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CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS FOR INFORMAL, SHORT-TERM EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES: A PORTAL PROPOSAL FOR CSUSB

Dia Poole

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CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS
FOR INFORMAL, SHORT-TERM EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
OPPORTUNITIES: A PORTAL PROPOSAL FOR CSUSB

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Communication Studies

by
Dia S. Poole
May 2023

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ABSTRACT

Each term, scores of students enrolled in practicum courses at universities must connect *informally* with community-based and nonprofit organizations (CBOs/NPOs) for short-term research, volunteerism, or practicum coursework assignments. In most cases, these student-community connections are known only to the students, the organizations they serve with, and the faculty who see the results of coproduced assignments. Few examples can be found in scholarly literature—beyond cursory nods to their existence—of structures designed and implemented primarily for connecting students with CBOs/NPOs and tracking participation in these informal experiential learning opportunities. Further, few examples exist of mechanisms that allow local organizations to convey their willingness to participate with students in informal experiences or to access university resources to solve problems. As a result of these gaps, contributions made by CBOs/NPOs to student learning go unrecognized by the universities, and universities fail to cultivate these informal relationships into partnerships for expanded learning opportunities through to career placement. This project proposes development of a portal to address this niche in town-gown relationships, where the university connects with its surrounding community to advance student learning outcomes and foster goodwill.

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You are all invited to the party!

DEDICATION

This graduate project and master's degree are dedicated to my late parents. Both believed in the power of higher education and were lifelong supporters of their daughters' personal, academic, and professional pursuits.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Connecting students with the surrounding community is one of the most important responsibilities a university bears. Community engagement is embedded in the core missions of California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) and the 23-campus California State University (CSU) system. The first sentence of CSUSB's mission statement conveys its responsibility to be “actively engaged in the vitality of our region” (California State University San Bernardino, n.d.). Implied in this statement is the university's commitment to build relationships through engagement with communities and partners across its service area. These connections between community (“town”) and university (“gown”) are commonly referred to as “town-gown” relationships.

The seventh clause in CSU's mission statement is more explicit about the system's commitment to its campus's communities: “To provide public services that enrich the university and its communities” (California State University, n.d.). The system commits to enacting its mission through two goals specific to community relations: the CSU 1) “Serves communities as educational, public service, cultural, and artistic centers in ways appropriate to individual campus locations and emphases,” and 2) “Encourages campuses to embrace the culture and heritage of their surrounding regions as sources of individuality and strength” (California State University, n.d., para. 15-16). Hence, town-gown relationships

serve as vehicles for communicating the university's dedication to delivering academic and other experiences that mutually benefit both parties.

Formal Connections: Students, the University, and Community Partners

Students' off-campus learning experiences are a valued component of the relationship between a university and its community. These learning experiences can be *formal* arrangements, such as with academic internships, service learning, and on-and off campus employment. Students may learn about opportunities to engage with community-based organizations through several formal mechanisms like their academic departments' internship programs, service-learning programs run through the campus Office of Community Engagement, or through employer relations programs offered through the campus Career Center. Each of these has their own methods of administering student recruitment, placement, and tracking. The CSU system also has a Web-based platform called *S4* for tracking student participation in experiential and service learning (California State University Center for Community Engagement, n.d.). These methods were explored during the data collection and analysis phase of this project to determine if they can be used or modified to connect students for informal learning opportunities.

Informal Connections: Students, Faculty, and the Community

This graduate project originated in a qualitative research methods course that required *informal* observation of a community-based organization (CBO). Each semester, hundreds of students enrolled in university practicum courses

must connect informally with local organizations for short-term research or coursework assignments. These short-term experiences are distinguished from more formal arrangements like internships wherein students serve with an organization for a full semester or more, and academic credit is earned for the full period. Informal assignments may require one or more days or weeks to complete, and students earn academic credit as part of their overall course requirements. Other than faculty, the university is unaware that the student is involved with the CBO.

Recently, the CSU undertook a systemwide effort to identify and capture these experiences, now referred to as “curricular community-engaged learning” or CCEL. CCEL and other high-impact practices (HIPs) have been shown to aid in student learning, retention, and progress to degree (Graduation Initiative 2025 Advisory Committee, 2021).

For me, connecting with a CBO for the required coursework observation was as simple as placing a telephone call to one or two friends. I have lived in San Bernardino and Riverside counties for the last seven years and for decades more prior to 1994. However, I did witness classmates struggle with finding an organization to complete their assignments. The data collection phase of this project revealed the profile of students who participate in CCEL experiences and the barriers they may face. My observations were that some students were not from the local area and did not have transportation or connections to existing organizations. Others were attending only virtual courses during the pandemic, making it impossible for them to visit or survey local organizations. Still others

did not know which or what type of organization would be willing to allow students to observe its operations. A readily accessible, easy-to-use mechanism is needed to connect students with CBOs when faculty include time-limited, informal experiential learning assignments in their course syllabi.

Faculty members are often silent or underrepresented partners in EL programs. Administrators are faced with the challenge of motivating faculty to participate in program development and implementation when faculty contributions are overlooked or undercompensated, if at all. Faculty cite several imbalances that present challenges to their participation: 1) the amount of time required to collaborate with community members—time they must commit in addition to time allocated for their teaching responsibilities; 2) EL program participation time is often uncompensated labor unless the academician seeks outside funding; 3) underappreciation for the contributions faculty make to the community in terms of their intellectual property and craft; and 4) lack of recognition and perceived fairness when it comes to considerations such as salary and tenure (Sieber, 2008; Smeltzer, 2018). Faculty cannot be expected to link their students with CBOs, neither should they be discouraged from including informal experiential learning opportunities in their syllabi because a linkage to and from the community does not exist.

Community-based and nonprofit organizations that need assistance with communication-related research or projects also do not have an efficient tool to match them with university resources. These resources include, but are not limited to, faculty and students in courses requiring practical research

assignments such as strategic communication; crisis communication; narrative storytelling; video/film/documentary imaging and production; and quantitative and qualitative research and analysis. In the absence of an efficient means of letting the university know they need help, these community needs go unaddressed, and an opportunity is missed to forge stronger bonds between the community and the university.

Informal experiential learning presents two other problems for town-gown relationships. First, because the university as an entity is largely unaware that these student-community relationships exist, the university cannot acknowledge or express its appreciation to the community for affording students these valuable learning opportunities and for directly contributing to student learning outcomes. Second, the university foregoes opportunities to integrate these *in-kind donors* of sorts into its formal experiential learning, career services, or advancement programs. In-kind donors contribute goods, services, time, space, and other non-cash (but quantifiable) assets of value to another organization (Heyman, 2016). In exchange, in-kind donors receive an opportunity to align their mission and objectives with the recipient organization, build goodwill, and set the stage for new and ongoing relationships. The university cannot recruit, engage, advance, or steward these hidden relationships. The chance for the university to build goodwill with grassroots community organizations is completely lost absent a mechanism to create awareness and appreciation of these invisible town-gown relationships.

The Need

The qualitative methods research project I completed in Spring 2022 for a local CBO yielded six outcomes for further study. The first five outcomes were additional research opportunities within the same CBO. Realizing that I alone could not complete all five, the sixth outcome called for a mechanism to connect student researchers with the CBO to complete the first five outcomes. Hence, this graduate proposal. Since Spring 2022, I documented an additional six examples where an efficient networking/access mechanism could facilitate university-to-community or community-to-university connections for experiential learning. In summary, four of the opportunities are community-initiated (“town-gown”), and two are initiated through university coursework requirements (“gown-town”). Consider these examples:

Quantitative Research Methods Course Final Paper Outcomes #1-5—Gown-Town Request. As discussed above, additional opportunities for student experiential learning include: 1) creating COVID-19 vaccine healthcare communication messages using message framing theory; 2) correlating data on a public/private sector collaborative’s COVID-19 messaging to changes in vaccine hesitancy and/or vaccine uptake using a mixed-methods approach; 3) exploring the results of two universities’ medical school studies on COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy vs. vaccine uptake; 4) developing strategies to resolve communication-related gaps and barriers in COVID-19 CBO and public health response; and 5) conducting a case study on the public/private sector

collaborative to inform best practices and replicate its model in other regions or states.

Crisis Communication Plan—Gown-Town Request. Undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in this Communication Studies 5000-level class are required to create a crisis communication plan. Students may select a CBO or nonprofit organization of their choice to complete this culminating project over the last half of the 16-week semester.

Individual and Group Fundraising/Grant writing Plan—Gown-Town Request. Undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in this Public Administration 5000-level class are required to complete series of assignments with a CBO or other entity of their choice. The assignments include creating a donor appeal letter and fundraising plan; a funder list; a request for proposal analysis; and a logic model and letter of inquiry. Students may work as individuals or may partner as a small working group with faculty permission.

Monkeypox Public Service Announcement—Town-Gown Request. A CBO desired to engage a student videographer/video team to film a two-to-three-minute PSA on preventing the spread of monkeypox. The video would air on social media and could be filmed at a campus studio, if available, or at a public location in the Inland Empire.

Nonprofit Summit Video—Town-Gown Request. A local nonprofit requested a student video team to film a one-day conference held at a local facility. The team would also monitor online discussion and provide technical assistance to participants joining via a live Webcast.

Town Hall Meeting Analysis—Town-Gown Request. An academically connected nonprofit requested student assistance to provide a synopsis of public comments at a series of town hall meetings. After summarizing the proceedings, the student would assist in making recommendations and developing next steps for community follow up.

Virtual Reality Disaster Preparedness Application—Town-Gown Request. A virtual "railway" across the Inland Empire will connect African-American residents with emergency management resources that help with disaster preparedness and planning, disaster mitigation, crisis response, readiness supplies, and other critical needs.

The Mechanism

CSUSB students enrolled in a variety of practicum courses are asked to participate in informal, short-term collaboration with area CBOs as part of their coursework assignments. However, there is no existing mechanism for connecting students who need to complete such activities with CBOs that meet the course requirements. The project examples above prompted this research question:

RQ: Can a portal be used to connect CSUSB Communication Studies students and CBOs/NPOs for short-term, informal experiential learning opportunities?

An efficient, easy-to-use mechanism that creates these two-way, informal relationships will fill an unaddressed need for CSUSB students and will

strengthen the bonds between university, faculty, students, and the community. This project proposes a framework for the creation of an access portal (or, if available and appropriate, adaptation of an existing portal) that connects community-based organizations (CBO) and nonprofit organizations (NPO) with CSUSB faculty and students for short-term, informal experiential learning opportunities. More specifically, this project proposes a portal for communication studies faculty and students. The proposed portal would 1) allow the organizations to post a profile of their communication-related experiential learning needs; 2) allow CSUSB faculty and students to post a profile of their expertise and/or desired practical learning experience; and 3) propose matches of organizations with available CSUSB resources to complete short-term coursework assignments or CBO/NPO projects.

The portal framework will be presented in a white paper (Appendix A) which also explores the department's student enrollment and demographics; barriers to student participation in CCEL courses; faculty, staff, and administrator perspectives on improving CCEL processes and practices; and opportunities for improved utilization of existing campus project, assignment, and research resources in CCEL courses.

Although this graduate project proposes a portal in the Department of Communication Studies, the need extends beyond this single academic discipline. As the examples above demonstrate, students and faculty in other departments with similar experiential learning requirements could benefit from a similar mechanism.

How are CBOs/NPOs (or local government entities) currently communicating their willingness to accommodate students who need to complete short-term, informal assignments? What kinds of mechanisms are used to forge student/CBO connections? How are these town-gown connections made in other academic departments? How might filling this service gap for Communication Studies benefit other academic disciplines or the campus as a whole? A review of scholarly literature provides insight into how these informal connections are made, how all parties benefit from successful partnerships, and where gaps persist.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Town-Gown Relationships

The relationships between universities (“gown”) and the local communities surrounding them (“town”) are known as “town-gown” (TG) relationships or networks. These relationships can have positive benefits for the university and the community. An overarching purpose for the university’s investment within the community is to foster goodwill and earn the community’s support. Ideally, that public support will manifest as heightened visibility, enhanced perception and respect for the university’s academic standing and reputation, increased donor and alumni contributions, increased enrollment by local students, increased participation by community members at campus activities, and greater job possibilities for the local workforce, among other potential benefits (Kim et al., 2006).

In addition to the academic benefits to universities, faculty, and students—discussed in greater detail below—solving local problems related to workforce development, economic development and revitalization, shared physical and capital resources, and community sustainability are often cited as the impetus for community participation and support of town-gown relationships. Universities should actively seek and include the community’s voice and presence on campuses to maximize the benefits of town-gown relationships (Bruning et al., 2006). The dialogue and transfer of knowledge that results from these

relationships cements the university and community shared roles of strengthening students' sense of civic responsibility, creating future civic leaders, and creating a thriving, sustainable community (Shelton, 2016).

Aside from the benefits presented above, a distinct debate exists on the cost/benefit of TG relationships. Smeltzer (2018) notes that universities have been critiqued for not matching the reputational benefits it receives through its TG relationships with the level of financial and human resources it is willing to commit to its community partners. This literature review briefly addresses these perceived imbalances (see "Challenges and Limitations" in this chapter) but primarily concentrates on one aspect of town-gown relationships: connecting university students to the community for short-term experiential learning opportunities.

Experiential and Service-Learning Programs

Since their appearance in higher education, the popularity of experiential learning/service learning (EL/SL) programs has grown throughout the United States and abroad as evidenced in statistics published by Campus Compact (2012). Campus Compact is a national coalition of college and university presidents that promotes EL/SL, civic engagement and community service. The organization reported that in the 2009–2010 academic year, 35% of the students enrolled at member schools participated in service learning, and 93% of coalition-member schools offered SL courses. Further, an average of 35 faculty members

per participating campus, across a broad range of academic disciplines, incorporated SL into their syllabi.

Types of Experiential Learning/Service Learning Projects

Experiential and service-learning opportunities take on different forms and purposes. In their simplest form, EL relationships exist to provide opportunities for students (with faculty support) to apply their knowledge to real-life situations and to collaboratively address community-identified problems. Examples of EL programs include paid or unpaid internships, community engaged learning, co-ops, student teaching, volunteer opportunities, and practicum placements (Bruning et al., 2006; Buzzelli & Asafo-Adjei, 2022; Smeltzer, 2018).

Gerstenblatt & Gilbert (2014) describe service-learning programs as ranging from a one-time experience (which is what this project proposal seeks to address), to a full-semester course, to academic programs that span a series of connected courses, including internships, international travel-abroad programs, and similar opportunities. Notwithstanding their variety, the authors found that service-learning programs always encompass three core elements: academic credit, reciprocal relationships with the community, and reflection.

How EL and SL activities are distinguished and where they occur across CSUSB's academic disciplines will be addressed during the data collection process. For the purposes of this project, it is helpful to begin by exploring how these experiential learning opportunities manifest within the communication studies discipline.

Experiential Learning/Service Learning in Communication Studies

Empirical data is available on the prevalence of EL/SL programs specifically within the discipline of communication studies. In 2004, researchers at North Dakota State University published a follow up to a 1995 study, comparing the growth of SL in communication studies programs between 1995 and 2001 (Oster-Aaland et al., 2004).

Surveys were sent to 356 communication studies department chairs at the same institutions as in 1995, with an identical survey sent to the department's SL coordinator. The findings showed that in the six intervening years, the majority of institutions had implemented SL programs with between 26% to 50% of their communication studies students participating, and the proportion of students placed in SL had increased, from 17% in 1995 to 26% in 2001.

