Utrecht University

CENTRE FOR GLOBAL CHALLENGES

Community Engaged Learning
Online CEL

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Online Community Engaged Learning (hereafter named online CEL) is one way to combine Community Engaged Learning with online learning practices. Online CEL becomes increasingly relevant in collaboration with communities that are hard to access, for example, because of a large distance between the geographical locations of the students and the partners, or during the COVID-19 pandemic. This document offers inspiration for the design of an online CEL course through suggestions and examples.

What is online CEL?

Online CEL can take different forms. The academic instructions can take place either online or offline, and the extent to which the engagement parts of the course are provided online or offline can also vary.[,1] In its most extreme form, both the lessons and the engagement are provided online. An example of such a 100%-online CEL course includes Economics of Global Challenges. This is a course at Utrecht University in which students are taught impact evaluation methods through online teaching and are asked to apply these skills in the design of an impact evaluation proposal for a societal partner organization in the Global South. Below are more detailed examples of online CEL courses from colleagues at Utrecht University.

This resource focuses mostly on online CEL, rather than online teaching itself. This is because there are already many useful materials available for online teaching at Utrecht University.

For more information on online teaching, visit the Centre for Academic Teaching's Educational database, reach out to Educate-It and/or Educational Consultancy & Professional Development.

Online CEL brings new opportunities for all parties involved:

- Students can collaborate in CEL projects with students from across the globe (for example through Collaborative Online International Learning, also called COIL).
- Students and scientists/teachers get the opportunity to work with communities from across the globe to address real problems from communities they are not directly linked to/out of their immediate network.
- Stakeholders* get to connect with students, even if they do not have any students in their close surroundings.
- Students have the opportunity for more flexibility in their CEL experience, because they can more easily work in their own time, at their own pace, and regardless of where the partners are located.

Stakeholders are broadly defined and can be part of the public sector (e.g., a municipality, policymakers), the business/private sector, academia and/or they can be citizens from a community.

In June 2020, UGlobe, in collaboration with the UU SIG CEL team and the CSL team from the VU, organized a meeting about the opportunities, challenges, and design of online CEL. You can find the recordings here.

Examples of final products of the engagement process

Students can work with stakeholders on several challenges and co-create plausible solutions to those challenges. While the process of engagement itself is the focus of (online) CEL, a final product often logically flows from that process. Examples of possible final products students could work well on digitally include:[2]
• Marketing or other communication plans and/or materials (incl. social media campaigns, a video, or a vlog);
• Research memoranda or evaluation plans;
• Online materials for partners' websites, such as blog posts or newsletter content;
• Annotated bibliographies, literature reviews on topics that are interesting for the partner (and align with the student's learning needs);
• Workshops, lesson plans or class curricula;
• Digital and graphic design (e.g., a poster) or artwork;
• Brochures;
• Policy proposals or policy briefs;
• Podcasts;
• Advisory reports;
• Software solutions.

Can online engagement be as 'engaging' as physical engagement?

Online CEL is different from physical CEL. There are features of physical engagement, such as the **cultivation of a sense of community** or a sense of place, that are hard to mimic online. Thus, creating a learning community might require more attention and organization in an online environment. Examples of ways to enhance these senses include students conducting a mapping of the community together with a community partner,[3] asking a community member to give a presentation about the community, host an online tour through the community/organization or having an online Q&A discussion where partners get interviewed by the students. However, not all engagement activities might be suitable in an online environment.

Besides the interaction with the partner, another aspect that is affected is the group work of the students. Students work in teams to answer the partners' problems. **Virtual collaboration in teams** is feasible using different technologies (software such as MS Teams) but more attention is needed for team building and communication among the team members. Additionally, teachers can have a key role in engaging the students through providing synchronous education (if possible).

To our knowledge, there is little research published on whether withdrawing the onsite learning experience and connection (positively or negatively) **impacts the students learning process**. One study that compared an offline CEL course to an online CEL course found no significant differences in learning outcomes[4]. As many teachers across the globe have been working with online CEL due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that more evaluations will follow soon.

