

## 13. Integrating Experiential Education Throughout

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*“This class gave me a push in going up to people to talk about things wrong with our society. The volunteer hours project helped me connect with people from the Single Payer movement and we went up to people to try to pass the SB 562 bill.”*

— A DeAnza student

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The curricula at all CLP sites require practical field experience as well as reading, research and learning in the classroom. Community organizing and leadership development require practical skills ranging from such interpersonal skills as listening, building relationships, and searching for issues which unite people, to skills in building effective organizations and mastering complex social and political issues. Like such other professions as medicine and law in which clinical experience is essential, preparation for careers in community planning, organizing and development requires substantial time learning through experience, trial and error, with training and mentoring by an expert practitioner.

In designing a Community Change Studies program, the community and academic partners must overcome the skepticism each may have felt toward the value of the other’s knowledge, understanding, and traditional ways of learning. There is no denying that many academics -- except those in medicine and law and other professions which depend on clinical education -- have little respect for practice-based education, especially when it’s taught by practitioners rather than career academics. Similarly, it’s clear that many organizers and community leaders doubt the relevance of academics to what organizers need to know: typically they see them as removed from the community, focused on theory with little practical experience, often based in elitist institutions which neglect and sometimes disrupt nearby neighborhoods.

**However, both academic and experiential learning are essential for community change agents pressing for progress on social, economic and political issues.** Each brings to the work knowledge, skills, understanding and vision, as well as the strengths of character and skills in analysis and strategic thinking which change agents need to maximize their impact. CLP Network programs are remarkably successful in creating genuine partnerships across these historic divides, including being highly creative in maximizing opportunities for experiential learning.

**CLP's sites use a wide variety of strategies for helping students learn through experience.** These start with most Change Studies faculty-members bringing extensive personal experience in community work to their teaching. Many have been organizers, community leaders or otherwise deeply involved in community change work before beginning teaching. Many others are adjuncts whose main job continues to be working on the ground with a community-based organization or other nonprofit or perhaps in political or union organizing, issue research or journalism. In addition, CCS courses frequently involve organizers and other practitioners as co-teachers, guest speakers and discussion leaders, a practice which students consistently praise as particularly motivating and instructive.

Instructors for virtually all courses in Community Change Studies use extensive **classroom exercises and group problem-solving and analysis** to help develop their students' practical skills. Many courses require **field assignments**, often including researching and analyzing community issues, interviewing organizers and community members, and/or taking part in organizing and community improvement efforts. Courses in Participatory Action Research get especially high marks for helping students grasp the whole process of creating change: through experience students learn how community residents can collaborate in choosing a priority issue, learning how to research it through interviews and analyzing documents, developing strategies for having an impact, taking action and then reflecting together on what they have learned. (*See Chapter 16 below on courses on Community-Based Research*).

Fortunately, there are many useful books and manuals on community organizing which provide excellent exercises for providing students with practical experience in the classroom as well as through field work. Several of these are available on CLP's website at [www.clpclp.org](http://www.clpclp.org) and others can be purchased through

[www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com), Amazon, local bookstores, and elsewhere. CLP's former Program Director Joan Minieri and Paul Getsos co-authored a particularly good book on Tools for Radical Democracy; and Scott Myers-Lipton has developed a very useful guide for university teachers looking for methods for providing experiential education on campus (Change: A Student Guide to Social Action).

The CLP website provides direct access to excellent teaching materials prepared for CLP by Professor Daniel HoSang and Michael Brown, as well as a 70-page guide to teaching organizing by Marshall Ganz of Harvard's Kennedy School. Our site also provides a direct link to a terrific series of handbooks on teaching organizing by David Beckwith and Cristina Lopez, formerly with CCC.

Over the years, DeAnza College has become very creative in developing ways to involve students in **tackling on-campus issues** in order to avoid adding to the travel burdens of their students, most of whom commute long distances. Recent examples include work on immigrant students' rights and sanctuary for those who are undocumented, divestiture of carbon stocks by the college, other policy issues facing the college and Student Government, and get out the vote efforts.

DeAnza's **off-campus field experiences** build on long-term relationships the faculty and students have developed with community partners, many of which are in nearby San Jose where many DeAnza students live. They include working with a congregation-based organization affiliated with national Faith in Action, participating in campaigns on environmental and immigrant rights issues, and pushing for rent control and other tenant protection measures which will directly benefit the college's students as well as others resisting gentrification. CLP's affiliate program at City College of New York has partnerships with 26 organizing groups throughout the metropolitan area, and places students as interns and fellows with many of those groups. Recently, students and faculty at CCNY assisted an alliance of those groups in winning City Council support for reforms supporting their development of Community Land Trusts to slow gentrification.

**Internships** can provide invaluable in-depth experience on the job if they are directly related to community change work or the skills and knowledge a change agent needs. Internships also can help students earn references and contacts which may be invaluable in the future as they look for jobs or advanced education. However, unpaid internships are a luxury few community college

students can afford: to stay in school and cover expenses students need to earn a living wage and therefore have no choice but to choose a full- or part-time job over an unpaid internship.