The 1995 and 2001 study participants were also asked about the benefits of SL to their communication studies students. The top three responses remained the same: making career connections by improving relationships between individuals and groups, integration of theory with practice, and opportunity for career/vocational clarification. In both years, the top skill that administrators perceived as gained by their students was interpersonal communication skills.

Sandra Smeltzer, a faculty member at Western University in Canada offers a more recent look at how EL programs are developed and implemented in the Canadian communication/media studies programs (Smeltzer, 2018). She reported that 25 of the 34 studies in Canadian universities offered EL in their

undergraduate and graduate curricula. Smeltzer's survey of the EL programs included gathering "public facing" data on personnel responsible for coordinating and supervising EL; number of in-class and placement hours; number of participating students; type/quantity of academic credit and/or financial remuneration; academic prerequisites; theoretical and reflection components; evaluation criteria and mechanisms; and types and/or examples of private, non-profit, and public partners. While thousands of students and hundreds of "town" partners were participating, Smeltzer reported there was little collaboration on the development and implementation of the pedagogy models. The programs self-isolated with "little to no discussion of best practices, challenges, and strategies to facilitate ethical and effective outcomes for both students and external partners." (Smeltzer, 2018, p. 2).

Smeltzer also surveyed public, non-profit, and private partners who hosted communication studies students for EL experiences. Five key themes emerged for the communication discipline: 1) little agreement on the descriptions, definitions, structure, and responsibility for development of the pedagogical models; 2) limited resources to ensure placements were meaningful, valuable, and theory-oriented; 3) faculty lacked mechanisms to collaborate with peers on best practices and overcoming challenges; 4) program administrators lacked mechanisms to track data related to student time commitments and outcomes; and 5) programs were developed in silos, without knowing what EL experiences others were creating and offering. Notwithstanding these structural concerns, the EL faculty and staff insisted that offering EL programs was a critical part of their

student recruitment efforts, and work continued on establishing best practices for program development.

Challenges and Limitations

The popularity, prevalence, and strengths of EL/SL programs do not come without limitations and challenges for the university, its faculty and students, and its community partners. These issues pose a conundrum for town-gown relationships, and sometimes cause friction with the university itself. These challenges range from the practical aspects of integrating TG/EL programs into curricula to serious concerns over the use of student labor and ethical considerations.

The relationship between the student and community is both the strength and Achilles' heel in EL/SL programs. The goal is to ensure that students learn, contribute, and reflect on their service with the community partner. Program designers have been criticized for perceived imbalances: that students gain more from the community than they contribute; the duration of the project precludes the development of long-term relationships between the student and community; the projects undertaken are not perceived as meaningful service learning; or that students (and/or faculty) fail to appreciate the complexity of social problems and needs addressed during the learning experience (Gerstenblatt & Gilbert, 2014; Oster-Aaland et al., 2004).

Experiential Learning/Service-Learning Implementation Strategies

Institutions around the country and abroad are tackling the issue of best practices for implementing formal and informal EL/SL programs (Green, 2022;

Holmes et al., 2022; Snell et al., 2015). A Texas university built its program on high-impact practices and investments in faculty. A managerial accounting program varied the duration of its EL/SL opportunities and evaluated outcomes for effectiveness. And an eight-campus university system in Asia sourced partner organizations to serve as student placements. Important lessons can be drawn from each of these study approaches.

Formal EL/SL Program: Faculty Engagement Focus. One of the criticisms of EL/SL has been that faculty concerns, needs, and limitations are not addressed when developing and implementing programs. Texas A&M University-Texarkana (TAMU-T) elected to incorporate incentives for faculty in its EL program (Green, 2022). As part of its Quality Enhancement Plan, the university launched its EL program in 2017, incorporating five “high impact practices”: undergraduate research, internships, study-abroad, project-based/field work, and service learning. Program administrators held orientation and recruitment events, and program information was communicated to students during freshman-level courses. Two directors, an administrative assistant, and a 12-member steering committee guided the program, with the two directors giving presentations to community groups. The initial launch included faculty training with banners and posters placed in their classrooms to introduce the program to students. Faculty incentives included a \$500 stipend and extra credit on their annual performance evaluation for revising their course syllabus to accommodate the program. Participating faculty members’ names and course titles were posted on the program website. A select group of 13 faculty members—the self-

titled “El Cadre”—attended an EL training academy and each received a \$1500 stipend for serving as mentor faculty, workshop trainers, and recruiters.

Mixed Formal/Informal EL/SL Program: Short- and Long-Term

Placements. Managerial accounting students participated in a recently published study that compared outcomes for a one-day service-learning opportunity versus a semester-long activity (Holmes et al., 2022). One group, comprised of business majors in their sophomore year, undertook a team-based, single-day project during class time in which they prepared gift bags for donation to nonprofit organizations serving disadvantaged children. A second group of business majors in their sophomore or junior year took a semester-long class in which they learned how to assist low-income community members with preparing their income tax returns. After completing the certification, the students conducted the tax assistance activities as volunteers outside of school hours. The study findings showed that 1) on average, both single-day and semester-long activities positively impacted their engagement with the course; 2) students in both projects reported a positive impact on their feelings of engagement with the community; and 3) semester-long students reported greater perceived engagement with the community. The authors were careful to note that the single-day project students worked with their classmates and did not have direct contact with the community members who benefitted from their project, whereas the semester long students were “hands on” with the community. They concede that this limitation could account for the semester-long students’ higher level of perceived community engagement.

Formal EL/SL Program: University-initiated Placements. Although service learning is relatively new to Asia, researchers studying SL participation at eight Hong Kong-area universities found lessons that they believe can be applied outside of Asia (Snell et al., 2015). Billing their study as a “road map” for SL projects, researchers point to design practices that could “effectively empower and enable students to practice service leadership skills and attributes.” First, the SL projects were embedded in preexisting semester-long courses for academic credit. Second, the learning objectives allowed students to apply academic concepts and develop leadership skills assessing community needs, and either meeting those needs or advocating on behalf of the community. Third, the university’s Office of Service Learning had amassed a network of nearly 150 organizations who had previously collaborated on SL projects. Fourth, a field coordinator—not the students—matched students to the projects they would work on. This was done to ensure that the students worked on issues deemed to be important. Other elements in the road map include establishing partner organization representatives to collaborate with students on each project; requiring students to attend mandatory workshops before beginning their placements; aligning projects with the professor’s academic goals; and in-class consultations between the instructor, student, and partner organization representatives.

EL/SL Program Administration. One of the key themes that emerged in Smeltzer’s (2018) study is the need for mechanisms to track student participation in EL activities. That aspect of EL/SL development is addressed by the

California State University system's S4 platform (California State University Center for Community Engagement, n.d.). S4 is a Web-based platform for managing student participation in experiential learning activities, such as service learning, internships, research, and field placements. The platform is accessed through the Office of the Chancellor's Website, and its presence reflects the university system's mission commitment to "prepare significant numbers of educated, responsible people to contribute to California's schools, economy, culture, and future" and to "offer degree programs in academic and applied areas that are responsive to the needs of the citizens of this state" (California State University, n.d., paras. 3, 20). CSU campuses are not required to use S4. A brief review of the publicly accessible Webpage reflects that 12 CSU campuses are actively enrolled as system users; CSUSB is not currently listed. An analysis of S4's usage, content, and feasibility as a potential portal for making informal EL/SL connections is included in the methodology/data collection sections of this manuscript. Also, further inquiry into CSUSB's development and monitoring of EL/SL programs within the Office of Community Engagement, with the Career Center's Handshake Web-based employment portal, and possibly other campus department portals were explored in the project methodology.

In summary, the volume of scholarly literature on town-gown relationships and experiential learning exceeds the scope and space of this review. A gap exists between the formal TG/EL relationships described in the literature and the focus of this project: making short-term, informal, student and community-initiated connections. This project may ultimately propose an access mechanism

that is structurally different than existing tools used to connect and track formal participation. Alternatively, this study's findings may indicate that connecting and tracking informal relationships can be accomplished in a similar fashion as more formalized EL/SL programs—possibly blurring the lines between what is considered "formal" and "informal"—or whether there is any benefit to be gained or value lost by making further distinction between them. However, the goals of this project are clearly aligned with the goals of formal TG/EL relationships: creating opportunities for students to gain real-life experiences, connecting theory to practice, coproducing knowledge, and solving local problems in real-time with community organizations as partners. Next, this literature review asks: what specific mechanism(s) can be used to make these important connections and jumpstart these relationships?

Access Portals to Town-Gown/Experiential Learning Networks

Town-gown/experiential learning opportunities rely on communication mechanisms to 1) allow the community to inform the university about local needs, and 2) allow the university to inform the community of its capabilities to assist with those needs. There is support within the discipline for conversations on applied communications between academia, the community, and advocates of social change.

Mohan J. Dutta, then incoming editor of the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, called for more attention to communication as praxis (Dutta, 2021). While acknowledging that theory is a key component of applied

communication scholarship, he posits that there is an increasing role for communication as praxis. It was his hope that the profession moves beyond theoretical boundaries and creates space for the practice of communication as a mechanism for solving societal problems and improving human lives. To facilitate that practice, the university and the community must both be aware of each other's needs and capabilities. This project proposes a mechanism – a portal—that connects CSUSB's students at the intersection of communication studies and community engagement.

But what, exactly, is a portal?

Since the onset of the Internet, the term “portal” has largely referenced a tool, a mechanism, an entryway to gain access to locations on the Web. In his 1999 article, “Portal Wars,” author Mike O’Leary defined a portal as “nothing more than a supermarket service on the Web, a set of commonly-used sites and services, linked from a single page” (O’Leary, 1999, p. 77). He characterized portals as providing three types of functions: research, transactional, and communication. The research function has three elements: a search engine for keyword entry, a directory of sites and services, and tools such as location finders, maps, etc. The transactional function of a portal allows a user to complete a transaction with a target site, like a purchase or other exchange. O’Leary describes the communication function as one of the most necessary and widely used, connecting users and establishing “communities” of users for conversations on electronic bulletin boards, in chatrooms, etc. Today, these

conversations take place on global social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

A more contemporary definition of a portal is “a one-stop information gateway where users obtain needed information in a single interface” (Binder & Yuan, 2002, p. 2). Western Kentucky University’s library embraced this description in developing their Topper InfoPortal (TIP). Portal developers at Vanderbilt University define their StarBRITE’s portal simply by its guiding principle: “to put the right information into the hands of the right user at the right time” (Harris et al., 2011, p. 656). The City of Bloomington (IN) also defines its town-gown portal by its function: to put university technology instructors in the same room as local technology business executives (King, 2012).

Portal Characteristics

Depending on the purpose and design, researchers have sought to identify certain characteristics that constitute a portal. According to TIP developers, a “powerful” portal—think commercial landing pages for Yahoo!, Google, AOL—addresses the “Five C’s:” customization, community, commerce, communication, and compatibility (Binder & Yuan, 2002, p. 2). Without fully defining the Five C’s, they argue that all five elements need not be addressed to constitute a portal. TIP, whose objective is to connect the community and the university to library and non-library resources of mutual interest, instead focuses on four unique aspects in its design approach: 1) a “one-stop-shopping” user

interface; 2) prioritized local and regional search results; 3) public access; and 4) low cost and maintenance (Binder & Yuan, 2002, p. 2).

Because the primary purpose of a portal is to facilitate a connection between parties and resources (who may or may not be aware of each other's presence), most portals are designed on an Internet-based technology platform. Human beings still use other forms of communication to connect: they call on the telephone, transmit documents by fax, text each other, store spreadsheets on thumb drives, mail printouts, and even (gulp!) speak to each other in person. Table 1 describes how each of these communication mechanisms can be used to make informal connections. Hypothetically, any of these forms of communication can be considered a standalone portal or can be integrated into a Web-based application.

Table 1. Non-Web-based Portals

Medium	Hypothetical Portal Use
Telephone	Placement coordinator phones TG/EL partners from a contact list to determine student placement opportunities.
Email	Faculty emails students advising them of available placement opportunities.
Fax	Placement coordinator faxes profiles of students seeking placements to potential sites. Sites fax placement descriptions or student agreements.
Text	Group texts are set up by discipline or class. Students seeking EL placements text requests, and organizations with available placements respond to queries via text, or vice versa.
Spreadsheet or Database	Placement coordinator uses a desktop spreadsheet or database to track incoming requests from students and organizations. Potential matches are made through searches and sorting.
Mail	Placement coordinator mails out information to potential placements twice a year to recruit potential placements.

In Person	Universities hold meet-and-greets or TG/EL “fairs” each semester where students connect directly with town-gown partners about service-learning opportunities.
Virtual	Faculty convene annual symposium on an integrated video/audio communication platform (e.g. Zoom) to discuss EL placement strategies for all practicum courses.

Because we live in a society where speed is paramount and Internet technology is widespread, examples of Web-based town-gown portals are more commonly found in the literature. How they are designed, implemented, and maintained is what differentiates one from another.

Portal Design Proposals

As discussed above, town-gown portals may provide access to libraries (TIP portal), to faculty and students for experiential learning (Bloomington technology portal), or to research and academic resources (StarBRITE portal). A comparison of the three projects in Table 2 demonstrates best practices for developing portals and provides a beginning framework for developing a town-gown portal project design proposal.

Based on the development process used for the three portals described above and others surveyed in the literature, the design proposal should include a minimum of five steps. First, identify a preliminary project team to establish the project’s scope, goals, and objectives. The team’s composition may change as the project design develops. Second, answer guiding design questions: What is the portal’s purpose? Who are its intended users? What does it need to do? What content should it provide? Is there something already in existence that can

be modified, or must a new mechanism be built? Third, establish a desired timeline for designing, constructing, testing, marketing, and launching the portal. This timeline may change due to the portal's final design and the availability of resources to carry out the project. Fourth, define and explore potential funding and staffing needs for constructing and maintaining the portal. Finally, outline a plan for marketing and launching the portal to its intended publics.

Table 2. Portal Design Examples

Activity	TIP Library Portal	City of Bloomington TG/EL Technology Portal	StarBrite Research Portal
Step 1: Project Team Composition	Committee chair and Web Site Team of six volunteer library faculty led by a full-time Web Coordinator.	University director of career services, city's director of economic and sustainable development	A team approach paired a new group from the Office of Research Informatics with an existing group from Research Services. The combined group met weekly since approximately one year prior to the official project launch and continues to meet on a regular basis.
Step 2: Initial Project Design Questions and Guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who is the targeted user? • What is the portal's theme and objective? • How/Can we integrate the portal into the existing system? • What should the portal offer? • Sites on portal should have quality and value, and commercial sites or those requiring registration should be avoided. • To facilitate ease of use and maintenance, number of links in subcategories were limited. • Most importantly, portal should have a strong local emphasis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy: Put business execs and tech educators from Indiana University together. Tech executives contacted the School of Informatics and Computing early in its decision-making process. • Create a dedicated Web-based portal. • More than an online billboard, the site features social media links, a job bank, blog feed, calendar of geek-friendly events, and tweets from members of the local tech community. • Over 40 local tech companies or organizations are featured in short profiles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective: Bind data, information, and knowledge to effective action to promote and speed the design and conduct of research. • 2006 survey identified strong need for a one-stop, web-based research portal designed to meet the day-to-day needs of the research community. • 2007 survey identified needs for informatics services, e.g. web-based grant proposal/study development applications; study conduct and administrative support applications. • Build as little as possible, leveraging services already in place across the institution. Create a simple framework and set of common page layout designs for content.
Step 3: Timeline, inception to completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spring 1999 initiated the idea of a portal of first choice. Began to work on the project with the WST members in January 2000. • Completed portal in April 2000. After a brief test run, TIP was released the following month. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City officials and the Bloomington Economic Development Corp. banded together in 2008 to create the Bloomington Technology Partnership. • The portal was created in 2012. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2006 faculty/staff survey identified actual or perceived service gaps. • 2007 survey of academic health centers to identify gaps and translational research barriers. • Portal created in 2007 and launched on October 23, 2007.