Being cautious on what kind of projects work in an online environment, does not mean that online CEL cannot be engaging. In any case, it is important to keep in mind, that in cases where physical meetings are not possible at all, the alternative to online CEL would be no CEL.

One well-established framework designed to help create truly collaborative and engaging online learning opportunities is the Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework.[5] A 'Community of Inquiry' is a group of learners, who interact collaboratively through discussions and discourse. According to the model, an online community of inquiry can be as engaging as physical online learning, if it consists of these three elements: the social presence, the teaching presence, and the cognitive presence. Interested to learn more about the CoI framework? Visit: https://coi.athabascau.ca/.

Online CEL course design

In many ways, online CEL course design is like CEL course design. Waldner et al. (2012)[1] summarized some key strategies for online CEL in three pillars: course design, technology, and communication.

COURSE DESIGN
Just as in offline CEL, course design requires attention to:[6]
1. Explicit connections between community engagement and learning objectives.
2. Reflection on the process to develop the solution as well as the personal development of the student.
3. Managing expectations regarding time commitment from all parties.
4. Student input: by assuming that students are motivated to learn by their intrinsic values rather than extrinsic values[7] and offering the opportunity for input, you will probably increase their motivation (and might increase the quality of the course[8]).
5. Faculty commitment.
6. Perceptible impacts: students will feel more motivated if they feel like they were able to make an impact on the community through the project.
7. Feedback loops: asking for and giving feedback by all parties involved stimulates student learning and continuous improvement of the course.
8. Interaction: concepts get meaning through interactive discussions and discourse.[9]

If a combination of online and offline activities is possible, you can also consider Hybrid or Blended learning/interaction. Visit the Educational Database if you would like to navigate through Online/Hybrid activities.

TECHNOLOGY
As a course coordinator or teacher, you might decide to support all teachers, students and community partners involved in the project, to work with the technology you want to use. For example this can be done by supporting them with manuals and/or through formal training. You also may want to check if the technologies each group uses coincide with each other.

Within the UU, teachers are only allowed to use and communicate tools that have been checked for privacy and security issues. The tools that are safe to use you can find in the Educate-it tool guide: https://educate-it.uu.nl/en/tool-guide/.

Careful consideration of the privacy and safety of the used technology is important in online CEL courses, even more so when sensitive information or data is provided. As a teacher, you might want to educate your students about privacy issues in technology, for example through an in-class discussion at the start of the online CEL project. Visit https://intranet.uu.nl/en/privacy, to find guidance for issues regarding General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Technology can also serve as a bridge between synchronous and asynchronous communications, so that the material is available for students that are not able to attend a session. Especially in an online CEL course, it is helpful if course instructors remain active to interact and provide feedback with students on the online engagement components – as regular classroom interaction is lacking.

Technology can also serve as a platform for communication between the community partner, the students, and the teacher. An online area, such as Microsoft Teams or a project website, can assist to maintain a sustainable partnership and can link similar organizations to you. Finally, the communication between students (team members) can also be facilitated with the use of technology.

- Networking online: building a network is usually a big advantage of CEL for students (and teachers). For an online version you can ask your students to plan an informal coffee-date with one or more members from the organization/community they are working with; to ask questions and get to know the organization/community better.
- Be open to the contribution and the ideas coming from students on how to set up the communication.
- Provide students instructions about the way that you want to communicate with them online (let them know when you are available to answer questions, via which platform you want to communicate, etc.)

Online CEL learning goals and competencies

Recent studies showed that online CEL projects are an effective way to develop a set of competencies related to interpersonal communications, problem-solving, teamwork in a real environment, and critical thinking.[8] Online CEL projects, like offline CEL projects, can boost the students' civil and social consciousness and practices through interactions with the communities. Next to those more soft-skill CEL learning outcomes and competencies, the study showed that online CEL can also promote other learning outcomes, that are important in a digital era,[8] such as machine learning and big data management.

