

Community Engagement Scholars Program University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

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I. Who are the students? What do they do in the program? Why? What do you hope will change for students as a result of the program? (This is your theory of change.)

In principle, the Community Engagement Scholars Program (CESP) exists to encourage students to become involved in and get recognized for integrating community work into their educational experience. The program allows students with high interest in community engagement to pursue their interests and meet their educational goals, while making an impact in their community. It also exists to encourage students to maintain long term relationships with community organizations. CESP recognizes curricular-based, co-curricular, and research-focused community engagement opportunities that cut across University's teaching, research, and outreach missions.

The CESP program is open to any degree seeking undergraduate who wishes to apply and complete the program requirements (detailed below). To apply to the program, students should have at least two years of coursework left before they graduate to ensure timely completion of the program requirements prior to graduation. Currently, about 300 students with representation from every college participate in CESP, though it is not known how many of these students are considered underserved (based on the First in the World grant criteria). The College of Liberal Arts (the largest college within the University) has the most students in the program. Students from the College of Science and Engineering are underrepresented in the program, perhaps due to the limited number of electives students are able to take in science and engineering majors. In contrast, students from the College of Biological Sciences are overrepresented in the program, likely due to the number of students intending to go into careers in healthcare and the volunteer requirements for many graduate programs in healthcare.

Many of the students in CESP are interested in healthcare, education, or social services, and participating in the program is often consistent with their career goals. Many of the students are already engaging in community work and want to be recognized for that work. Additionally, they may want to meet and interact with students who have similar interests, and want to reflect on and find meaning through their community engagement. However, certain students complete the program because they are passionate about community engagement, and may not envision a career closely aligned to service work.

To join the program students complete a 3 part process, a) an information session, 2) the Workshop for New Scholars training session and 3) the draft of their Ethic of Service reflection. To complete the program, students must complete and get documentation of 400 hours of community engagement (a maximum of 200 hours can be paid or done as part of

academic credit), complete at least eight academic credits of service-learning course work, complete and submit six reflections on their community engagement experiences, and complete an Integrative Community Engagement Project (ICEP) in conjunction with the capstone seminar. Students must also participate in regular meetings with program advisors. The ICEP, which is a culminating, capstone-like experience that addresses a community need, is completed as part of the program capstone course which is facilitated by a CSLC staff member and can involve anywhere from four to 15 students. Students are asked to work on a project with an organization (a community-based not-for-profit organization) as a means to enhance the organization's capacity to secure long term community impact.

At the beginning of the program, students are asked to create their ethic of service, or to describe what service means to them, and to meet with a staff member in order to determine their upcoming coursework. Throughout the program, as part of their reflections, they are also asked to grapple with topics such as: sense of self, agency, diversity, power, privilege, community building and collaboration. These reflections can be done in multiple ways, such as leading a student group reflection on a topic of interest to other Community Engagement Scholars, attending sessions led by other students, preparing for and participation in lobby day related to an issue that impacts students community work and creating videos. These ongoing reflections are intended to help students see how their academic experiences and community-based work are transforming their attitudes, assumptions, and perspectives, and how their service might be impacting the community. At the end of the program, students are then asked to look back at their reflections in order to identify patterns and create meaning out of their diverse experiences. For example, this past year, students were asked to make word clouds describing their attitudes towards service when they started their program, compared to when they ended. Therefore, the overarching goal of the program, or the theory of change, is for students to reflect on their changing relationships in their community work and to gain a better understanding of what service to others truly means.

II. Institutional Supports and Issues

The Community Engagement Scholars Program is financially supported by central campus funds through the University's Office for Public Engagement. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the program is viewed positively among students, faculty, administrators, and staff at the University. For example, the University often features CESP in news items and marketing materials about how University of Minnesota students engage with the community. The CESP is also institutionally supported through the advertisement of the program in the online application students use the first week they are on campus. Students who complete the program requirements are recognized at commencement (e.g., their names are listed in the commencement booklet), are provided with a certificate of recognition and a medal from the University to be worn at Commencement, and receive a notation on their official transcript. The University also provides support to the program by managing an online system in which students' supervisors can approve the students' service hours. Hence, the program is embedded in the fabric of the University.

III. Community Issues

The program is managed by the staff at the Community Service-Learning Center, a campus-wide unit responsible for supporting faculty in developing credit-bearing community-based learning initiatives on the Twin Cities campus. Compared to service-learning courses, the Center staff has significantly less contact with community partners in the CESP program. This is because the CESP program is focused more on the student experience than on course development.

Many students in the CESP work at organizations that the University has been involved with for decades, while others work at organizations that have no formal affiliation with the University. If students do not have a specific organization at which they want to volunteer, the CESP staff generally suggest organizations that have longstanding relationships with the University in order to maintain those relationships. Although the program maintains partnerships with more than 300 organizations in the Twin Cities area, students often want to work at specific organizations that do not have existing relationships with the University due to personal interests and travel. For example, students often go home to communities outside the Twin Cities during the summer and volunteer for healthcare or other organizations within their home towns. Some students also get involved in organizations when they study abroad, through organizations such as HECUA or Minnesota Studies in International Development (MSID) which combine academic study, field work and meaningful internships both in the United States and abroad. For situations like this, the CESP staff simply verifies that the organization at which the students are working is a nonprofit or governmental organization.