Activity	TIP Library Portal	City of Bloomington TG/EL Technology Portal	StarBrite Research Portal
Step 4: Portal Cost & Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built within existing library funding using volunteer library staff. • Required only purchasing Web development software as Dreamweaver and hiring an hourly student Web assistant to perform labor- and time-intensive chores. • Uses link-checking software to monitor external links, enlisting volunteers to recommend new sites, and reviewing regularly to remove outdated or inferior sites as better ones emerge and are added. 	Bloomington Economic Development Corp. co-funds the partnership with the city.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project was planned as a long-term solution and granted institutional support and resources prior to receiving special award funding. • Three guiding principles: focus on researcher needs and maintain customer service focus; leverage existing resources; and plan for continuous improvement and expansion. • All information requested is automatically logged and forwarded by e-mail to the Vanderbilt Research Support Services group.
Step 5: Marketing Portal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid generic names, connect name to users/partnership. • Increasing site's visibility is not primary concern. Concern is to support patrons' needs for information. • Proactive series of marketing events: mass e-mailing campaign, banners, imprinted bookmarks, campus and local newspapers, public training workshops, direct link to university homepage, regional and national conferences, as well as international programs and publications. 	Held networking events, educational forums, conducted social media outreach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formally introduced to the research community on October 23, 2007, during a town hall meeting designed to introduce a new science award. • Portal marketed via broad-based educational sessions designed to highlight the benefits of system usage.

The actual design proposals cited in the literature vary depending on how the town-gown partnerships were formed, who initiated the portal's development, and/or how the portal project was funded. Authors typically state that they submitted "a proposal" without providing a copy of the document as part of the published study, perhaps believing that the product's final report would be deemed more important. This could also mean that the documents are proprietary, part of a grant or award application, or if generated prior to the Internet, may be kept in a dusty box in the participating university's Institutional Review Board archive. The development team will want to research prior portal proposals, final reports, and substantiating documents when exploring how a portal came into being.

In summary, best practices in scholarly literature recommend that the project proposal should be as clear and thorough as possible yet simple and succinct. The goal is to produce a living document that meets the needs of town-gown partners. This graduate project seeks to explore and document CSUSB's capabilities to address a specific yet elusive objective: creating a mechanism to connect students and the community for informal learning opportunities and problem solving.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

This project's deliverable is a white paper that proposes and supports a five-step framework for the creation of an access portal—or the adaptation of an existing portal—that connects community-based organizations (CBOs) and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) with CSUSB faculty and students for informal, communication-related research experiences. A review of literature on best practices and examples of three successful town-gown portals identified a five-step framework to launch such a project. Step One identifies a project team to establish the project's scope, goals, and objectives. In Step Two, the project team answers basic design questions about a new or adapted portal's contents and use. In Step Three, the project team establishes a timeline for designing, constructing, and testing the project. Step Four explores and defines potential funding and staffing needs, and Step Five outlines a marketing campaign for launching the portal.

I reiterate here that this graduate project will *not* directly result in the construction and launch of the recommended portal. The Spring 2023 research activities gathered data to inform the *first two sections* of the suggested five-part framework: refining the scope and exploring existing portals and mechanisms. The white paper presents those findings, arguments, and recommendations for consideration by campus decisionmakers. If this pilot project is determined to be

beneficial for CSUSB to pursue, a project team would be needed to research the remaining sections of the framework and make further recommendations for development and implementation of the desired portal or mechanism. The white paper will also include useful guidance for researching the framework sections.

Why a White Paper?

A white paper—also known as a “concept paper”—is a concise, persuasive document. The objective of a white paper is to convince decisionmakers to consider, adopt, or fund a proposed solution to an identified problem (Hanover Research, 2022). It may be used as an executive summary or as a precursor to a full research paper, but its structure and contents should stand alone to sufficiently capture and present the key arguments in a clear and convincing manner. The document’s structure and contents are guided both by its purpose and the needs of its intended audience(s).

Structure and Contents

Structural elements of a white paper typically include an *executive summary*, which provides a concise statement of the problem, study purpose, and summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations; an *introduction*, where the writer explains why they are approaching the decisionmaker for approval and/or funding and how the project aligns with organizational mission and goals; the organizational *need* the proposal seeks to address and *rationale* for bringing the topic forward; a *description* of the proposed solution and alternatives, implementation steps, how the proposed

solution remedies the problem, and the impact(s) on beneficiaries; and a *conclusion* with information such as budget, timeline, and contacts for key project participants.

Target Audience

A persuasive white paper will contain the information readers want and need to make an informed decision about the problem presented. It will grab their attention by appealing to the readers' priorities and anticipating specific concerns they may have. This white paper will serve as an exploratory tool for its target audience to evaluate the project's feasibility and, if justified, to appropriate resources to develop the portal.

The target audience of this project's white paper is CSUSB administrators, faculty, staff, and student representatives who are best positioned to consider and adopt the *framework* presented for a new town-gown portal. The audience for this white paper should include, at minimum, the following members of the campus community: faculty and student representatives with an interest in EL/SL and community partnerships; deans and chairs of colleges and departments with practicum course offerings (e.g. communication studies, public administration, health and human ecology, etc.); administrators in the Office of Community Engagement, Office of Student Research, and Career Services; and the provosts and vice presidents with oversight for academic and student services, budget, information technology, and university advancement. These offices and individuals are charged with advancing the CSU and CSUSB mission, objectives,

and strategic priorities such as eliminating equity gaps and barriers; sharing high-impact and best practices; increasing accountability and transparency of student success metrics; and promoting strategies with the greatest impact on Pell Grant recipients, first-generation students, and others (Graduation Initiative 2025 Advisory Committee, 2021). This white paper seeks to align the portal's potential benefits with the priorities advanced by the target audience's day-to-day functions—chiefly, increasing student access to experiential learning opportunities, advancing student learning and achievement outcomes, and establishing mutually beneficial community relationships.

Because this project is poised to significantly impact the surrounding community, each of the above-named parties is invited to open the white paper for comments from CSUSB's community partners, particularly those involved in EL/SL and other student research opportunities.

Data Collection

Data was gathered to inform the first two steps of the framework: clarifying the project scope and exploring existing mechanisms for possible adaptation. These initial data fall into three categories: 1) syllabi from courses with practicum assignments, as identified by DCS faculty; 2) student enrollment in practicum courses; and 3) characteristics of existing experiential learning participation systems.

Practicum Course Syllabi

Preliminary information suggests that CSUSB Communication Studies undergraduate and graduate students engage in experiential learning assignments for courses in qualitative research, campus newspaper production, campus radio station production, digital/video production, television journalism production, and filmmaking. An email inquiry was distributed asking DCS faculty to self-identify if they 1) teach courses having an EL component that involves off-campus entities; 2) would be willing to share their course syllabi and/or assignment descriptions for the EL component(s); and 3) would be willing to participate in an interview to gather additional details. The faculty responses informed the scope of informal EL practices within DCS, the number and participants for potential faculty interviews, and the request for syllabi and aggregate student enrollment data in the identified courses. Data were gathered from the syllabi and assignment descriptions on the type of coproduction activities students are asked to perform; how, when, and where students are asked to engage with which type(s) of community/nonprofit organizations; and the timeframe and duration of the assignments or learning experiences. Of primary interest—and the rationale for this project—is the guidance or assistance that students are given by faculty, staff, or other resources to connect with organizations to host their learning experience.

Student Enrollment in Practicum Courses

We know from prior research that the prevalence of experiential/service learning has grown exponentially across the country, including within surveys of communication studies programs where as many as 50% of students were participating in EL/SL programs (Campus Compact, 2012; Oster-Aaland et al., 2004). We also know that EL/SL experiences and other high-impact practices contribute significantly to student learning outcomes and have positive implications for student retention, closing equity and achievement gaps, progress toward degree completion, and graduation rates, as evidenced by the CSU's commitment to service learning and the Graduation Initiative 2025 (California State University Center for Community Engagement, n.d.; Graduation Initiative 2025 Advisory Committee, 2021).

During Spring 2023, aggregate enrollment data was gathered from campus research dashboards on the classification, number, and demographic profile of students that complete DCS courses with practicum course requirements each semester and academic year. These data will be useful in establishing future sample populations for obtaining students' and community organizations' perspectives on portal design, use, and marketing. The findings were incorporated into this manuscript and white paper to inform the current and future demand for informal EL/SL experiences within DCS practicum courses. Gathering similar enrollment data from other academic departments with a substantial number of practicum courses will provide insight into potential portal

need or use outside of DCS. The student demographic, course enrollment, and faculty participation data may offer insight into how CSUSB faculty and student participation compares to similar institutions. The data may also suggest possibilities for future research into CSUSB student outcomes through participation in CSUSB informal EL courses.

Existing Experiential Learning Mechanisms

Students engaged in formal experiential learning opportunities are connected to host organizations and tracked through different mechanisms in offices and programs at CSUSB and within the CSU system. These may be automated or non-automated, Web-based or manual, depending on the program's needs. The literature suggests that adapting an existing portal is preferable to constructing a new one in terms of time, cost, and support. A preliminary review of the existing CSUSB and CSU mechanisms, systems, or processes—as identified by administrators, faculty, or staff—will inform their development timeline, costs, content, purposes, users, outputs, and maintenance requirements. More importantly, discussions with operational staff may yield candidates for possible adaptation in administering informal experiential learning programs or may reveal other potential solutions not previously explored. One potential candidate for adaptation may be the California State University's S4 integrated Web interface which is used to manage formal EL/SL participation. The data collection process included modifying S4 as a potential informal portal option and using non-Web-based portals.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information that will 1) identify the mechanisms, portals, processes, capabilities, and gaps that currently help students connect with the community; 2) identify whether or not prior research has been conducted on this topic, and if so, the results of the inquiry(ies); 3) clarify the scope and need for this project; 4) help prioritize the potential benefits to be gained from undertaking this project and reveal any concerns or objections raised; and 5) inform the need for further research by a full project team.

Interview participants were selected primarily from faculty, staff, and administrators in the Department of Communication Studies and other campus offices. Interviews were conducted with all faculty who respond that they teach courses with informal experiential learning assignments. Some follow-up inquiries were completed via email. The primary objective was to obtain their perspectives on faculty, student and community needs, and what actions, if any, they would like to see taken regarding informal EL activities.

Interviews were conducted with administrators and/or staff in the CSUSB Office of Community Engagement, Student Affairs, Web Services, Career Services, and the CSU Chancellor's Office. The chair of the CSUSB Faculty Senate's High Impact Practices Committee was also interviewed regarding any prior research, reports, or ongoing discussions on this subject. One interview was conducted with a department chair and a nearby private university, a library

portal administrator, and a nonprofit CEO who has hosted university students for experiential learning coursework.

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) application for exempt status was filed as required for human-subject participation. Note that because the information gathered is specific to individual department and office functions and processes, most interviewees can be readily identified. Therefore, the interviews were not confidential or anonymous. Informed consent was obtained, and all interviews were conducted virtually and recorded to ensure accuracy.

The findings from all of the above data sources were incorporated into the white paper discussions on 1) the current status of informal TG/EL relationships; 2) the rationale and need for the proposed portal and alternative approaches for making student-community connections; 3) breadth and limitations of the portal's scope; 4) opportunities for adapting an existing portal; and 5) conducting future research to inform the campus and community's needs. The white paper will ask readers to consider the arguments presented and a range of options for addressing them within CSUSB's priorities for high impact practices and town-gown relationships.

Limitations

The literature has shown that developing multi-dimensional portals can be complex, time-consuming projects, depending on the specific design elements and resource availability. Due to time restraints, this project conducts an initial examination of how CSUSB may respond to an unfulfilled need and opportunity

to provide a service to its students and local organizations. This proposal does not include direct surveys of students or community groups in this first information-gathering phase. However, obtaining their perspectives about the portal's purpose and function are *essential* components of the project's scope, design, and development phases. Conducting primary research involving students and the public is also a complex, multi-dimensional undertaking, so research related to these groups will be incorporated into the framework artifact for consideration by an established project team. Where it served to offer clarity, I included my own perspectives and experiences as a student with practicum course requirements to connect with community organizations.

Final Manuscript Production, Timeline, and Budget

As envisioned, the final manuscript includes as its first three chapters the introduction, literature review, and methodology sections from the project proposal. A fourth chapter summarizes my research findings, discusses the project's implications and contributions to the field, and offers recommendations for moving forward with next steps. The project artifact is inserted as an appendix immediately preceding the reference section. This artifact is a white paper which lays out a five-point framework for exploring the development of a town-gown portal development project within the Department of Communication Studies.

The timeline for finalizing this manuscript followed established guidelines from the Department of Communication Studies and the CSUSB Office of Graduate Studies.

There are no anticipated costs for completing this project manuscript or the white paper. Student research travel funds were received to present this study: at the 37th Annual CSU Student Research Competition on April 28, 2023, at San Diego State University, and the 73rd Annual International Communication Association Conference on May 29, 2023, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The primary deliverable for this research project is a white paper which can be found as Appendix A. It proposes that CSUSB's Department of Communication Studies explore the creation of a portal to facilitate student and faculty connections with community-based organizations—and community connections with the campus—for *informal, short-term* experiential learning (EL) coursework assignments. Recently, the CSU developed a new taxonomy that distinguishes these informal EL experiences from more formal internships and service-learning programs. The CSU now refers to these informal experiences as curricular community-engaged learning, or CCEL (Community-Engaged Learning Attribute Initiative, 2023).

Importantly, this white paper does not prescribe how, exactly, this proposed CCEL portal should be designed, structured, and implemented. Rather, it relies on enrollment data, demographics, and faculty and administrator interviews to establish the need for such a portal. Then, it proposes a five-step framework for the Department of Communication Studies to develop a portal in consultation with other University and community stakeholders. But a portal is just one of several opportunities the Department has to develop its CCEL experiences. CSUSB has recently embarked on a campuswide update of its strategic plan. This effort will include a review of course offerings in academic departments to better define and categorize high-impact practices (HIPs) and

document where they are occurring (Campbell, CSUSB Administrator). The Department may wish to begin conversations on how its experiential learning course offerings are structured and administered in preparation for the upcoming HIPs review.

This chapter previews the white paper which aims to add perspectives to these upcoming conversations. The key findings are discussed within the wider context of steps the Department may take now to enhance the student CCEL experience until a community-facing portal can be created. This study's limitations and constraints are explained. The recommendations and framework for future research precede this paper's call to action and the white paper.

Key Findings

This project's key findings can be grouped into four major areas. First, the Department of Communication Services enrolls hundreds of students each semester who are required to take a minimum of six-units of experiential learning courses. These students are geographically dispersed and are primarily first-generation college students and Pell Grant recipients. A portal would enable students to locate CCEL project work sites near their homes, jobs, and the campus. It would also provide a means to connect with organizations that share their social, cultural, and community interests.

Second, in the absence of a portal, there is no mechanism for Communication Studies students and faculty to find CBOs to partner with informally, and no mechanism for CBOs to connect with faculty and students

seeking CCEL project sites. Also, no repository or history exists of community-based organizations who have previously worked with the Department's students for informal experiential learning assignments. Therefore, the Department currently has no means of recognizing the contribution students make to the community and the contributions these organizations make to student learning.