More information on CEL learning goals and competencies?
Check out the **CEL resource on Learning Goals.**

▶	**Course**	**DOMCAST**
👤	**Coordinator**	Pim Huijnen
🎓	**Students Involved**	11 History students (BA en MA)
🕐	**Duration**	5 months
🤝	**External Partner**	Citizens of Utrecht
🚀	**Online Vs Offline**	Project meetings, research, interviews, and communication online. Recording offline.
✏️	**Description**	In this course, students create the DOMCast, an investigative podcast series on the history of Utrecht. Together with citizens from Utrecht, students formulated and answered questions about the history of Utrecht. The DOMCast aims to present a new way of disseminating historical scholarship to the general public while giving the audience agency in the process of answering historical questions.
⊕	**Opportunities**	**Interesting for the field of History,** because instead of publishing the results of research, the podcast presents the ongoing research itself (including the questions, the deliberations, the inventiveness, the dead ends, etc.). This is important, because everybody has an idea of history writing (a lot of people do it), but not so much of academic history writing. It shows the public what it is exactly that historians do when they are at work. **Interesting for students of History,** because it enables them to bring learned skills into practice (archival research, oral history), and teaches them new ones (interviewing, editing, engaging with the public) that might be relevant for their job prospects. **Interesting for the public,** because it gives them the chance to get involved in academic history writing. They are invited to assist the historian in their search for answers. Historians can draw from the historical knowledge that so many non-academic historians have.
🧪	**Challenges**	• Time and funding for organization, supervision, etc. • Finding the approach for a podcast that is fun making and listening to. • Finding studio-quality recording locations in times of Corona. • Keeping students committed and their research going in a digital environment. • Advertising the podcast series without any access to physical spaces and restricted contact to partner organizations (museums etc.).
⭐	**Tips & tricks**	• Making podcasts is, in principle, very online-proof: all you need is a good recorder and/or microphone and software (do not cut down on those!). • Make use of the UU podcast studios, equipment, and expertise wherever possible. • Involve the UU Communications department for PR of the project. • Take professional expertise or supervision on board for tips & tricks on how to record, edit, etc. • Make use of the strengths of podcasts as a medium: find the sounds that make stories come alive – either as a recording or from (audio-visual) archives – and use these as building blocks for narratives.
✋	**More info**	https://www.uu.nl/en/education/top-lecturers-and-top-students/student-awards/exceptional-extracurricular-achievements/domcast-winner-2020 and https://domcast.nl/

▶	**Course**	**ECONOMICS OF GLOBAL CHALLENGES**
👤	**Coordinator**	Joost de Laat
🎓	**Students involved**	34 students from various Economics Master Programmes (elective)
🕐	**Duration**	10 weeks
🤝	**External partners**	International NGO's: Green Digital Finance Alliance, European Foundation Society and Education, and Trust for Social Achievement
🚀	**Online vs offline**	Both the engagement and teaching part are online
✏	**Description**	In this course, students are taught impact evaluation methods and their applications to address global challenges. Early in the course, students indicate their preference for a topic (educational, financial or the environment and) and are placed in small groups (3 or 4 students). Specifically, each group prepares a scientific impact evaluation proposal for a program addressing a global challenge that is run by a societal partner organization abroad. Students will meet twice (online) with the societal partner, and each group will also prepare a presentation of the final proposal to be given to the societal partner at the end of the course during an online symposium.
✛	**Opportunities**	The online environment made it easier to contact and engage with partner organizations outside of the Netherlands providing a more global perspective to the course
🔬	**Challenges**	Balancing the limited time that organisations have to engage with the students on the one hand, and the need/desire by students to have extensive interactions with the societal partner to develop a thoroughly researched scientific impact proposal
⭐	**Tips & tricks**	To make the most out of the few meetings that the students had with the partner organizations, we found it helpful to send in advance the students' question to the partner organizations so the meeting were more fruitful and useful.

