

12. Developing the Curriculum

CLP sites vary considerably in the courses they offer, depending on what the local partners decide to emphasize most and how much flexibility there is in the college curriculum for adding new courses and/or modifying existing ones.

However, to be part of the CLP Network, a program must offer students a set of courses aimed at **building their knowledge, skills, commitment and vision concerning community and social change, preparing them for jobs, leadership roles, or further education in this field.** In particular, they must enable students to develop the initial knowledge and skills they will need to **begin mastering “organizing”** which include competencies in reaching out to people of color and others with low-incomes, bringing them together, helping them identify and analyze common issues and how they might be addressed, and preparing them to develop leadership and take action on those issues.

These cross-sector competencies are in high demand in community-based organizations of various types, and in several other sectors of the economy as well – other nonprofits, churches, public agencies, politics, and community-facing positions with banks and other for-profit businesses. Note that the cross-sector skills which business looks for as it recruits *is remarkably similar to the list of cross-sector skills Community Change Studies students learn* CLP programs offer 3-5 core courses and range in teaching strategies and emphases, but most cover the following:

- Culture, Community and Identity as an Agent of Change – helping students develop an understanding of their communities and themselves as agents of change, through exploring their personal histories and identities, the impact of race, gender, class, sexuality, culture, historical trauma and internalized oppression; drawing strength from their own cultures; healing and personal transformation; and developing cross-cultural competencies.
- Introduction to Organizing – History, Theory and Practice, including both a review of different approaches to collective action for social change and extensive practical organizing skill development.
- Community-Based and Participatory Action Research -- Issue development, popular education and membership learning through participation in research and analyzing issues as important elements in

developing members, community leaders, organizers and collective efforts.

- Understanding the Region's Political Economy and Issues – Lessons from history of social movements and community action in the context of race, income and demographic changes, the local economy, local and state government and politics.
- A Capstone Project – a practicum involving practical experience helping bring people together to identify, address and move forward on a common issue.

Core Learning Areas



Other courses which are often offered as electives in a Community Change Studies curriculum include:

- Advanced community organizing, campaigns and movement-building.
- Political theory, democracy, history of social movements and social reforms.
- Social media and communications strategies for social change.
- Legislative and electoral strategies.

- Nonprofit management.

Upper division courses in a BA program can offer students great opportunities to focus on the **issue area** they care about most, developing in-depth knowledge on that issue and how to create positive change and reforms on the issue. Examples of possible fields of concentration in which organizing skills and knowledge can have a substantial impact include --

- Environmental issues, including climate change, sustainability, green jobs and energy democracy.
- Community planning and development.
- Criminal justice reform and community safety.
- Health and mental health – care, promotion and reform.
- Employment, income and labor issues and movements.
- Education reform.

For any of these issue areas, potential change agents should develop –

- An understanding of the immediate issue or project.
- An understanding of its root causes.
- An understanding of the underlying policy and institutional issues.
- An understanding how decisions are made, who makes them, why, and what points of intervention exist.
- An ability to identify potential partners and allies.
- Competency in becoming equipped with the facts and technical analysis needed to have an influence.
- Vision and direction for achieving growing longer-term success on the issue.

Incorporating Many Strategies for Creating Community and Social Change:

The local community/college partnerships in the CLP Network have drawn on several different traditions of community organizing and collective efforts to create fundamental social, economic and political change in the US and globally.

These include the community organizing traditions of Fred Ross, Saul Alinsky and others who have developed systematic approaches to organizing, as well as the popular and adult educational traditions of Paolo Freire, the Highlander Center, Septima Clark and Ella Baker.

They also draw lessons from a wide variety of movements and traditions of nonviolence, including the civil rights, Chicano, and American Indian movements, Welfare Rights, the Poor Peoples Campaign and Black Lives Matter. The Women's, LGBTQ, global climate change, student-led and criminal justice reform movements have added greatly to the richness of experience in bringing about change.

There is also much to be learned from voter registration and electoral organizing, especially efforts led by people of all races who are poor or working class. These sources range from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to Black Girls Vote to Willie Velasquez' Southwest Voter Education Project, and similar efforts in the past and continuing today. There's also a rich history of very progressive political traditions, including the Populists, Progressives and Socialists as well as the fusion politics of the Reconstruction era and the alternative politics of La Raza Unida, the Freedom Democrats, the Working Families Party and other alternative parties.

There is an endless list of organizations and institutions which have been trailblazers and whose experience illuminates the emerging field of Community Change Studies. Churches and faith-based movements. Ethnic studies programs and racial movements. The Catholic Worker and Sanctuary Movements. Class actions on behalf of people of color or other disadvantaged groups. The organizing traditions in social work, neighborhood and community planning, community healthcare reform. The labor movement.