Third, students taking the same core EL classes may have a different experience when faculty members use different methods to connect students with community partners or faculty rotate to teach other courses. Absent opportunities for full-time and part-time faculty to collaborate with each other, community connections are broken, and best practices go unshared. Interviews with faculty and campus administrators revealed that more collaboration between faculty teaching CCEL courses will allow them to take advantage of existing community engagement resources, partnership opportunities, campus technology, and best practices within and between EL courses.

Finally, faculty and students are unaware of and are underutilizing existing projects, assignments, and research (PAR) resources. Campus resources that allow students to search existing project databases, store examples of their completed projects, record their informal research experiences, or launch major research projects are dispersed throughout the campus Website and are not accessible from a central point. Addendum 3 to the white paper outlines little known and underutilized campus resources and best practices. The Addendum proposes that a tile be added to the existing *myCoyote* student services portal to

link students to those resource pages which are spread throughout the CSUSB Website.

A Wider Timeline of Curricular Community-Engaged Learning Opportunities

Data collection for this project revealed a larger set of considerations in addition to the portal proposal. Such a portal falls midway on a timeline of opportunities available to the Department for improving how students, faculty, and organizations connect. The timeline includes 1) identifying and sharing best practices already in use by faculty and students; 2) considering adoption of shared practices in the department's EL courses to ensure consistent student learning experiences; 3) ensuring that all students are made aware of existing campus resources that can aid them in applied coursework and research efforts; 4) adding a tile to the *myCoyote* student services portal that brings together helpful links for EL projects, assignments, and research resources; 5) adopting best practices that help faculty and students recruit new community partners and retain existing partnerships for future student opportunities; 6) preparing for the 2023-2024 CSUSB Strategic Plan update which will describe and classify CCEL experiences using a standardized rubric and taxonomy; and 7) preparing for the multi-year CSU systemwide effort to classify and track these informal experiences.

These opportunities are depicted in Figure 1.

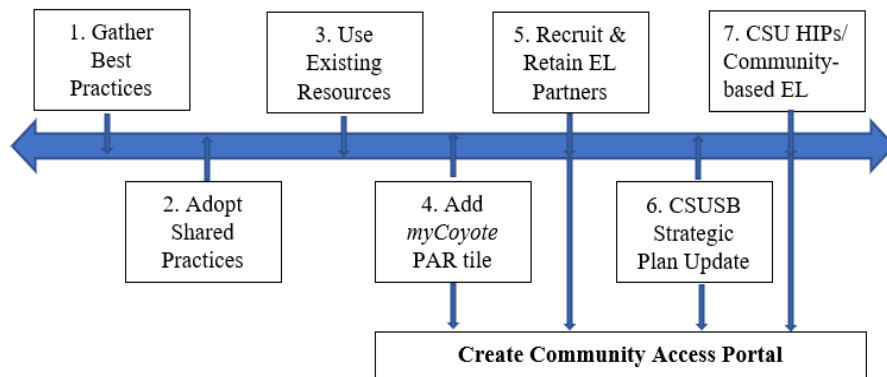


Figure 1. DCS Community-Engaged Learning Opportunity Timeline

Although Items #6 and #7 fall outside of the scope of this study's purpose or intent, it is important to understand and address them. The systemwide focus on CCEL, HIPs, and the campus Strategic Plan update are major initiatives on the horizon for CSUSB and relate to the timeliness of the portal framework discussion. At least two CSU campuses have already initiated portal projects to administer CCEL experiences at the department level. By pursuing the parallel tracks of early assessment of its HIPs, improving existing CCEL practices, and exploring the creation of a community-access portal, the Department of Communication Studies may position itself as a candidate for adoption of the models used by the two early-adopter CSU campuses. Do the challenges and opportunities facing DCS mirror those of campuses who have successfully taken steps to account for its CCEL practices through the implementation of a community-facing portal?

CCEs are the most frequently occurring experiential learning/HIPs experiences. However, they are the least tracked, counted, and reported (Campbell, CSUSB Interim Vice Provost). Indeed, the CSU system only recently defined and named CCEs. So, other than course enrollment, no reports or statistics exist on CCE assignments, student experiences, or how they relate to student learning and success. Further, because it does not track these experiences, the university cannot account for or acknowledge this work—not the time faculty invest in creating the experience for students, not the time students expend connecting and working with CBOs, and not the resources organizations invest in the students' success. This recognition must be a part of the systemwide and campus impetus to focus on CCE. CSUSB administrators acknowledge these missed opportunities to recognize and build goodwill with these nearly-invisible partners (Podolske, CSUSB Administrator; Campbell, CSUSB Interim Vice Provost).

How the department addresses and/or implements any portion of timeline items #1-5 above could have implications for how Items #6 and #7 will be addressed when those activities occur. More importantly, Items #4-7 will form the basis for applying the community access portal framework in Appendix A. Any efforts that DCS undertakes to identify, categorize, and document its CCE processes and practices will help inform the campus's initiative to accomplish the same as part of its strategic plan update and the CSU systemwide CCE initiative. The portal framework will periodically reference these timeline

elements that arose in interviews with faculty and administrators. Research observations related to strategic planning and internal processes are summarized in Appendix B for DCS consideration.

Project Limitations and Constraints

This study's findings are preliminary in that they do not include interviews with two key populations: the students enrolled in practicum courses and the CBOs they partner with. If the proposed portal framework advances, these groups must be included to determine their needs and design the portal to meet them.

The author conducted one interview with a CBO administrator – the chief executive officer for the local nonprofit where this study originated. The discussion centered on organizational preferences when establishing formal and informal partnerships for student assignments. The CEO expressed support for a portal, noting that it should be efficient and easy to use (Williams, Nonprofit Administrator). Regarding potential changes to how informal, short-term relationships are currently established, the CEO also indicated that organizations do not want to be unnecessarily or overly “managed,” but they will comply with reasonable risk management or other bureaucratic requirements. Care will need to be taken, then, so as to not be seen as taking a “heavy-handed approach” when instituting formal processes for making connections when these organizations have previously just dealt directly with faculty (Fairley, CSU Administrator). The potential risk management processes needed to protect the

university must be balanced with rewards and benefits of making the process easier for students, faculty, and the community.

CSUSB's Faculty Senate's HIPs committee will survey colleges and departments next year to begin the process of classifying CCEL courses. Will Departments move forward with internal changes while the systemwide and campus activities related to CCEL are moving on parallel tracks? Who will decide the timeline and next steps for revising CCEL practices and/or adopting a means of tracking them? Who will be tasked with managing CCEL tracking within academic departments?

Recommendations and Framework for Future Research

The key findings, limitations, and constraints discussed above are open issues that are well known to CSUSB faculty and administrators. This study attempts to contribute to the Department's and the campus's body of knowledge by succinctly capturing these issues in one document for wider conversations. The timing of this study is fortuitous as it comes when the campus (and the entire CSU system) is focusing on identifying and tracking how these CCEL experiences are administered and how they contribute to student learning.

Appendix A, the portal framework white paper, details the findings, considerations, and recommendations presented in this chapter. Its target audience is two-fold. First, department administrators and faculty can use the study internally to consider adopting any of the recommendations. Second, campus administrators may reference it during discussions on CCELS, HIPs, and

the Strategic Plan update; when considering the proposed upgrade to the student services portal; or when discussing possible adaptation of the CSU Chancellor's Office S4 community-access portal within the Department of Communication Studies.

This study frames the discussion and recommends the establishment of a project team to explore the creation or adaptation of a public-facing access portal to connect students and faculty with community-based organizations for short-term, informal experiential learning opportunities or CCEL.

APPENDIX A

DEVELOPING A PORTAL FOR FACILITATING INFORMAL, TOWN-GOWN
COLLABORATIONS: A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR CSUSB'S
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

**Developing a Portal for Facilitating Informal,
Town-Gown Collaborations:
A Proposed Framework for CSUSB'S Department of
Communication Studies**

Dia S. Poole, Master of Arts

Department of Communication Studies, California State University, San

Bernardino

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community engagement is embedded in the core missions of California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB) and the 23-campus California State University (CSU) system. CSUSB's mission statement conveys its responsibility to be "actively engaged in the vitality of our region" (California State University San Bernardino, n.d.). Further, the CSU's mission includes a commitment to "provide public services that enrich the university and its communities" (California State University, n.d.). Connections between community and university, or "town-gown" relationships, can mutually benefit students, the university, and surrounding communities (Kim et al., 2006; Bruning et al., 2006; Shelton, 2016):

- students and faculty benefit through increased support for learning and the knowledge transfer that results from working with local organizations;
- communities benefit through increased access to university resources to help solve local problems; and
- the university benefits through the increased presence, networking, and goodwill that results from student-community engagement.

CSUSB Community Engagement through Experiential Learning

One important way CSUSB students and faculty engage with the community is through short-term, informal coursework assignments with community-based or nonprofit organizations (CBOs/NPOs). Recently, the CSU undertook a systemwide effort to identify and capture these experiences, now referred to as "**curricular community-engaged learning**" or **CCEL**. CCEL and other high-impact practices (HIPs) have been shown to aid in student learning, retention, and progress to degree (Graduation Initiative 2025 Advisory Committee, 2021).

This study finds that each semester, hundreds of students in the CSUSB Department of Communication Studies (DCS) connect with area CBOs/NPOs (and often private-sector small businesses) to complete assignments. These courses place students in real-world environments where they can gain and demonstrate skills needed to enter the workforce and become leaders in their communities. Creating public relations campaigns, Website and social media campaigns, radio and television broadcast stories, and human-interest newspaper features are a few examples of the projects that students complete. However, the lack of a mechanism to make these connections poses significant barriers for students and faculty and has impacts for the university at large.

Key Findings: Barriers to Curricular Community Engagement Learning

At CSUSB, the campus's Office of Community Engagement, Career Center, and academic departments carefully arrange and track student participation in *formal* internships and service-learning activities. This study finds that aside from faculty efforts,

- no structured mechanisms exist to connect communication studies students to CBOs and NPOs for *informal*, practicum coursework assignments;
- no mechanism exists for local organizations to convey their interest or willingness to work with the Department's students or faculty;

- no mechanism exists to document, track, or report on how, when, where, and in what numbers the Department's faculty and students connect with local organizations for CCEL experiences;
- these student-community connections are known only to participating students, the organizations they work with, and the faculty who see students' work; the CBO/NPO's and student contributions to each other is unknown to and unacknowledged by the university at large; and
- CSUSB misses the opportunity to cultivate these informal relationships into formal partnerships for expanded learning opportunities, career placement, and university advancement.

Recommendations for Improving Community Connections: A Portal Proposal

This white paper, which is informed by empirical, mixed-methods research, recommends that the Department consider creating a portal to help students connect with area CBOs/NPOs for CCEL opportunities. This town-gown portal would create an accessible "space" where students, faculty, and CBOs could find learning opportunities, share their interests, exchange ideas, find resources, identify and solve problems, and build lasting community relationships. Specifically, the report proposes that DCS

- creates a project team to consider and adopt the recommended five-step framework for developing or adapting a town-gown collaboration portal for use by students, faculty, and the community;
- encourages collaboration between faculty to share best practices for facilitating student connections and recruiting and retaining community partners; and
- takes steps to improve the use of existing university resources for completing student projects, assignments, and research.

CSUSB and CSU Strategic Planning/HIPs Impact

The need for a mechanism for facilitating and tracking informal town-gown relationships has ramifications far beyond a single campus department. CSUSB will identify, describe, and tag HIPs, including CCEL, as part of its strategic planning process (Campbell, CSUSB Interim Vice Provost). "Empowering students to seek or create opportunities to develop relevant initiatives with community or peer partners" is a proposed objective of CSUSB's updated strategic plan (Medina, CSUSB Faculty).

This report offers information and suggestions that Communication Studies and other CSUSB departments may find useful during the strategic planning process. Two of the CSU's 23 campuses have taken steps toward implementing portals to capture CCEL: California State University Channel Islands (CSUCI) and California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (CPP). Could the Department of Communication Studies serve as a pilot site for a CCEL portal?

This report is specifically intended for consideration by administrators and faculty in CSUSB's Department of Communication Studies, the College of Arts and Letters, and other campus offices (e.g., Office of Community Engagement, Career Center, and others) who are best positioned to bring this portal to fruition. All CSUSB administrators, faculty, staff, and students are invited to read this report and provide feedback.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dia S. Poole embraced community-based research while enrolled in the Communication Studies master's degree program at California State University San Bernardino (CSUSB). She previously earned her undergraduate degree in business administration at CSUSB where she served on the Alumni Association board of directors and went on to serve as president of the systemwide California State University (CSU) Alumni Council. During her tenure on the Council, she visited all 23 CSU campuses and gained a unique perspective on the CSU's relationships with the communities it serves.

With this background, Dia embarked on a culminating research project to bring more CSUSB student and faculty resources to the community and help solve local problems. Dia's career in government relations and public affairs complements the academic research skills she acquired in the master's program. Since Spring 2021, she has delivered research reports on the coronavirus pandemic's impact on African American communities, crisis communications, and grant writing/fundraising for community-based organizations. After graduating, Dia plans to continue working with Inland Empire community-based and nonprofits organizations to develop advocacy programs and campaigns.

PROJECT BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

This project stems from a Spring 2022 course in Qualitative Research Methods in Communication Studies (COMM 6003). For that course, the author connected with an Inland Empire collaborative of public and private sector, public health, academic, and faith-based organizations who sought to explore and solve local communication-related problems. The study researched how health communication messages on the COVID-19 vaccines were delivered to the region's African American communities experiencing high coronavirus-related illness and death. To date, I have completed nine (9) informal, short-term experiential learning projects with this collaborative for courses in qualitative research, crisis communications, and fundraising and grant writing (a Public Administration course).

Members of the aforementioned collaborative have expressed interest in working with other Communication Studies students to complete projects that were "left on the cutting room floor" at the completion of my study (see Addendum #1 for a list of these projects and their descriptions). Unfortunately, my attempts to "hand off" these projects to other students revealed a problem: no mechanism currently exists for Communication Studies faculty and students to share organizational connections and project opportunities with other students; nor is there a mechanism the CBOs and NPOs can use to indicate their interest and willingness to work with our students.

There are other challenges related to connecting students with organizations. Students may not be familiar with the local area or may not have local connections. Prior faculty or student connections are not collected or shared for use in subsequent courses. Absent a repository, faculty and students rely primarily on "word of mouth" to make community contacts. Finally, the contributions made to student learning by these

organizations are not known or recognized beyond the students, the faculty, and the organizations. The university, as an entity, cannot acknowledge the organizations or the students for their shared transfer or knowledge as it does with formal experiential learning programs like internships or service learning.

What sorts of missed opportunities are we talking about? For example, a health equity coalition wanted a case study to enable other communities to replicate its model pandemic response program. A public health department needed statistical evidence to support claims that its COVID-19 vaccine message framing changed public attitudes and increased vaccine uptake. A CBO wanted to film a short public service announcement on preventing the spread of mPOX. Of course, these are just the missed opportunities associated with one Communication Studies graduate student. If each of the department's 34 graduate students conducts a single study or project that academic year as part of a core or elective class, and that study identifies a minimum of three "opportunities for future research," then more than 100 potential projects could be "left on the cutting room floor."

With these observations, I concluded that the Department also needs a mechanism or portal to capture these study prospects—research which has already been deemed worthy of pursuing and with community partners who desperately want to see them completed—when developing a response to capturing CCEL experiences.

A TOWN-GOWN COLLABORATION PORTAL: COMMUNITY AND UNIVERSITY BENEFITS

Town-gown experiential learning opportunities depend on effective communication. First, CBOs and NPOs need to be able to inform faculty, students, and administrators about their organizational and community needs. Second, departments, faculty, and students need to be able to inform the community of their interest and capabilities to assist with those needs and learn in the process. A town-gown portal is one mechanism for facilitating this communication.