▶	**Course**	**PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS HONOURS PROGRAMME CLINIC (PIL) AND SKILLS TRAINING**
👤	**Coordinator**	Brianne McGonigle Leyh and Julie Fraser
🎓	**Students involved**	5-6 in the PIL clinic and 30 in the skills training offered to a broader group of Honours Programme students.
🕐	**Duration**	approx. 7 months
🤝	**External partners**	International NGOs (or other non-state actors) engaging in human rights law-related issues
🦖	**Online vs offline**	Lessons, Skills Training, and partner engagement online
✏	**Description**	As a first step, clients/societal partners define the (real-life) problems they face, the contexts in which they operate, and the scope of the issues. Then the PIL Clinic supervisor(s), in consultation with the partner, defines a legal question for the students to work on that fits the problem and scope. The students then debrief the societal partner to learn more information at the heart of the legal issue. They may need to go back to the partner throughout the research to get clarification on the challenges. Examples of past projects have included: The Use of Technology in the Investigation of Serious Crimes (2018-2019); The Role of Business Engagement with Civil Society in Protecting and Promoting Civic Freedoms (2017-2018); Best Practices in Truth Commission Archiving (2016-2017); and Data Protection, Profiling, and Anti-Fraud Systems: Comparative State Practice (2015-2016). Online skills training sessions are also organized with guests unable to travel to Utrecht. Skills training may cover themes ranging from professional responsibility, negotiation, networking, or interviewing.
✛	**Opportunities**	• Technology has enabled us to ensure regular online conversations with clients/partners outside the Netherlands. • Ability to engage with a wide array of partners since issues of travel are not relevant.
🏛	**Challenges**	• Ensuring privacy and security (sharing and keeping information confidential). • Time zone issues sometimes come into play.
⭐	**Tips & tricks**	Online meetings with clients are different from real-life conversations. You must invest more time in building relationships to have a fruitful collaboration. This is important to understand each other and understand the perspectives of the partners – there is no point in providing legal advice on a question that they are not interested in. Communication is particularly important there! To build relationships, it may be useful to work with the same partners over multiple years.
👆	**More info**	https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/utrecht-university-school-of-law/education/masters-programmes/public-international-law-and-human-rights-honours-programme-clinic-pil-clinical-programme

▶ **Course**		**INTIMACIES OF THE REMOTE WARFARE**
👤 **Coordinator**		Lauren Gould and Neil Wilson
🎓 **Students involved**		4 students, from the Conflict Studies and Human Rights MA program and the Liberal Arts and Sciences BA program.
🕐 **Duration**		6 Months
🤝 **External partner**		PAX: https://www.paxforpeace.nl/
📣 **Online vs offline**		The project is entirely online, in both the research the students undertake and the teaching/instruction on technical skills they receive from the societal partner.
✏️ **Description**		This project is part of a wider collaboration between the Intimacies of Remote Warfare and PAX researching the reverberating civilian harm effects of a 2015 Dutch airstrike on Hawija, Iraq. This project sees students assist the PAX Protection of Civilians team in investigating the reverberating civilian harm effects of the Hawija airstrike. Students research how the event figures in collective "imaginations of violence" among the local population. Through discourse analysis of open-source data gathered from social media, students are seeking to understand stories of loss, personal victimhood, and suffering; perceptions of perpetrators and enemies; processes of remembering and forgetting; and attribution of blame and accountability. Lastly, students are examining how these imaginations of violence feed into repertoires of contention, or potential "blowback" effects (unintended consequences of military engagement). As well as serving a societal partner (PAX) directly with this research, students are investigating a phenomenon of interest to a much wider group of stakeholders, improving public awareness in the process. To this end, final research findings will be shared not only with the partner organization but parliamentarians and the broader public. For project leader Dr. Lauren Gould, this project also feeds directly into the research and public engagement goals of her research program The Intimacies of Remote Warfare, making it an inspirational project for the students, societal partner, and supervising lecturer.
✣ **Opportunities**		• Online research using open-source data (or open-source intelligence (OSINT), provide students a valuable method for studying phenomena remotely. Remote methodologies are especially valuable during the covid-19 pandemic when fieldwork opportunities are severely curtailed. Even in "normal" circumstances, however, remote methodologies have obvious benefits for studying communities, events, and phenomena that are otherwise difficult to access safely, e.g., war zones. • The online nature of this project also allows the students to connect with and learn from experts further afield, e.g., those skilled in OSINT collection or language translation.