There certainly is no dearth of experience and inspiration in this field. They provide great opportunities for learning and teaching by teachers, practitioners and students alike.

Designing the Curriculum and Organizing Support for the Program:

Since Community Change Studies is a new cross-disciplinary field of study which requires a mix of courses and experiential learning, most CLP programs begin when 3-5 faculty members and community leaders come together to design and then advocate for creation of a Certificate program or a new Minor in Community Change Studies.

It takes some time for such a diverse group to reach consensus on goals and strategy. Very often one major obstacle they must overcome is the wide gap which usually exists between the world of practice and academia.

Mutual respect is essential, including respect for what each brings to challenge of developing the next generation of leaders and organizers of community and social change. Academics must recognize the value of practice-based education and that community organizers and leaders bring deep knowledge as well as practical skills to the learning process. At the same time, practitioners must see the value of providing new organizers and leaders with opportunities to deepen

- Their critical and strategic thinking skills,
- Their research and analytic experience and,
- Their understanding of the local political economy and what they can learn from examining the history of change and struggle.

They also can gain from the educators' knowledge and skills in helping people learn.

Each CCS program is somewhat unique, responding to local leadership, needs and priorities as well as to local opportunities, barriers and resources. However, despite these differences, the CLP Network's successful members have had to address the same key issues and go through the same stages in the planning process.

Step 1. Define the Target Students and Broad Learning Goals for the Program

- What are our "learning goals"? What do we want our graduates to be able to do, to understand, to become after they complete this educational step?
- Who should be our priority students? What kinds of backgrounds are best for organizing in poor communities and communities of color?
- How can we best reach and recruit these people?
- Can we devise promising strategies for recruiting people from the community as well as from the current student body? Would that demonstrate to the college administrators that the program attracts new students to the campus?

Step 2. Assess the Readiness of the College for Such an Initiative

The histories of the CLP Network's programs vary widely. Some are initiated by faculty or college leadership; others are responses to community or nonprofit leaders searching for new ways of developing the next generation of skilled, knowledgeable leaders and organizers. Whatever their history, each program develops through a systematic "organizing" process – outreach, research, power analysis, building consensus and alliances, and developing thoughtful and clever strategies for overcoming obstacles and gaining the necessary support for a substantial new initiative.

And they all have had to answer the following questions –

- How open is the college to creating new courses, Certificate and Degree programs? Is enrollment and college income dropping and reducing its flexibility?
- Who are potential allies within the faculty, the college leadership and administration, college initiatives and student groups?
- Is there a Department which seems like a particularly good home for the program? Does it offer the enthusiastic leadership, related courses, program support and good base for recruiting students you need?
- Are there any currently any approved courses which fit naturally within the learning goals of this new initiative? How interested are their instructors in collaborating, perhaps modifying or adding new courses or learning modules?
- What new courses and modules would be needed to complete the curriculum?
- What are the main potential obstacles? – Lack of influence, dropping enrollment, difficulty of starting something nontraditional? How can they be overcome?
- What key elements should be included in our strategy so we can combine the proposal, the argumentation, the allies, the tactics, midcourse victories and power we need? What steps are needed?
- How can we ensure that the courses are all classified as "academic" and can be articulated into a BA program or accepted by a local partnering 4-year institution?

Step 3: Developing the Curriculum

Please note that Chapters 14-18 cover the content of the core courses most CLP Network sites offer. This chapter provides context and some ideas for designing a curriculum.

The Introductory Course –

In the Intro course, should you introduce students to a broad picture of all the topics they will be addressing during the AA? Or delve into greater depth on a few of them? Or somehow combine both the broad and deep?

Before you decide what specific topics to covered in the Intro course, think hard about the initial impact you want to have on students. If you're developing 3-5 Community Change courses, there will be many opportunities to introduce all the topics you want to cover. Nevertheless, the introductory course provides a unique opportunity to create a firm foundation for the rest of the Community Change Studies program.

Can you design an introductory course which serves three purposes?

1. **Excites student interest and helps recruit** sufficient numbers of students, especially the kinds of students you most want to attract
 - Are there major events or citywide, broad community issues which can provide a strong appeal and focus for recruiting students? (e.g. the University of Baltimore had a tremendous response when it reacted to the slaying of Freddy Gray by immediately offering a course in "Divided Baltimore" focusing on issues of race and reform and offering it to the broader community as well as currently enrolled students).
 - What course, faculty-members and guest speakers would provide the biggest draw?
 - Are students aroused by any current issue which could be a focal point and drawing card for an introductory course? The pandemic? Free tuition policies? Creating jobs with good wages for youth? Etc.
 - Does the college have a social commitment or issue focus which the course could reinforce, adding to its relevance and appeal?

