

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

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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	
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 HSHS'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 HSHS and Web Services staff who also had other duties aside from the portal project. There was no formally adopted budget and HSHS 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 HSHS 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.

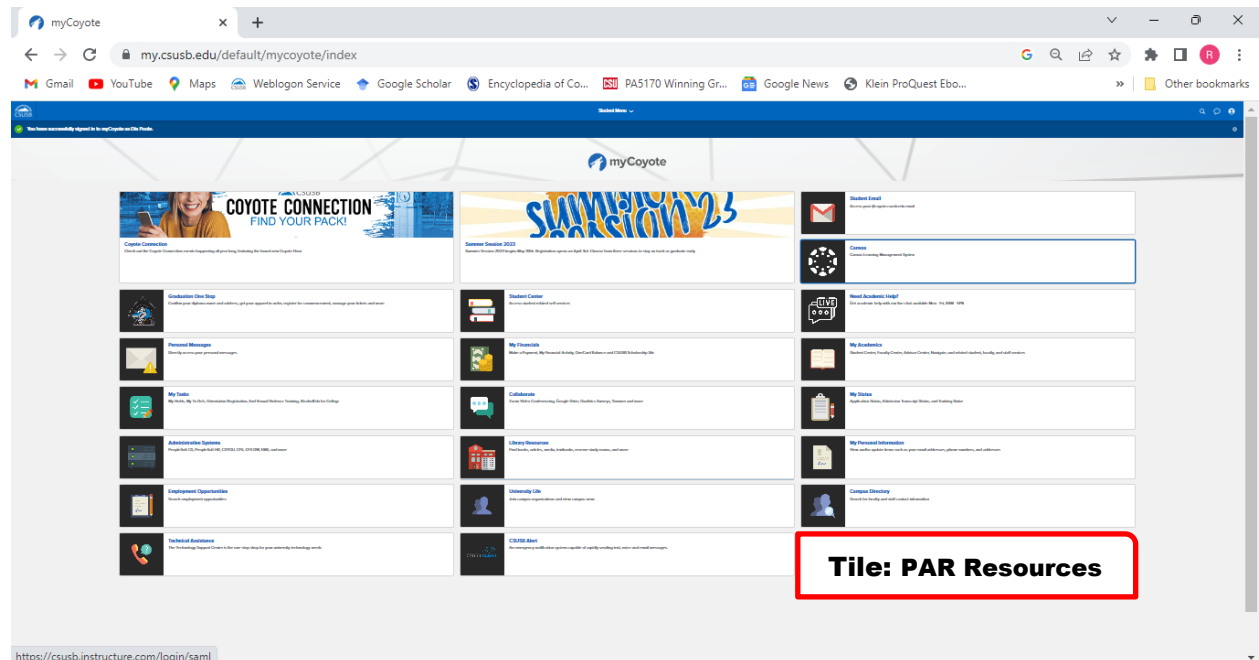
Dispersed Online Projects, Assignments, and Research Resources

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/*Portfolio*: <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’ *Portfolium* 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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