Challenges	• Communication. As with any online teaching, online CEL requires clear communication. Many subtle nuances of offline interactions (e.g., body language) are missing from video calls, so it is important that participants articulate themselves as clearly as possible, and that they are afforded many opportunities to do so. The same applies to the societal partner, who must be forthcoming and transparent about what they expect from students.
	• Online CEL may not foster the same sense of teamwork or camaraderie that an offline setting generates more readily. It is therefore important for project participants to check in with each other informally (e.g., without specific tasks/work in mind) for casual, sociable discussions. This is especially important where the project is interdisciplinary or involves students from interdisciplinary backgrounds.
	• Reflection, which typically arises naturally and collectively in the informal setting of an offline CEL project, may feel forced and unnatural over a video call. It is therefore perhaps advisable to ask students to reflect in their own time, individually, before reporting back to the others over Teams. This means they are equipped with talking points and ideas for when these discussions are held.
Tips & tricks	• Maintaining close communication within the project (i.e., among students) and between the students and societal partners is vital to overcoming the distance of online/remote CEL. Regularly scheduled meetings to provide updates and seek guidance are invaluable for the students' learning experience.
	• Embrace the opportunities online research provides. By working fully remotely, students can expand their networks well beyond their immediate communities, seeking advice from experts further afield and publicizing findings more broadly.
More info	https://intimacies-of-remote-warfare.nl/

Recources
1   Waldner, L. S., Mcgorry, S. Y., & Widener, M. C. (2012). E-Service-Learning: The Evolution of Service-Learning to Engage a Growing Online Student Population. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement, 16(2)*, 123.
2   Santos Rego, M. Á., Mella Núñez, Í., & Sotelino Losada, A. (2020). Movilidad y TIC en aprendizaje-servicio: perspectivas para una sociedad global y tecnológica. *RIED. Revista Iberoamericana de Educación a Distancia, 23*(1), 67–84. https://doi.org/10.5944/ried.23.1.24180
3   Public Good Impact (2020). *Community Engagement and Remote Teaching: Reflections and Resources.* Retrieved from: https://publicgoodimpact.com/2020/03/18/community-engagement-and-remote-teaching-reflec-tions-and-resources/?amp=1
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5   McGorry, S. Y. (2012). No Significant Difference in Service Learning Online. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 16*(4), 45–54
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9   Morgan, W., & Streb, M. (2001). Building citizenship: how student voice in service-learning develops civic values. Social science quarterly, 82(1), 154-169.
10 Sandia Sandoval, B. E., & Montilva Calderón, J. A. (2020). Tecnologías Digitales en el Aprendizaje-Servicio para la Formación Ciudadana del Nuevo Milenio. RIED. Revista Iberoamericana de Educación a Distancia, 23(1), 129–148. https://doi.org/10.5944/ried.23.1.24138.

Additional resources:
1   The European Association of Service-Learning in Higher Education (EASLHE) produced a 'Practical guide on e-Service-Learning in response to COVID-19.
    See: https://www.eoslhe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Practical-guide-on-e-Service-Learning_web.pdf
2   The University College London (UCL) designed a teaching toolkit on Designing CEL in a digital learning environment:
    https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/publications/2020/jun/designing-community-engaged-learning-cel-digital-learning-environment