A portal is defined as "a one-stop information gateway where users obtain needed information in a single interface" (Binder & Yuan, 2002, p. 2). For instance, developers at Vanderbilt University say their StarBRITE research portal "put[s] the right information into the hands of the right user at the right time" (Harris et al., 2011, p. 656). This project proposes a mechanism – a portal — that connects CSUSB's students at the intersection of communication studies and community engagement. This intersection has potential benefits for students, faculty, the university at large, and the community.

Benefits to Students

Experiential learning and other high-impact practices (HIPs) contribute significantly to student learning outcomes and have positive implications for student retention, closing equity and achievement gaps, academic progress, and graduation rates (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2023). The CSU prioritizes these components of student success in its commitment to service learning and the Graduation Initiative 2025 (California State University Center for Community Engagement, n.d.;

Graduation Initiative 2025 Advisory Committee, 2021). Then-Chancellor Timothy White stated that the “initiative affirms our systemwide commitment to eliminate achievement gaps, improve time to degree, and ensure that every student has access to the tools, resources and guidance needed to achieve (Chancellor’s Office, 2016).

Experiential learning activities also prepare students to enter the workforce and contribute to their communities, enable them to build a portfolio of work, and expose them to the professional and social skills they need to work as effective team members (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2023). A portal would create a repository of organizations where students can identify and connect with host organizations tailored to their academic and professional interests and that meet their geographic needs. This is especially helpful for students who are not familiar with the Inland Empire, such as international students and those students who live significant distances from campus. The portal would also cut down the time it takes for students to secure approvals necessary to partner on projects. Finally, a portal would allow students to begin work on their assignments or research sooner than they could if they had to search extensively for an organization to host them.

Benefits to Faculty

Faculty participation in EL programs presents a unique set of challenges which are further constrained by the absence of a mechanism to help students connect with local organizations. Motivating instructors to develop and teach EL programs can be difficult when the time they must commit is overlooked or uncompensated; their intellectual and creative contributions to the community and those of their students are underappreciated; or their efforts are not taken into consideration when decisions are made on employment terms, such as salary and tenure (Sieber, 2008; Smeltzer, 2018).

Instructors may be discouraged from including informal EL opportunities in their syllabi because a linkage to and from the community does not exist. This vacuum places the burden of *recruiting, vetting, selecting, diversifying, and retaining* community and industry partners on faculty. Students and EL programs suffer when faculty rotate teaching assignments or leave the institution, taking those valuable partner connections with them. A portal can function as a repository for these connections, enabling faculty to share resources with their colleagues and support their students’ efforts to secure work sites in the community.

Benefits to the Community

Community-based, nonprofit, and governmental organizations would benefit from a mechanism for matching them with Department resources. These resources include faculty and students in practicum courses such as public relations; radio, television, and video/film production; strategic and crisis communication; quantitative and qualitative research and analysis; organizational communications; and others.

In the absence of an efficient means of letting the university know they need help, these community needs go unaddressed, and the university misses an opportunity to help solve local problems. Faculty members commented that community partners have expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to host student projects and are often

surprised by their skill level and quality work products. A portal would provide the tracking needed to aggregate students' CCEL contributions to the community and include those contributions in its academic and community engagement reporting.

Finally, a shared portal provides a mechanism to prominently identify CCEL town-gown partners; recognize them for their contributions to student learning; nurture them into stronger, more visible relationships; and build goodwill between the community, university, and surrounding region.

Benefits to the University Beyond Communication Studies

An efficient mechanism or portal will facilitate university-to-community or community-to-university connections for experiential learning opportunities. Although this graduate project proposes a program within the Department of Communication Studies, the need extends beyond this one discipline. Faculty and students in other departments with informal praxis requirements—such as public administration and health sciences—could benefit from a similar mechanism. The project's purpose is to create an efficient mechanism that brings the university and community together—to learn from each other, share resources, and support each other's wellbeing.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Does the Department of Communication Studies need a portal to facilitate CCEL experiences? How are faculty and students currently connecting with community organizations, and how will a portal improve the process? And if establishing a portal is the best approach, how will it be created and what will it look like?

To answer these questions and prepare this white paper, the author engaged in three key research components: 1) secondary analysis of Department of Communication Studies course enrollment and student demographic data using the university dashboards; 2) semi-structured interviews with Department faculty about their CCEL practices and review of their syllabi and CCEL assignment instructions; and 3) semi-structured interviews with campus administrators about existing and potential portal systems. The following describes these three research components.

Course Enrollment and Student Demographic Data

CSUSB's Office of Institutional Research (IR) dashboards were used to determine how many students are taking the Department's EL courses and to construct a profile of Communication Studies students. For student researchers, these dashboards provide program-level data on enrollment and student demographics, including class level, full or part-time status, ethnicity, sex, and underrepresentation levels. The dashboards also reveal students' residential geographic distribution—which is important when considering their familiarity with local organizations for selecting and conducting EL activities—and the number of Pell Grant recipients, which may affect transportation options to and from study sites for some students.

Faculty Interviews and Syllabi Review

Long, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 Department of Communication Studies faculty members. Their responses informed the scope of EL practices that are carried out within the department, how students and the community benefit from these activities, what mechanisms are used to match students with organizations to complete those assignments, and the challenges and barriers that faculty and students face connecting with organizations for CCEL.

Faculty were also invited to submit examples of their Communication Studies course syllabi and practicum assignment instructions. The syllabi and assignment descriptions explain the type of coproduction activities students are asked to perform; how, when, and where students are asked to engage with which type(s) of community/nonprofit organizations; and the timeframe and duration of the assignments or learning experiences. Of primary interest is 1) any guidance or assistance included in the syllabus on connecting with organizations to host the students' learning experience, and 2) any content presented on using existing campus resources to connect with organizations and track participation with organizations for informal coursework assignments.

Administrator Interviews Regarding Curricular Community-Engaged Learning Structures

Interviews were also conducted with university entities that administer formal and informal experiential learning programs. The purpose for these interviews was to determine the adaptability of existing student-to-CBO engagement tracking systems for informal use with CCEL assignments. Examples were gathered of both Web- and non-Web-based applications for connecting students to CBOs and matching CBO needs to university resources. The applications surveyed include: the CSU's S4 community engagement platform; CSUSB's Canvas Public Health Workforce Development Training System; Portfolium (CSUSB's electronic portfolio for student-generated content); the CSUSB Career Center Handshake System; CSUSB Coyote Connection; the California Grants Portal; and others.

KEY FINDINGS

This study's review of the Department of Communication Studies' CCEL structures and practices has identified four key areas that impact its ability to create, sustain, and manage student-community connections: 1) the department's course offerings and student profile; 2) the need for a mechanism to connect and track students for CCEL experiences; 3) opportunities for Department faculty teaching practicum courses to share information and best practices for engaging community partners; and 4) the underutilization of existing campus resources for assisting students with projects, assignments, and research.

Key Finding #1: Extensive Student Participation in CCEL Courses, but Barriers Persist

The Department of Communication Studies requires that each of its 400-plus undergraduate students take “experiential learning” courses, including courses that involve CCEL components. And graduate-level courses like qualitative research methods, strategic communication, and the graduate project culminating experience also provide CCEL opportunities. These classes and experiences are designed to ensure that students gain communication-related skills and capabilities through real-world applications. However, a review of the Department’s student population suggests several barriers to student participation in the Department’s CCEL courses, including geographic, socio-cultural, and financial challenges. The following explains these opportunities and challenges.

Program Enrollment and Curricular Community-Engaged Learning Coursework Opportunities

CSUSB’s public dashboards show that, over the past five years, the Department of Communication Studies has enrolled more than 400 undergraduates and 30 graduate students each Fall term (Table 1).

Table 1. Five-Year Fall Enrollment for Department of Communication Studies

Semester/Year	Total Enrolled	Undergraduate	Graduate
Fall 2022	444	410	34
Fall 2021	470	436	34
Fall 2020	535	504	31
Fall 2019	594	561	33
Fall 2018	590	558	32

Source: Workbook: Enrollment by Academic Plan

Because students may complete CCEL assignments as individuals or in small groups, there is not necessarily a one-to-one correlation of students to community connections in experiential learning courses (this will be discussed more later). However, with more than 400 students completing required experiential learning courses, and with many of those courses incorporating CCEL components, it’s clear that Department of Communication Studies students have extensive opportunities to participate in CCEL experiences. In fact, it follows that students participate in informal CCEL experiences in *exponentially greater numbers* than in formal experiences like internships and service-learning (SL) projects.

For the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Communication, the department requires students to complete a minimum of three courses (six units) from a list of 18 “experiential learning” courses. A list with undergraduate experiential learning course requirements can be found in Addendum #2. These courses often involve connecting with a campus or community-based entities to complete class assignments. Client

deliverables include public relations campaigns, public-interest articles for the student newspaper *Coyote Chronicle*, campus radio and television station features, social media and Internet platform development, digital and video filmmaking, and other activities.

Graduate students in Communication Studies take several required and elective courses which may (based on faculty preference) incorporate CCEL practices, including quantitative and qualitative methods; strategic communication and applied communication research; and the graduate project culminating experience. For example, one professor requires students in the core course in qualitative research methods to connect with an external organization to complete practicum assignments and a full, IRB-approved research paper.

Student Geographic Distribution

The university's public dashboards also provide insight on the demographic characteristics of the department's students, including their geographic distribution. This is important because professors requiring students to visit or conduct activities at their host organization often suggest that students select an organization close to their residence, work, or school. This allows students to access project locations easily and safely within the time they are allotted for their activities (Lawal, Grant). Table 2 shows the geographic distribution of the department's Spring 2022 and Fall 2022 enrollment.

Table 2. Department of Communication Studies Student Geographic Breakdown

Residence Area	Spring 2022	Fall 2022
San Bernardino County	227	212
Riverside County	157	165
Other California County	45	45
Out of state	6	5
International	16	17
Total Non-San Bernardino County	223	232

Source: CSUSB Institutional Research and Analytics

In Spring and Fall 2022, roughly half of the department's students were from outside of San Bernardino County. Students who are unfamiliar with communities surrounding the university may have a more difficult time locating an organization to work with on their coursework assignments or research projects than local students. Also, because San Bernardino County is the nation's largest geographic county, a portion of students from *within* the county may not be considered local to the campus (e.g., High Desert and Mountain areas) and may face similar barriers to finding project organizations due to unfamiliarity or simply the travel time to and from project sites. For these students, a portal can familiarize them with organizations near the campus and allow them to easily select partner organizations that overcome geographic obstacles.

First-Generation College Students

Between Fall 2020 and Fall 2022, on average 78.6% of the Department's enrollees were first-generation college students. CSUSB defines "first-generation college students" as "a student whose parent(s)/guardian(s) have not received a four-year degree from within the United States" (California State University San Bernardino, n.d.). These students are as skilled academically and determined to succeed as their peers, and they are poised to make significant contributions to their communities. However, first-generation college students can struggle to navigate the university's "hidden curriculum" of jargon, policies, and procedures, and this can affect student confidence and success (Center for First-generation Student Success, n.d.). CCEL processes, such as researching CBOs, presenting themselves and their project ideas to managers or supervisors, and acclimating to the professional work environment may present particular challenges for first-generation students. The ability to overcome this "hidden curriculum" may also be influenced by social and cultural factors that can affect student confidence unless they have access to tools and resources to ensure their success (Center for First-generation Student Success, n.d.). A well-designed portal would enable students and faculty to locate organizations with shared industry, social, and cultural interests, with professionals who can relate to the students' life stories, and in communities where students are comfortable navigating the landscape.

Pell Grant Recipients

Finally, the university's dashboard reflects that on average, 55.6% of the department's Fall 2020 through Fall 2022 enrollees were Pell Grant recipients. Limited funds may limit students' transportation to host organizations. These students may also have to navigate around part- or full-time jobs. Having a mechanism to identify organizations near the campus, a student's residence, or job site can mitigate costs for these students and ease faculty concerns about students' ability to participate fully and equitably in CCEL activities.

These statistics provide only a general view of the department's student population; however, they are useful for considering a portal proposal and developing it. First, these data identify important student populations to survey regarding this portal's design, use, and marketing. Second, they may be helpful for faculty contemplating whether to include practicum opportunities in non-EL-designated courses, or how they may wish to design their CCEL courses for individual or team projects. Third, a deeper dive into specific CCEL course enrollment data can be used to compare CSUSB student participation in CCEL courses with similarly-situated institutions. Finally, the data may also suggest possibilities for future research into CSUSB student outcomes through participation in CCEL courses.

Key Finding #2: Challenges Connecting Students with Community-based Organizations

To understand how CCEL course administration can be improved, this study sought answers to these central questions: How are the Department's faculty and students currently connecting with community organizations? What difficulties or barriers are

they experiencing? And, how can community connections be improved by establishing a portal?

How Connections are Currently Made

Community connections for CCEL coursework may be student-initiated or faculty-initiated, depending on the course and the instructor's preferred teaching model. Some individual students may be required to find their own organization as part of the learning experience, while other students may work as pairs or groups to locate a site (Lawal & Pena, DCS Faculty). Faculty with existing CBO connections and resources may preselect a work site for student teams (Grant & Kendall, DCS Faculty), while other instructors may not. Department faculty using a service-learning approach have also reached out to the Office of Community Engagement for assistance locating resources (Kendall & Pena, DCS Faculty). Others take advantage of personal connections to industry partners and professional communication, media, public relations organizations as potential project sites for student networking and site selection.

An outcome of this varied approach to connecting students with organizations is that CCEL process may vary for the same class, taught in a different semester, by a different instructor, and possibly yielding a very different student experience. The variety of site selection methods used by Department professors and lecturers interviewed for this project is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Site Selection Models for Experiential Learning Experiences

Course Number/ Faculty	SL model placements, industry partners	Groups: Faculty selects org	Groups: Students select org	Individual Students select org	Uses OCE, DCE database
CS 2392 CS 3371 (Gondwe)	X	X	X	X	
CS 2291 (Grant)		X			
CS 2392 (Kendall)	X				X
CS 1000 CS 2491 CS 3042 (Lawal)				X	
CS 2393 (Lyons)				X	
CS 6003 (Muhtaseb)	X			X	

Course Number/ Faculty	SL model placements, industry partners	Groups: Faculty selects org	Groups: Students select org	Individual Students select org	Uses OCE, DCE database
CS 4491 (Pena)	X	X			X
xREAL Lab (Popescu)	X	X	X		
GIS, Univ of Redlands (Ma)	X				

A review of the sample course syllabi received did not produce specific examples of guidance for students to recruit organizations as potential practicum sites. Faculty who allowed students to select their own sites did report instructing students during class lectures and discussions on criteria for selecting sites and how to safely go about approaching businesses and organizations as potential sites (Gondwe, Lawal & Lyons, DCS Faculty). Low-tech, boilerplate text can be added to syllabi to guide students to community partners and existing campus projects, assignments, and research resources.

Gaps in Making Connections

Interviews with faculty and administrators repeatedly highlighted the current gaps in connecting students with the community and how a remedy for these obstacles would ease the burdens on students, faculty, and informal partner organizations. The problem of having limited access to community resources is not unique to CSUSB or to the CSU. An interview with a department chair at the nearby University of Redlands found the same issue within its Geographic Information Systems (GIS) master's degree program. However, the local GIS technology industry serves as a pipeline to work sites for program students, ensuring that they have access to companies and individuals that may become future employers. Industry partners have specific technical criteria they need from students, and students have a specific technical skill set they bring. CSUSB's xREAL Lab employs a similar model: the program model is technology-based with structured methods and faculty. This is not the case with the Department's overall body of EL courses—clients and their organizational needs may vary widely. These conversations reveal that a CCEL portal would help address this variety of needs in three important ways.