For this reason, CLP is constantly looking for additional resources to expand the number of paid internships for students preparing for community change careers. Unfortunately, it is abundantly clear from our sites' experience that the private sector will not provide adequate funding to meet these needs. Therefore, the CLP Network has begun efforts to expand government support for the kinds of paid internships which are needed. This work has focused in part on efforts to reform and strengthen the **Federal Work Study Program**, especially its provisions emphasizing **Community Service Jobs** and **civic engagement**. We have launched a long-term campaign on this issue, and our Congressional supporters have won an initial victory: the House Appropriations Committee's report included the following language.

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*“The Committee encourages the Department to work with institutions of higher education to ensure that schools are providing this information (on Community-based Work Study) to students and that community service jobs provide experiential education and college-credit for students preparing for careers working with community-based organizations in low and middle-income communities. The Committee also encourages the Department to increase the number and scope of learning partnerships between community-based nonprofits, community and/or four-year colleges and other programs that offer educational pathways to careers in community organizing and community change, especially for first generation college students.”*

— Page 202, Report of the Committee on Appropriations,  
House of Representatives on HR 2740, May 15, 2019

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See Chapter 23 for details on CLP's expanding campaign to create new state and federal programs offering "**Community-Building Internships**" which would resemble an apprenticeship in providing students like ours with a living wage 40 hours a week for 2-4 years during which they would prepare for careers in community and social change. In return for this opportunity to "earn while they learn", Community-Building Interns would commit to serving in those careers for a minimum of five years after graduation. Legislation along these lines is being introduced in the US House of Representatives and a number of state legislatures.

Most CLP programs include a **practicum or capstone project** during which students work with others to make progress on a community issue. They devote substantial time to applying what they have learned from their coursework and field experience to a real-life situation, and then reflect in depth on their experience. In some cases, they plan and complete a capstone project which involves analyzing how an organization is addressing a community issue, and includes interviews, other field research, and an assessment of lessons from the effort. Others include a self-assessment by each student of their own skills, knowledge, and personal strengths and weaknesses as potential agents of positive change. All the syllabi in the CLP website's section on curricula on Community-Based Action Research include practical experience and skill-building for students.

Professor Lena Jones of Minneapolis Community and Technical College offers a unique **total immersion** program. Each summer she offers students from Minneapolis College and other parts of the country a chance to travel with her to the Mississippi Delta and immerse themselves in meeting with veterans of the civil rights movement and studying the history and lessons of that crucial era. Other sites would benefit greatly from being able to offer that kind of deep immersion experience in a community, a movement or an issue. On a smaller scale, DeAnza, has offered students an opportunity to learn first-hand about the lives and issues of nearby farmworkers by involving the students in providing literacy education to farmworker families.

Finally, several sites have partnerships with **Americorps'** Public Allies programs. PA offers stipends, health and education benefits for 10 months of service and learning to young people, especially "opportunity youth" from low-income backgrounds. Because of their shared commitment to youth leadership

development, CLP sites and Allies programs have built partnerships in four cities so far. The most ambitious of these is run by CD Tech, which operates Public Allies for all of Los Angeles and has over 50 paid volunteers each year. Tech recruits, trains and supervises the volunteers and also offers them free enrollment in 1-2 college credit-generating courses in Community Planning and Organizing at LATTC, CD Tech's community college partner. Students then can enroll as regular college students with a head start towards a college Certificate or Degree.

New York City's Association for Neighborhood Housing and Development has recruited, enrolled and trained 10 Public Allies each year for ten years. Over 100 young people have been placed for on-the-job experience with nonprofit members of the Association, earning stipends and health insurance. Fully 85% have moved directly into jobs with nonprofits in the city. In other cities CLP sites provide training for Public Allies and guide some graduates into service with the Allies or Americorps VISTA.

Clearly, this experiential education is invaluable for preparing people for roles leading change and organizing collective action. However, **it is equally clear that academic education is equally essential. While the courses offered by particular community colleges and public universities offer widely, they all offer invaluable Certificates or Degrees as well as many courses which greatly broaden their graduates' knowledge and skills in ways which are incredibly valuable for community organizers and leaders**, including courses which --

- Deepen students' understanding of the full range of strategies for creating social and community change, including social movements, organizing, nonviolent action, electoral politics, litigation and legislation.
- Deepen students' understanding of other people, including delving into issues of race, class, gender, white privilege, internalized oppression, trauma and healing.
- Help them understand the economy, politics, and demographic trends in the region where they will work, and what can be learned from the history of local struggles for reform.
- Develop their research, analytic and critical thinking skills.
- Develop students' skills in public speaking, argumentation, writing and presentation.

- Expand students' vision of what is possible, by exploring various approaches to strengthen democracy, representative government, civic participation and accountability, and studying alternative views of capitalism, democratic socialism, the welfare state and the roles of mediating structures and civil society.
- Deepen their understanding of people's behavior through literature and the other humanities and through sociology, psychology, and social psychology.
- Develop their strategic, mediation and conflict resolution skills.

**Many experienced community leaders and organizers lament the fact that few entry-level staff people come to the work with this kind of broad knowledge and understanding, and even fewer mix that background with the practical skills which only on the ground experience or expert experiential education can offer.**