rigorous scholarship and learning

Belief in community engaged learning as cutting-edge for discipline/community

Collaboration, relationships, public-making

Colleague, student, staff collegiality and partnership building

Institution type, mission, appointment type

Reward system/positionality in favor of faculty engagement, how expansively scholarship and service are defined as

Scholarship

In community engaged learning, scholarship can be considered not only the discovery of knowledge, but also integration with other disciplines as well as applying knowledge and teaching it an innovative way: 'the scholarship of integration involves synthesizing knowledge, making connections across disciplines, and reexamining findings to identify new meanings that may lead to more comprehensive understanding (Wagner, 2017)."

Service

Service can hold academic rigor and add depth and value to any discipline. Students are exposed to methods of identifying and addressing problems, supporting long-term visions and solutions.

1.7.2

Reasons Faculty Have Applied C-EL Methodologies