How Will a Portal Improve Connections?

First, a timely, easy-to-use portal will help solve local problems by bringing CSUSB resources to the community, and by bringing the community to CSUSB. Second, facilitating this engagement will increase CSUSB's visibility and reputation as a trusted, consistent community partner in the Inland Empire. As faculty rotate and courses go in

and out of the class schedule each semester, it becomes difficult to maintain a base of community partners for CCEL assignments (this will be discussed further below). Finally, a portal would also provide an avenue for the university to track organizations participating in CCEL relationships, recognize the contribution these organizations continually make to student learning; and grow them from informal to formal partners for longer term projects, internships, and career opportunities.

Given that portal creation or adaptation projects can take a significant amount of time to develop, this study found that the Department can take two major steps to facilitate CCEL course administration: by internally sharing best practices and by incorporating use of existing campus resources.

Key Finding #3: Improving Curricular Community-Engaged Learning Success

Interviews with CSUSB faculty teaching CCEL courses revealed that few opportunities exist to exchange information and best practices. Each instructor designs their own course content and format, and there is no organized departmental activity to bring full and part-time faculty together for the specific purpose of discussing experiential learning practices. More collaboration between faculty teaching CCEL courses and with campus administrators will allow them to take advantage of existing community engagement resources, partnership opportunities, campus technology, and share best practices within and between EL courses.

Faculty and students are unaware of and are underutilizing existing projects, assignments, and research (PAR) resources. Campus resources that allow students to search existing project databases, store examples of their completed projects, record their informal research experiences, or launch major research projects are not accessible from a central point.

Addendum #3 outlines little known or underutilized campus resources and best practices. The document proposes that a tile be added to the existing *MyCoyote* student services portal to link students to those existing resource pages which are spread throughout the CSUSB Website.

SOLUTION ALTERNATIVES

Students engaged in *formal* experiential learning opportunities are connected to host organizations and tracked through different mechanisms in offices and programs at CSUSB and within the CSU system. These may be automated or non-automated, Web-based or manual, depending on the program's needs.

We live in a society where speed is paramount and Internet technology is widespread, so portals are more commonly found as Web-based applications. How they are designed, implemented, and maintained is what differentiates one from another. What is generally agreed upon is that adapting an existing mechanism is preferred to creating a mechanism from scratch.

Adaptation Alternative: S4 Platform, Office of the Chancellor

A review of several existing CSUSB and CSU mechanisms, systems, or processes—as identified by administrators, faculty, or staff—informed the development timeline, costs, content, purposes, users, outputs, and maintenance requirements for adapting a portal. Discussions with development and operational staff confirmed that adaptation of an existing mechanism is a preferred approach in terms of development time and costs (Wagner, CSU Administrator; Cadavid, CSUSB Administrator). California State University’s S4 integrated Web interface, used by several CSU campuses to manage formal EL/SL participation, emerged as a potential candidate for adaptation at CSUSB.

As mentioned above, S4 is undergoing a new development phase that includes tracking CCEL experiences. The possibility of using S4 as a potential CCEL portal option brings with it numerous procedural and technical considerations that each of the 23 CSU campuses must explore prior to knowing if adaptation is feasible and advisable. One advantage of adapting S4 is the fact that two CSU campuses have already begun the process of implementing S4 as a portal for CCEL administration: CSU Channel Islands and Cal Poly Pomona which is located less than an hour away from CSUSB.

Could S4 be adapted to serve as the Department’s CCEL access portal? That question is best answered by the following five-step portal development framework.

A Five-Step Framework for Further Studying and Implementing a Curricular Community-Engaged Learning Portal

This white paper proposes and supports a five-step framework for the creation of an access portal—or the adaptation of an existing portal—that connects community-based organizations (CBOs) and nonprofit organizations (NPOs) with CSUSB faculty and students for informal, communication-related research experiences (or CCEL). Because CCEL experiences are only just beginning to be tracked in earnest throughout the CSU, a new or adapted public-facing portal may be best considered within the context of the systemwide CCEL effort.

A review of scholarly literature, community engagement best practices, and examples of successful town-gown portals identified a five-step framework for launching such a project.

- **Step One:** a project team is identified to establish the project’s scope, goals, and objectives;
- **Step Two:** the project team answers basic design questions about a new or adapted portal’s contents and use;
- **Step Three:** the project team establishes a timeline for designing, constructing, and testing the project;
- **Step Four:** potential funding and staffing needs are explored and defined; and
- **Step Five:** a marketing campaign for launching the portal is developed and executed.

Note that this graduate project will *not* directly result in the *construction and launch* of a portal. This white paper seeks to inform the *first two sections* of the suggested five-part framework by 1) proposing members for a pilot project team, and 2) informing scope and design opportunities for a newly created or adapted town-gown portal.

So, what questions must be answered in the five-step process of the portal design proposal? What would a town-gown portal look like for the Department of Communication Studies to facilitate community and student connections for informal experiential learning opportunities? A brief discussion of how these steps have been applied in other community-access portal creation or adaptation projects follows each step description.

Step One: Identify an initial project team, including:

- Member who can make or seek decisions about the adaptation of the candidate mechanism
- Member who can appropriate or seek the staff and funding needed to construct the adaptation
- Member who can appropriate or seek the staff and funding for ongoing maintenance and user technical support.
- Member who can address DCS day-to-day administrative requirements.
- Member to serve as marketing and communications liaison with CBOs/NPOs.
- Member to represent CSUSB students' interests, e.g. ASI Representative
- Member(s) to represent community interests
- In later stages, consider development of an advisory board

Establishing a project team is the first step in determining the project's overall scope, goals, and objectives. The team should be comprised of individuals who can evaluate the problem, identify what additional information is needed, evaluate and/or develop recommendations, and – importantly – make decisions within their respective departments or offices relative to the implementation of the portal if the team's findings are supported. The team's size may grow or be reduced over time, depending on the project scope and stage. Examples of varying team size and composition can be found within CSUSB and other portal projects with similar objectives.

The project team for CSUSB's Health Science and Human Ecology's public portal—the Canvas Public Health Workforce Development Training System—was tasked with making all decisions regarding the portal's development and implementation. The project was overseen by a faculty lecturer/coordinator and the team was comprised of a MPH program coordinator who referred students to build portal content and approved the training modules, MPH students who developed the modules, and a senior instructional designer from CSUSB's Web Services division who implemented the technology (Olney & Cadavid, CSUSB Administrators).

The California Grants Portal, mandated and funded by legislation in 2019, was created for a purpose not unlike this proposal: to bring grant seekers together with grant makers (Bose-Varela, Portal Administrator). The formal project team was comprised of a lead designer, a technical lead in the library's technology unit, and a contracted system development vendor. However, prospective portal users, representatives from over 40 grant-issuing state departments, and library executive staff worked alongside the project team on all aspects of the portal's project design, construction, testing, and implementation.

The S4 portal implementation project at Cal Poly Pomona will generally follow the departmental-centered model used at Cal State Channel Islands. Inquiries with technical staff at both campuses can further inform how the development and implementation teams were established based on their respective project design needs.

Step Two: Clarify the scope, need, and design opportunities:

- What requirements exist for applied practice in DCS undergraduate and graduate courses?
- What types of assignments require students to connect with CBOs/NPOs?
- What mechanisms are faculty and administrators currently using to connect students with CBOs/NPOs? How are students making their own connections?
- Where are the perceived gaps in connecting students with organizations (and vice versa)?
- What ideal mechanism(s) would help DCS/faculty and students efficiently and effectively connect with the community? What would it look like and do?
- What ideal mechanism(s) would help community organizations efficiently and effectively connect with CSUSB students? How best can these organizations communicate their needs to CSUSB?
- What decisions can be made and actions taken based on the mechanism's outputs?
- Are there any privacy issues to consider around student and organizational data?
- What data do administrators need from the system regarding participation, HIPs, etc.
- Explore possible existing mechanism(s): Is there something already in existence at CSUSB, within the CSU, or more broadly, that can be modified? Can existing systems intersect to provide solutions for students, faculty, university, and community? What compatibility issues preclude systems from being adopted?
 - CalState S4 System CSU Chancellor's Office of Community Engagement
 - CSUSB Office of Community Engagement (OCE), Database of Engagement Opportunities,
 - CSUSB Career Services Handshake System
 - CSUSB CANVAS (Open Source) Public Health Workforce Development Training System system
 - CSUSB Portfolium System
 - CSUSB Campus Labs/Coyote Connection System
 - CSUSB Office of Student Research (OSR) Website
 - California State Library Grants Portal

The second step involves intensive research by the project team to further assess the portal's scope, need, and design elements. The project team decides on a methodology to gather data from internal and external stakeholders to determine who the portal will serve, what it will look like, what information will be input and output, where it will reside, and who will construct it and maintain it (Bose-Varela, Portal Administrator; Fairley & Wagner, CSU Administrators). Involving portal users is a necessary step within the design process (Bose-Varela, Portal Administrator; Williams, Nonprofit Administrator). For instance, this study did not include data gathering from an important group of primary stakeholders—students—and a more detailed analysis is needed of the department's current processes and practices for CCEL courses.

Community-based organizations, nonprofits, and governmental entities engaging in CCEL projects must be participants in this scope and design phase so that their needs are incorporated into proposed solutions (Bose-Varela, Portal Administrator).

The project team also explores existing systems in greater detail to determine if there are options that can be adopted as-is or adapted to meet the project scope and objectives, from a procedural and a technological perspective (Fairley & Wagner, CSU Administrators). The CSU is currently focusing on tracking CCEL practices throughout the system. The Center for Community Engagement oversees the S4 system which was recently piloted at the department level to track CCEL participation at California State University Channel Islands (Fairley & Wagner, CSU Administrators). An S4 pilot project is in the early stages of implementation for tracking CCEL coursework in the Liberal Studies department at Cal Poly Pomona (Fairley, CSU Administrator). A detailed investigation can determine if the required technology framework exists to pilot S4—using CSUCI or CCP as a model—in CSUSB’s Department of Communication Studies.

Step Three: Timeline

Information to gather:

- How long will it take to develop a preliminary design for the adaptation?
- How long will it take to secure any required approvals needed before development work can begin?
- How long will it take developers to construct the portal?
- How much time should be allowed for testing the portal?
- How long will it take to secure final approvals to launch the portal?
- How much time should be allowed for marketing the portal? When should marketing efforts begin and end?

Establishing a development timeline is the third key step in portal projects. Here, the project team establishes a timeline predicated by the scope, design, and available resources to complete the work. In the case of the State Library’s Grants.gov portal, the timeline was set by legislative mandate—developers were given one year to complete the project, from start to finish (Bose-Varela, Portal Administrator). HSHE’s Canvas Public Health Workforce Training portal was also developed within approximately one year, although without a mandated timeline. The senior instructional designer’s choice of Canvas open-source development software, having students create the training module, and having a streamlined approval process allowed for a timely launch (Cadavid & Olney, CSUSB Administrators). Two of the portals examined in the literature review also followed the one-year development timeframe, while a third was launched nearly four years after first conceptualized.

Step Four: Funding and staffing to build or adapt and maintain the portal

- Who will seek funding authorization or expenditure approval for the portal project?
- Who will provide the cost estimates for construction or adaptation?
- Should the university solely fund the project, or should it be a town-gown-grown initiative?
- How will funds be sought and/or allocated for ongoing maintenance and revision?
- Should funds be sought at the system level by considering the pilot a potential system-wide solution?

The cost of creating and maintaining portals depends on the project scope and final design. Once the project team has decided these requirements, funding and staffing needs can be identified. Portals adapted from existing models typically cost less to implement and maintain. If the team decides that the S4 model can be adopted, the Chancellor's Office, CSUCI, and CPP can inform the team on potential share of costs charged to campuses for the host system's day-to-day operations and expansion (Fairley & Wagner, CSU Administrators).

The difference in funding models can be seen by contrasting the California Grants.gov portal with CSUSB HShe's workforce training portal. Grants.gov was funded through the legislative budget process that allocated \$200,000 for development and implementation (Bose-Varela, Portal Administrator). The workforce training portal was developed using existing HShe and Web Services staff who also had other duties aside from the portal project. There was no formally adopted budget and HShe was not charged for the senior instructional designer's services (Calavid & Olney, CSUSB Administrators).

If new development is required, the project team may seek grant funding or other sources to fund new initiatives at the campus level, CSU system level, or from sources external to the university such as a public-private partnership. Even with dedicated funding and existing resources, portal developers agree that the amount allocated to a project is typically insufficient—especially with new initiatives (Bose-Varela, Portal Administrator; Calavid, Olney, CSUSB Administrators; Wagner, CSU Administrator). Other resources for new development include campus Web Services staff, computer science students, or the Extended Reality for Learning (xREAL) Lab which has funding and faculty and staff resources for innovative technology projects (Popescu).

Staffing required to maintain the portal will vary depending on the portal's complexity and use. The HShe project coordinator spends as little as two hours per month on maintenance issues, while the technical lead's time spent is insignificant due to the open access platform housing the portal (Calavid & Olney, CSUSB Administrators). By comparison, the Grants.gov portal is dynamic and heavily accessed, requiring a

dedicated full-time project manager and technical lead to manage requests for upgrades from public users and host departments (Bose-Varela, Portal Administrator).

Step Five---Marketing and launching the portal

- Establish the target publics for the marketing campaign
- Explore existing student and campus resources for developing a marketing campaign
- Are external (non-CSUSB) resources need to develop/launch the campaign?
- How much will the campaign cost and how will those funds be acquired, for internal or external development and implementation?
- How will ongoing portal promotion occur?
- Where will the portal “live” in DCS and how will faculty, students, and the community know it’s there?

The fifth step in this framework, marketing and launching the portal, is as important as the steps taken to develop it (Bose-Varela, Portal Administrator). The project team will investigate available campus resources, including marketing faculty and students, who may design or contribute to the design of a marketing plan for the portal’s initial launch. Further, plans for ongoing assessment of stakeholder needs and the portal’s ongoing promotion are critical (Olney, CSUSB Administrator).

The marketing and launch process used for the Grants.gov portal demonstrates that plans must be tailored for the target publics: internal stakeholders—the state agencies and departments posting grant opportunities, and external stakeholders—the individuals and organizations seeking grant funding. Key to reaching these groups was using relationships between grant seekers and grant makers established well before the portal’s development (Bose-Varela, Portal Administrator). Once the portal was tested by internal and external stakeholders, separate marketing plans were initiated to meet the legislatively-mandated implementation date. The first notices informed *internal* stakeholders that the system was ready for data entry and provided written instructions, video recordings, and timelines for accomplishing those preparatory tasks. Fifteen days later, notices were distributed to *external* stakeholders that the portal was live with preloaded grant opportunities. Outreach included technical assistance workshops, social media posts, and speaking engagements by the State Librarian and the portal’s project manager at community meetings, nonprofit organizations, and county offices.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that there is a high degree of interest within the Department of Communication Studies for improving the way faculty and students connect with the community for informal, short-term experiential learning assignments. Faculty interviews revealed that this is not a new issue but one that can and should be given more

attention within the Department. This study's findings support the Department's need for a mechanism to facilitate these informal community connections. Beyond that, the Department needs a mechanism to account for these connections that occur in *exponentially* greater numbers than all other forms of experiential learning, require a significant effort on the part of faculty and students to accomplish, but are the least recorded, reported, and acknowledged.