- Could focusing on the neighborhoods, people and non-profit organizations surrounding the college add to the courses' interest and reality-base?
2. **Convinces students to take additional courses** in Community Change Studies and complete the Minor/Certificate/Major by creating early learning experiences which deepen the student's understanding of self, her/his story, her/his community, and the group or cohort with which their educational journey will begin. A dynamic, supportive and challenging collective must be formed early on which demonstrates to the students what is possible through organizing.
 3. **Impacts the students' ability to achieve the learning goals** by enhancing their --
 - Sense of identity.
 - Self-esteem and confidence.
 - Understanding of society.
 - Motivation to study and work on these issues.
 - Feeling these courses relate to them, get at issues they care about.
 - Participation in class.
 - Ability to study and work in teams.
 - Study habits.
 - Ability to learn through a combination of experiential education, readings, classroom discussion, and reflection,
 - Hunger to learn more by taking other CCS courses and/or consider a career in this field.

The curriculum design should help students develop a sense of accomplishment as they proceed through the set of courses, adding to their confidence and motivation to engage in what could become a life-long learning process, of growing as an agent of change and developing the tremendous breadth of knowledge and development which is needed to create substantial community and social change.

Helpful Pedagogies --

Virtually all CCS courses are interactive, with lots of small group discussions and problem-solving. They minimize lectures with “experts” downloading information to passive students: instead they seek to uplift students as experts of their own experiences, their understanding of community and institutions, and then help them build from that base of knowledge. They prioritize teaching methods which make students feel:

- Ownership of the learning process.
- Capable of gaining new knowledge, new skills.
- Challenged to push her/himself and secure enough to take risks which aid in her/his personal, professional, academic, or political development.
- An understanding of the discipline and frameworks through which strategic decisions can be made.

Many teachers create learning communities in the classroom because that approach has such strong advantages for courses in building community and creating change --

- It models community-building, leadership development, and organizing and therefore helps students internalize the skills and habits they will need.
- It helps the educator know and understand her/his students – their backgrounds and interests, what motivates them to take the course, how they view themselves, how they interact with others, and how they learn – and to take this knowledge into account in shaping the course.
- It helps each student grapple with and share his/her own identity and motivation.
- It helps students learn about each other and the teacher, identifying things they share, thus providing a foundation for building strong relationships as they start learning together.
- It helps create an atmosphere of trust and safety within the learning group, thus encouraging participation, candor and teamwork.
- It can demonstrate to students that the course is designed to respond to their interests and needs, thus generating a sense of ownership over the learning program; some educators invite the students to become co-creators of the course, helping make decisions as the course proceeds.
- It can model to students how listening, facilitation and organizing skills can help them bring people together to work on common issues.

- It helps each student develop greater understanding of her/himself and social identity in the context of organizing and change
 1. Focusing on your motivation and self-interest in organizing
 2. Exploring issues of identity, gender, race, class, age, etc.
 3. Exploring issues of power and privilege
 4. Exploring how you interact with others in the community

When they teach, both academics and practitioners are intentional in **integrating different perspectives and vantage points** to help engage students. For example, it is imperative that students learn about the impact government policies have had on individuals, but equally important that they understand its impact on different communities, institutions, and structures. Another example would be developing an analysis of how and why things happen at the local level, and then using those same principles to dissect how and why things happen at the regional, state, national, and international levels. This deepens critical thinking.

Story-telling is an especially important pedagogy in organizing and social change as well as in many of America's cultural traditions. It is a particularly valuable technique for helping CCS students understand what can be learned from the histories of their own communities as well as other very different experiences. Expert story-telling about how a particular issue emerged and was addressed can weave together the building of the knowledge, skills and bonds among students from different communities. CLP is currently exploring the possibility of establishing a web-based Story Bank to provide teachers, trainers, organizers and community leaders with easy access to directly relevant stories which they can use for learning and knowledge and skill transfer.

Virtually all CLP's faculty members draw heavily on their own deep community roots and involve community leaders and organizers as guest speakers and discussion leaders to help the students develop their values, inspiration, new insights, horizons, what is possible through well-planned collective action.

Experiential education

The curricula at all CLP sites require field experience as well as reading and classroom learning. The sites use a wide variety of on-campus as well as off-campus strategies for helping students learn through experience with community

issues and organizing. *(See next chapter for more on experiential education in Community Change Studies programs.)*