IV. The History/Evolution of the Program – How did it end up as it is?

The following information was gathered from the Community Engagement Scholars Program's website hosted by University of Minnesota

(<http://www.servicelearning.umn.edu/cesp/background.html/>)

In 2000, with the growing need for universities to form civically responsible citizens and participate actively in their surrounding communities, University of Minnesota formed the Task Force on Civic Engagement which later became the Council on Public Engagement (COPE). The then Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education sent a team to attend the Collaboration Summer Institute 2001 on Civic engagement in order to create programs that focused on civic learning experiences. As a result, in 2002, the Vice Provost asked COPE and the Director of the Office of Service-Learning (now the Community Service-Learning Center) to identify ways to acknowledge students at the University who were more deeply involved in the civic learning and community engagement projects. In 2003, the Director created a work group composed of representatives from all undergraduate colleges, several community partner organizations, students, a staff member in the Office of the Registrar and the Director of the Literacy Initiatives Program. That same fall, the program became part of the official activities of the Innovations Committee of COPE. In addition, a crucial component to furthering the program's development included the Community Service-Learning & Campus-Community Collaboration Initiatives

grants, coordinated by Minnesota Campus Compact and the Minnesota Higher Education Services Office, and funded by the State of Minnesota. The Director consulted work group members to gain feedback and insight from the college members on what was already happening to reward students within the institution and then began compiling a list of existing models that recognized students' involvement in the community on other University campuses. The group examined the challenges and opportunities of the following programs: University of Utah's Service-Learning Scholars Program; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Public Service Scholars Program; Northwestern University's Service-Learning Certificate Program; Connecticut College's Community Action-Certificate; and the Community Engagement Program at Florida State University. Drawing from these programs, they developed the CESP, specifically adapting components from University of Utah's Service Learning Scholar Program and UNC Chapel Hill's program, but taking into consideration a lot of feedback received from work group members, Council of Undergraduate Deans (SCEP) members and the University's Senate Educational Policy Committee.

By the end of 2004 the Council of Undergraduate Deans, SCEP and the Board of Regents gave its approval for the program. CESP was officially launched in April of 2005, and has been running successfully for 10 years under the leadership of the Director (Laurel Hirt).

V. A short anecdote that reveals how the program is embodied/enfleshed/enacted in relationship. It could be the story of a life, or a relationship, or a mistake, but just something to hold onto to give a sense of the program as lived in/not static.

Nearing the end of their required community hours, participants are asked to design a project that will benefit the organization they worked with. A few of these Integrative Community Engagement Projects (ICEP) are well documented in the programs website (<http://www.servicelearning.umn.edu/cesp/ICEP/index.html>). To better understand how students engage with this program, a description of a couple of these projects that demonstrate mutual benefits to both the student and community is offered.

PARTICIPANT I: One CESP student created a volunteer manual that has guidelines for future volunteers, with the hope of helping new volunteers adjust to the dynamics of the organization. This project was very important for the organization which works with Latino women who are victims of domestic violence. The guide works as a reference for new volunteers to use quickly and efficiently when working with these women.

PARTICIPANT II: For his ICEP, a CESP student created an app that helps people find their way around the difficult-to-navigate hospital complex where he completed his community work. Even though his area of expertise wasn't in technology, it has always been a hobby of his to develop an app. He saw a need and took the initiative to develop the app for visitors to the hospital.

VI. What makes the program sustainable? What makes the program vulnerable? What threats to the program's vitality exist? What dilemmas of practice is the program facing? (An example of a practice dilemma from CUNY)

The program is sustainable thanks to the ongoing University funding, stable and capable professional staff (minimal turnover), additional support from student staff, the presence of an online system that allows participants to register their hours and keep in constant communication with the program, and students' high interest in community engagement. Support from a committed cadre of faculty has also been essential for recruiting and placing CESP students in engagement experiences that match students' interests and passions.

Some of the factors that make the program vulnerable are:

- limited funding (as the number of students participants grows);
- the demand on students' time, especially as students reach the last semesters of their degree (this is a main reason students fail to complete the program);
- use of the online system, which makes the program vulnerable to potential system failures or glitches; and
- flexible credit options for completing the service-learning course requirement (which can compromise quality and ensuring students have a rigorous and productive educational experience).

VII. The Edges of the Project – Where the project hopes to go, what is happening that might be beyond expectations (dangerous or exciting).

The program's future plans are to create an introductory class for participants so that there is uniformity in the program in terms of clarity of expectations and standards of good practice, and to help frame the philosophy of the program. The CESP program staff also seeks to engage CESP alumni in mentoring newer members and/or serving and presenters or speakers. With regard to community partners, the CESP staff seeks to have students start their Integrative Community Engagement Projects earlier and to include projects brought to them by the students' community partners. The staff also wishes to expand and create partnerships with other organizations that can bring new opportunities to the CESP students. Finally, the staff has been thinking of creating an eBook with participants' personal reflections about community work.