Why This Is Important and How We Should Move Forward

The timing of this study coincides with the conversations underway within the CSU system. So now would be an opportune time to have internal conversations with Department administrators and staff, tenure-track faculty, and adjunct faculty who teach experiential learning courses. This study recommends that the Department convenes a small internal working group to begin addressing these foundational questions:

- Should the Department move forward to adopt practices that will help now (e.g., best practice sharing between faculty, improved communication with the Office of Community Engagement, better use of existing campus resources, etc.) while awaiting CSUSB strategic plan's investigation into CCEL and other high-impact practices? If so, who will be responsible for assessing and coordinating these interim steps?
- Should the Department request technical assistance at the CSU system level to explore its candidacy as a pilot site for implementing the S4 CCEL department-centric model adopted at CSUSI and CPP?
- If technical, procedural, or other barriers preclude its candidacy as a S4 pilot site, should the Department explore the CCEL-related forms and processes that CSUCI and CPP are using? For example, CPP used a community engagement form that allows organizations to specify which types of resources, engagement level, and projects they are looking for. Would building a simple shared repository (e.g., Google drive document) using community-based organizations previously vetted and used by faculty and students be a helpful first step? If so, who will be responsible for creating and maintaining the repository?

Additional notes, a timeline, and considerations for the Department can be found in Chapter 4 and as Appendix B of this research study's full manuscript.

Strengths and Limitations

The systemwide emphasis on CCELs supports this study's research question and project objectives. Efforts are underway at the Chancellor's Office to expand its CCEL tracking capabilities, two CSU campuses have already begun portal projects, and CSUSB will gather data on CCELs as part of its strategic plan update. The Department is faced with deciding if or how it wishes to proceed considering these concurrent initiatives.

Any new initiative brings with it a need to secure buy-in from internal and external stakeholders, particularly when it requires an investment of time, funding, and

staffing resources (Wagner & Fairley, CSU Administrators). With this research question, all participants recognize the need to address the problem—the lingering question has been *how?* The findings presented in this white paper suggest several approaches the Department can consider as first steps. However, further research is warranted to address topics outside of the immediate scope of this study, including communications with two key publics.

Key Publics

The research question identifies two key publics that this portal will serve: students and community-based organizations. Due to time constraints, this study could not include data gathering from practicum course students and CBOs who may use the proposed portal. Data gathered from these publics is essential in justifying a portal project and determining its specific design elements. The community cannot be matched to students and faculty until a consistent structure is in place to ensure that resource needs and capabilities are clearly defined. This study could not conduct interviews with *all* faculty teaching practicum courses due to time and availability constraints—some faculty do not teach every semester or were not available to participate in the interviews. Finally, more information is needed from CSU and CSUSB administrators on plans to address CCEL experiences systemwide so that campus resources are not unnecessarily expended, campus and system missions are aligned, and shared goals and objectives can be achieved. The project team must address these limitations within their project plans.

Governance and Risk Assessment

Lastly, two additional issues arose that warrant further exploration: governance and risk assessment. The S4 portal model for managing CCEL places the portal's (non-technical) oversight within the Department as opposed to within the campus's community engagement operation. How will the Department and faculty respond if a community portal is launched and community requests flood in? Who and how will the incoming partnership requests be managed to ensure that requested partnerships are fairly distributed to faculty, existing partnerships are preserved, and that partner organizations have an equal opportunity to be selected to host classroom assignments? Community partners have previously dealt with faculty and students informally; how will they react to a more formalized process for connecting with students through the portal?

Currently, faculty vet and approve the organizations they select to place students with for practicum assignments (Kendall, Lyons, & Grant, DCS Faculty). The faculty also advises students to exercise care when recruiting their own organizations to work with, and then summarily review and accept the organizations as part of the assignment preparation (Lawal, DCS Faculty). Would opening a portal that allows community organizations to "self-nominate" for projects without being vetted through the university's community engagement or risk management channels pose increased liability for the university if students use the portal to directly access those unvetted organizations? Does the fact that students are already making these unvetted connections mitigate the university's responsibilities should a mishap occur with one of the host organizations?

These important questions are left to the project team should the Department choose to advance this portal proposal.

Next Steps

The target audience of this project's white paper is CSUSB administrators, faculty, staff, and student representatives who are best positioned to consider and adopt the *framework* presented for a new town-gown portal. The audience for this white paper should include, at minimum, the following members of the campus community: faculty and student representatives with an interest in experiential learning, service learning, and community-based learning partnerships; deans and chairs of colleges and departments with practicum course offerings (e.g. communication studies, public administration, health and human ecology, etc.); administrators in the Office of Community Engagement, Office of Student Research, and Career Services; and the provosts and vice presidents with oversight for academic and student services, budget, information technology, and university advancement.

These offices and individuals are charged with advancing the CSU and CSUSB mission, objectives, and strategic plan goals discussed earlier in this paper. This white paper seeks to align the portal's potential benefits with the priorities advanced by the target audience's day-to-day functions—chiefly, increasing student access to experiential learning opportunities, advancing student learning and achievement outcomes, and establishing mutually beneficial community relationships. These priorities are outlined in the Chancellor's Office Center for Community Engagement 2018-19 California's Call to Service Initiative described here: <https://www.cpp.edu/cce/faculty/cel-attribute-initiative.shtml>

Because this project is poised to significantly impact the surrounding community, each of the above-named parties is invited to open the white paper for comments from CSUSB's community partners, particularly those involved in EL/SL and other student research opportunities.

ADDENDUM #1: EXAMPLES OF MISSED TOWN-GOWN CURRICULAR COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING CONNECTIONS

Since Spring 2022 to the present, I have worked with an Inland Empire collaborative of public and private sector, public health, academic, and faith-based organizations on exploring and solving local communication-related problems. I have completed nine (9) informal, short-term experiential learning assignments with this collaborative in qualitative research, crisis communications, and fundraising and grant writing (public administration) courses. Members of the above-mentioned public health collaborative have expressed an interest in having students complete the remaining five projects my original study that were “left on the cutting room floor” (*the present study being the sixth “opportunity for future research”*) and an additional six projects. In summary, four of the project opportunities are community-initiated (“town-gown”), and two were initiated through university coursework requirements (“gown-town”):

Qualitative Research Methods Course Final Paper Outcomes #1-5—Gown-Town Request. Opportunities for student experiential learning assignments or graduate projects include:

1. Creating COVID-19 vaccine healthcare communication messages using message framing theory to improve COVID-19 vaccine uptake in African American communities;
2. Correlating quantitative data on a public/private sector collaborative’s COVID-19 messages to changes in vaccine hesitancy and/or vaccine uptake using a mixed-methods approach;
3. Exploring the results of two regional universities’ medical school studies on African American COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy vs. vaccine uptake within the Inland Empire region;
4. Developing strategies to resolve over 30 communication-related gaps and barriers observed during the COVID-19 CBO and public health response; and
5. Conducting a case study on the public/private sector health equity collaborative to inform best practices and replicate its model in other regions or states.

Crisis Communication Plan—Gown-Town Request. Undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in this Communication Studies 5000-level class are required to create a crisis communication plan. Students may select an existing organization of their choice to complete this culminating project over the last half of the 16-week semester.

Individual and Group Fundraising/Grant Writing Plan—Gown-Town Request. Undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in this Public Administration 5000-level class are required to complete series of assignments with a CBO or other entity of their choice. The assignments include creating a donor appeal letter and fundraising plan; a funder list; a request for proposal analysis; and a logic model and letter of inquiry. Students may work as individuals or may partner as a small working group with faculty permission.

Monkeypox Public Service Announcement—Town-Gown Request. A CBO desired to engage a student videographer/video team to film a two-to-three-minute PSA

on preventing the spread of monkeypox. The video would air on social media and could be filmed at a campus studio, if available, or at a public location in the Inland Empire.

Nonprofit Summit Video—Town-Gown Request. A local nonprofit requested a student video team to film a one-day conference held at a local facility. The team would also monitor online discussion and provide technical assistance to participants joining via a live Webcast.

Town Hall Meeting Analysis—Town-Gown Request. An academically connected nonprofit requested student assistance to provide a synopsis of public comments at a series of town hall meetings. After summarizing the proceedings, the student would assist in making recommendations and developing next steps for community follow up.

Virtual Reality Disaster Preparedness Application—Town-Gown Request. A virtual "railway" across the Inland Empire will connect African-American residents with emergency management resources that help with disaster preparedness and planning, disaster mitigation, crisis response, readiness supplies, and other critical needs.

ADDENDUM #2: Department of Communication Studies Experiential Learning Course Offerings

Undergraduate Requirements

Students must choose six units from at least two of the following experiential learning courses. In these courses, students apply Communication theories and practices in supervised, "hands-on" activities, and they reflect on those experiences.

<u>COMM 2291</u>	Practicum in Relational and Organizational Communication
<u>COMM 2292</u>	Practicum in Mentoring
<u>COMM 2293</u>	Practicum in Intercollegiate Forensics: Coyote Debate
<u>COMM 2391</u>	Practicum in Multimedia Journalism: Coyote Chronicle
<u>COMM 2392</u>	Practicum in Digital Audio and Radio
<u>COMM 2393</u>	Practicum in Television Journalism Production: Local Matters
<u>COMM 2491</u>	Practicum in Strategic Communication: Coyote PR
<u>COMM 2492</u>	Practicum in Advertising: Coyote Advertising
<u>COMM 2592</u>	Practicum in Communication Research
<u>COMM 2593</u>	Service Learning in Communication
<u>COMM 4291</u>	Advanced Practicum in Relational and Organizational Communication
<u>COMM 4292</u>	Advanced Practicum in Mentoring
<u>COMM 4293</u>	Advanced Practicum in Intercollegiate Forensics: Coyote Debate
<u>COMM 4391</u>	Advanced Practicum in Multimedia Journalism: Coyote Chronicle
<u>COMM 4392</u>	Advanced Practicum in Digital Audio and Radio: Coyote Radio
<u>COMM 4393</u>	Advanced Practicum in Television Journalism Production: Local Matters
<u>COMM 4491</u>	Advanced Practicum in Strategic Communication: Coyote PR
<u>COMM 4492</u>	Advanced Practicum in Advertising: National Student Advertising Competition team
<u>COMM 5792</u>	Internship in Communication
<u>COMM 5793</u>	Internship in Communication
<u>COMM 5794</u>	Internship in Communication

Source: Bachelor of Arts in Communication, DCS Website

ADDENDUM #3: UNDERUTILIZATION OF EXISTING CAMPUS RESOURCES AND BEST PRACTICES

This study recommends that—pending development of a portal to facilitate student-community connections—faculty and students within the Department of Communication Studies should make more frequent use of existing community engagement resources and best practices within and between experiential learning courses. To facilitate use of these resources, this study recommends that the campus explore adding a segment to the *myCoyote* student services home page to create a one-stop access point for projects, assignments, and research (PAR) tools that are currently spread throughout the university’s csusb.edu Website.

Observed Impediments to Connecting Students with Community Organizations

1. ***Students as Resources.*** Students are an underutilized resource in maintaining connections to community partners they have established. They are not tasked with connecting their informal networks to faculty, the Office of Community Engagement (OCE), or the Career Center to cultivate these informal relationships into formal service learning or employment partnerships.
2. ***OCE Database.*** Students are underutilizing the existing Database for Community Engagement in the OCE: 1) they do not know it exists, 2) it does not appear in their course syllabus, 3) faculty do not refer students to search for organizations tagged as willing to participate with coursework assignments, 4) students are not trained in how to use the DCE—they do not know what they can or cannot access or whether they can initiate contact with organizations indicating they will accept coursework assignments.
3. ***Course Syllabi.*** Experiential learning course syllabi are not consistently used to make students aware of existing projects, assignments, and research assistance for practicum coursework. Low-tech, boilerplate techniques can be added to syllabi to lessen stress on faculty and assist them in guiding students to community partners and project resources.
4. ***Free e-Portfolios.*** Students are not made aware that the university has an electronic portfolio product called *Portfolium* that they can use, free of charge, to centrally store their completed projects and research (Shisler, CSUSB Administrator). There is no written instructional guide to using this product and it is not frequently included in EL syllabi as a tool students can use to showcase their work when recruiting community organizations for projects and research or when internship and job seeking.
5. ***Free LinkedIn.*** Similarly, course syllabi are not encouraging students to create a free university LinkedIn account which can be used to build relationships to CBO/NPO leaders that they connect with for projects. Those relationships can continue once students graduate, move onward and upward in their profession, and help students following them connect to these same organizations for project and research opportunities.

6. ***List of Acquired Skills.*** For practicum classes, students may not know how to translate the courses' learning objectives into a list of skills they have acquired through the coursework. This may prevent them from adequately describing what they plan to accomplish when recruiting an organization for a CCEL project, or when approaching a potential employer. Faculty teaching EL courses can encourage students to document and share their core competencies by providing boilerplate language at the course conclusion (Kendall, DCS Faculty).
7. ***Recruiting Organizations for EL Courses.*** No mechanism exists to make community organizations aware of the 18 core EL courses, other practicum courses offered by the Department, and what type of projects and assignments students will be working on—public relations, video, film, broadcast media, journalism, etc. There is no organized annual, semiannual, or other recruitment effort—which could be spearheaded by students—to inform CBOs about options for partnerships during the current or next semester. This problem is compounded if/when faculty change and take their partner resources with them, or they change the way connections are made and prior partners are lost.
8. ***Handshake Informal Partners?*** The Department may wish to inquire whether the Career Center's *Handshake* employer relations system employers may be willing to join the OCE's engagement database for CCEL opportunities or be flagged in *Handshake* as willing to host coursework assignments as a precursor to a job offer for students. It does not appear that the Department, OCE, and the Career Center have collaborated to explore that possibility.
9. ***Free Handshake Accounts.*** Students may not be aware that a *Handshake* account is automatically generated for each enrolled student (Lara, CSUSB Administrator). Can *Handshake* be used to focus students' attention on organizations in their preferred industry to consider as potential CCEL sites, and later for internship, service learning, or employment opportunities?
10. ***CCEL Updates for Formal Partners.*** It is unclear if organizations in the OCE database and in *Handshake* are notified that academic departments do CCEL coursework and the type of projects/assignments students will do in practicum classes that semester or academic year. Sharing that information with existing *formal* partners may open the door for additional engagement as *informal* partners for short-term assignments when they otherwise would not be engaged with the university.
11. ***Projects on the "Cutting Room Floor."*** There is no mechanism to share student projects and research left on the cutting room floor for "future research" with the community, other students, or other faculty. Examples of these missed town-gown opportunities can be found in Addendum #1.
12. ***University/Department Recognition.*** OCE holds an annual recruitment and recognition events for its service-learning community partners. The Career Center regularly holds employer relations activities to bring employers to campus to engage with students. Aside from faculty, the university as an entity does not know about CCEL partners so these organizations go unacknowledged. Students are also not routinely tasked with acknowledging the organizations for their contributions to student learning. This lack of recognition could be an impediment to nurturing,

retaining, and advancing those community partnerships for future students. Brainstorm ways that these contributions can be acknowledged by students, faculty, the department, and the university.

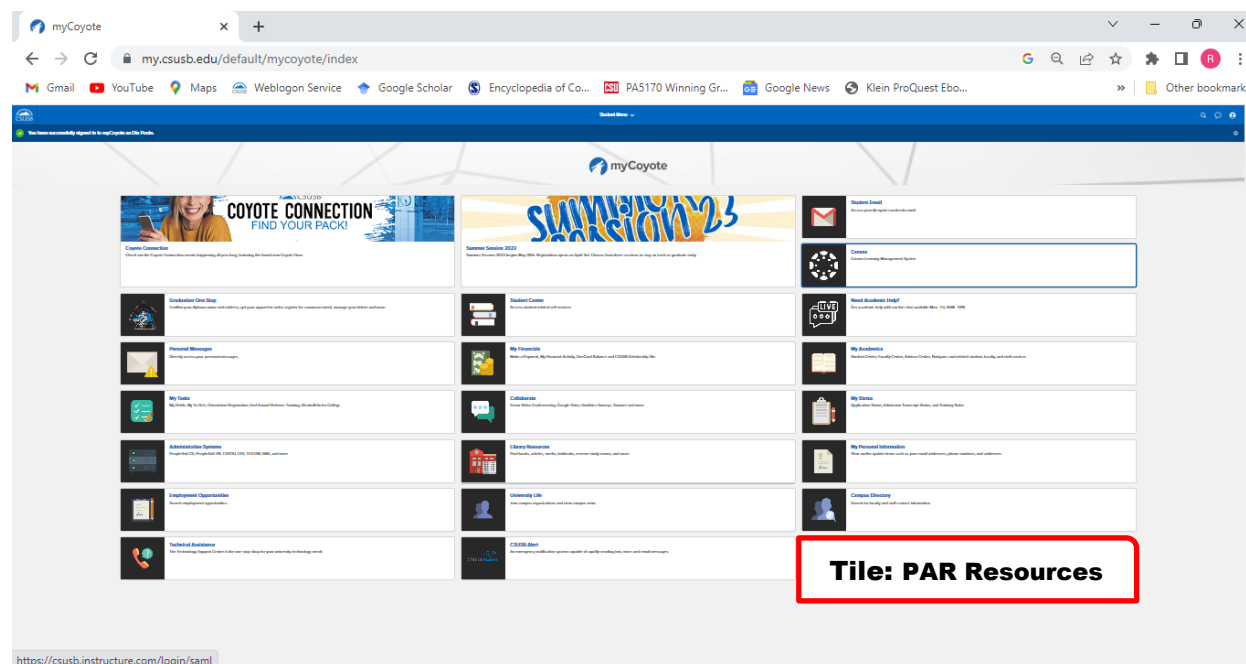
Dispersed Online Projects, Assignments, and Research Resources

1. ***Little-known Resources.*** Students may not know that helpful resources exist or where to find them on the campus Website to connect with on- and off-campus organizations for projects, assignments, and research.
2. ***Dispersed Resources.*** Some campus Webpages for projects and research are content-thin: they do not point to each other or do not include sufficient narratives to inform students of places they should look for resources.

Opportunities to Improve Use of Existing Resources

1. **Projects, Assignments, and Research (PAR) Section on myCoyote.** Adding a new tile—an icon and box—on the existing *myCoyote* Homepage (Figure 2) that will serve as a one-stop location that brings forward previously invisible, unknown, and underutilized resources under a “*PAR Resources*” tile.

Figure 2. *myCoyote* Homepage



Clicking on the tile would direct viewers to a list of links—each with a 1–2-line narrative description—to Webpages students need for projects, assignments, and research-related activities, including, but not limited to, the following:

- a. Folio/*Portfolium*: <https://www.csusb.edu/its/blog/article/506934>
 - b. Career Center *Handshake*: <https://www.csusb.edu/career-center/handshake>
 - c. Office of Community Engagement, Database of Engagement Opportunities: <https://www.csusb.edu/community-engagement/faculty/resources/database-of-engagement-opportunities>
 - d. Scholarworks: Search for projects by topic, locate opportunities for future research <https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>
 - e. LinkedIn account: <https://www.linkedin.com/school/california-state-university-san-bernardino/>
 - f. Office of Student Research: <https://www.csusb.edu/student-research>
 - g. Institutional Review Board: <https://www.csusb.edu/institutional-review-board>
 - h. Coyote Connection profile/research experience capture: <https://csusb.campuslabs.com/engage/involvement/experiences>
 - i. On-campus organizations list: <https://csusb.campuslabs.com/engage/organizations>
 - j. Proposed: List of course offerings by term that include community engagement, practicum, applied coursework, and if possible, the types of assignments students will produce that term.
- ❖ Include a link to this new *myCoyote* tile in all experiential learning course syllabi with a brief description of how the section can help students.
 - ❖ Invite Coyote PR (COMM 2491-92) students to create a launch campaign—“*PAR for the Course*”—announcing the new *myCoyote* tile.
2. ***Students as Ambassadors.*** Students can connect their informal networks to OCE and the Career Center (CC) when completing coursework assignments, possibly as part of closing evaluation via a form, a link to an online form, or when established, a portal. Students can ask their contacts if they wish to be considered for a future informal or formal partnership with OCE or CC. This can begin growing a pool of resources for future coursework assignments. Once organizations are vetted, students should have direct access to these resources without the need for faculty or OCE intervention.
 3. ***OCE Database Training.*** Students and faculty need information on how to access and use the Database for Community Engagement to speed up connection to CBOs for CCEL coursework assignments. The training should include how CBOs who have been vetted for classwork assignments are flagged in the database and how faculty and students can access contact information for those CBOs.
 4. ***Low-stress Best Practices.*** The following suggestions for faculty teaching practicum courses may help students locate project sites and reduce the stress on faculty to provide resources:
 - Include the creation of an electronic portfolio in the syllabus for CCEL class assignments. (Kendall & Lawal, DCS Faculty; Shisler, CSUSB Administrator)
 - Include instructions in the syllabus for students to connect their CBOs to OCE for future projects (see #2 above).

- Set Canvas access to allow students at least the beginning of the next term to download graded assignments, instructor comments, and to build their e-portfolios. Some courses are locked out of Canvas shortly after finals week.
 - Include the creation of a LinkedIn account in the syllabus tied back to the Department program. As former students advance in their career, their link to the department allows faculty to watch their progress and reach out for opportunities for current students to do coursework, secure internships, career readiness, and secure jobs (Kendall, DCS Faculty).
 - For practicum classes, include in the syllabus a list of technical skills the student should possess by the end of the class: a technical fluency list or list of core competencies. Upon completing the class, faculty provides student with a boilerplate “job description” that students can insert into their resumes and LinkedIn accounts that describe the experience they acquired. The job description/fluency list can also be tied to the students’ *Portfolio* account to share projects that demonstrate fluency in the technical skills with potential internship providers or employers. (Kendall, DCS Faculty).
5. ***CCEL Recruitment Events***. Consider holding annual or semi-annual recruitment events targeting communication-related employers, CBOs, nonprofits, etc., to generate project sites and highlight the coursework assignments students can complete for their organization that semester.
 6. ***Career Center-OCE Collaboration***. Connect Career Center employer relations with OCE to give potential employers who are not quite ready to host interns or make new hires the opportunity to offer short-term, informal opportunities. Make those employers accessible to students for coursework through access to the OCE database or through the students’ free *Handshake* accounts. If not already being done, provide a list of CCEL courses and the type of assignments students will complete to administrators in OCE and the Career Center and to organizations in OCE’s database and in *Handshake*. Make the same list available to faculty and students through Canvas and the proposed PAR section on *myCoyote* (see below).
 7. ***Opportunities for Further Research***. Most if not all formal research studies include a section on “opportunities for formal research.” These opportunities may be informal, short-term projects or formal research proposals. Until a portal is constructed to collect them, brainstorm ways that outgoing semester students can share their own “cutting room floor” projects (See Addendum #1) and incoming semester students can access topics prior students have left unaddressed.

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APPENDIX B
CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION
STUDIES

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

The following notes represent topics, issues, ideas, and concerns that surfaced from conversations with administrators and faculty. They may be helpful to the Department as it addresses various facets of curricular community-engaged learning (CCEL) administration.

Strategic Planning

1. In preparation for the CSU and CSUSB review of CCEL, high-impact practices (HIPs), and Strategic Plan survey, the Department could begin informally inventorying and documenting its CCEL courses and student contributions to the community. This can inform us where new links to the community are needed and the Department's capabilities to respond to community needs.
2. CSUSB can learn lessons from CPP and CSUCI and any other campus who is adopting CO model of using S4, decentralizing community engagement functions from a single outlet to departments to manage internally using a portal. The portal creates a centralized pool that ensures continuity of community resources when faculty and lecturers shift courses or depart. Ultimately, the portal allows students to access a pool of vetted community resources as they move from class to class within their program; it promotes repeat use of successful community resources; CBOs recognize themselves as a known, vetted partner to the university; and it promotes student

- progression from entry-level to more advanced assignments with community partners—the students also become a known quantity as they advance through their EL courses.
3. The Department may consider sharing the issues and opportunities this white paper presents with the Faculty Senate HIPs Committee and administrators participating in the Strategic Plan update discussions.
 4. A fundamental question is “Are we there yet?” Is the Department ready to develop or adapt a CCEL portal, or should it take a more thorough, internal look at its CCEL structure as posed in #1 above? Alternatively, the department can wait until those campus and systemwide CCEL/HIPs/Strategic Plan efforts are completed and instead concentrate on better use of existing resources, such as the development of a one-stop student Projects, Assignments, and Resource (PAR) segment on *MyCoyote* that points students to the breadth of existing resources they can use to complete CCEL and research assignments (see Addendum 3).

Faculty Information Sharing and Access to Resources

5. There is currently no organized plan for faculty to access the community for their own research or for their students for CCEL experiences. The community cannot be matched to students and faculty until a consistent structure is in place to ensure that resources and capabilities are clearly understood—at least for the 18 core EL courses and for the remaining of the approximately 30 practicum courses:

- a. Which courses need faculty-selected SL matches?
 - b. Which courses need group CCEL matches?
 - c. Which courses need individual student CCEL matches?
 - d. Do these identifications remain consistent even if the instructor changes?
6. Should the approach to how connections are made for core EL classes be consistent when faculty members change or rotate? Is there a need to explore how EL courses are taught differently as faculty changes? Since these are required core courses, how much variance is there/should there be as faculty shift from semester to semester, year to year? Should the student connections with the community in core EL courses be consistently employed—meaning, should students in course 2xxx in the fall semester engage with actual community organizations, while students in the same course taught by a different faculty member the next semester are not afforded that opportunity? If that’s the case, CCEL practices will swing widely as faculty take their EL community resources with them—resources that were available to some students aren’t available to others coming behind them.
7. At least once a year, it may be helpful to survey CCEL course offerings for the next two semesters and determine which model students will use to connect with community-based organizations (CBOs). Once identified, the Office of Community Engagement can be contacted to see where it is appropriate to use its Database for Community engagement (DCE) for SL or CCEL projects,

- and where faculty need to rely on the Department's internal resources for partnerships. Faculty will then have a starting point and, resources permitting, can access an internal repository or list to see of CBOs previously used as project sites. The list should include products that prior students have delivered for the organizations and if group/team or individual student approaches were used.
8. Tenure-track faculty and lecturers interact infrequently even though lecturers are teaching numerous core EL/CCEL classes. More frequent information sharing between faculty to discuss connecting with the community and better use of existing resources would benefit faculty and students.
 9. An impediment to information sharing can be access to community organizations who have existing faculty relationships. Who maintains "control" of the relationships if a portal gives other faculty equal access to those partners? How might a portal facilitate or impede OCE's work to build formal SL relationships? Or the Career Center's work to build employer relationships?
 10. Faculty may wish to discuss the scale of alternatives presented in this study to see which, if any, of the practices or recommendations can be incorporated into courses they teach to benefit students currently engaging with CBOs.

Connections with the Office of Community Engagement

11. Currently, the Department's needs for community connections vary to such an extent that it is difficult to establish how OCE and its database may aid with those processes.
12. If it hasn't happened recently, OCE and Department administrators may want to meet and discuss needs, current use or underutilization of OCE and database resources, and OCE service delivery capabilities. Faculty need a clear, realistic picture of expectations when calling on OCE to assist with service learning, experiential learning, and CCEL requests.
13. It would be helpful to have faculty workshops on using OCE's database to extract CBOs who are flagged as willing to accept coursework assignments.

Setting Community Expectations and Understanding Risks

14. Improvements are needed in how the Department connects students with the community, but what may have to be sacrificed to transition to full access capabilities. Will faculty with established community partners risk those partners not being available if a portal allows other faculty to access those contacts? Is that an acceptable risk for the common good? What about CBOs who enter their interest in serving as a worksite and then aren't chosen by faculty who prefer their own pre-established connections? Or organizations who aren't chosen because students don't find them as glamorous or attractive as others, even though the hands-on experience would be more

beneficial? Finding the right balance and setting expectations for students, faculty, and the university is key.

15. To successfully implement a portal, information seekers and information providers must reach consensus on what the providers will enter on the site, and what seekers expect to find on the site. The result is a consistent product delivered on the portal and consistent expectations on the part of portal users.
16. Employers in the Career Center's Handshake employer relations system and community/industry partners in the Office of Community Engagement's Database of Engagement Opportunities are vetted by their respective offices. How/Are CCEs considered within the Department's and university's risk management protocols? How would establishing a portal impact or change these protocols? Would new risk management protocols impede the Department's ability to connect students with CBOs, particularly in communities who favor a more informal, less bureaucratic approach?

APPENDIX C

IRB-FY2023-113 – INITIAL: IRB ADMIN./EXEMPT REVIEW DETERMINATION
LETTER

IRB-FY2023-113 - Initial: IRB Admin./Exempt Review Determination Letter

do-not-reply@cayuse.com
2:54 PM
to me, Corrigan

Thu, Jan 12, 2023,



January 12, 2023

CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Administrative/Exempt Review Determination
Status: Determined Exempt
IRB-FY2023-113

Prof. Thomas Corrigan and Respondia Poole
CAL - Communications
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Prof. Thomas Corrigan and Respondia Poole:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Graduate Project: Department of Communication Studies Town-Gown Portal Pilot Project" has been reviewed and determined exempt by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of CSU, San Bernardino. An exempt determination means your study had met the federal requirements for exempt status under 45 CFR 46.104. The CSUSB IRB has weighed the risks and benefits of the study to ensure the protection of human participants.

This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional campus approvals which may be required including access to CSUSB campus facilities and affiliate campuses. Investigators should consider the changing COVID-19 circumstances based on current CDC, California Department of Public Health, and campus guidance and submit appropriate protocol modifications to the IRB as needed. CSUSB campus and affiliate health screenings should be

completed for all campus human research related activities. Human research activities conducted at off-campus sites should follow CDC, California Department of Public Health, and local guidance. See CSUSB's [COVID-19 Prevention Plan](#) for more information regarding campus requirements.

You are required to notify the IRB of the following as mandated by the Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) federal regulations 45 CFR 46 and CSUSB IRB policy. The forms (modification, renewal, unanticipated/adverse event, study closure) are located in the Cayuse IRB System with instructions provided on the IRB Applications, Forms, and Submission webpage. Failure to notify the IRB of the following requirements may result in disciplinary action. The Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is due for renewal. Ensure you file your protocol renewal and continuing review form through the Cayuse IRB system to keep your protocol current and active unless you have completed your study.

- **Ensure your CITI Human Subjects Training is kept up-to-date and current throughout the study.**
- **Submit a protocol modification (change) if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your study for review and approval by the IRB before being implemented in your study.**
- **Notify the IRB within 5 days of any unanticipated or adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research.**
- **Submit a study closure through the Cayuse IRB submission system once your study has ended.**

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval number IRB-FY2023-113 in all correspondence. Any complaints you receive from participants and/or others related to your research may be directed to Mr. Gillespie.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

King-To Yeung

King-To Yeung, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

KY/MG

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