



Utrecht University

CENTRE FOR
GLOBAL
CHALLENGES

About Community Engaged Learning

**AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE ON COMMUNITY ENGAGED
LEARNING AT UTRECHT UNIVERSITY**



About Community Engaged Learning

In this introductory booklet on Community Engaged Learning you can find information on:

1. What is CEL?
2. Terminologies
3. Why CEL?
4. Examples from CEL at Utrecht University



What is Community Engaged Learning?

Community Engaged Learning is experiential education in which students, teachers and external partners work together on societal challenges. Community Engaged Learning integrates societal engagement with academic study and reflection to enrich and enhance the learning experience and contribute to community needs. Community Engaged Learning at Utrecht University has the following characteristics:

- The focus is on (local and/or global) *societal challenges* in which scientific knowledge and skills can make a difference
- We work on *questions* and *needs* of society
- Students, scientists and external stakeholders investigate the societal challenge together and thereby all learn (*reciprocity*)
- The course is embedded in the *curriculum*
- It is *experiential* education: a form of education in which students learn by doing and experiencing by truly being active in society
- Scientific and societal *reflection* is the foundation for learning by all participants

Community Engaged Learning and similar terminology

Within Utrecht University we choose to use the term Community Engaged Learning for this type of education. This emphasizes the importance of close cooperation with society, such as (semi) public organizations, citizens and other societal partners. In scientific literature and academic practice, however, several concepts are used that are more or less similar to Community Engaged Learning. Think of concepts such as (community) service learning, community based learning, civic learning, and public, civic, or community engagement (in the curriculum). There are also many different definitions of these concepts. Within Utrecht University we have opted to use one term, Community Engaged Learning, for clarity in conversations, without excluding the specific connotations of these other concepts and definitions.

Why Community Engaged Learning?

The vision of Utrecht University is: "We live in a world that is rapidly changing. Global issues are complex: they are not limited to generations or continents and cannot be solved from one single perspective. Themes such as climate change, distribution of wealth and healthy living require an interdisciplinary approach. Scientific insights are needed to solve these issues". In this context, the mission of Utrecht University is 'working towards a better world'.¹ This mission can be fulfilled by doing interdisciplinary research and teaching. But research and teaching are never an end in themselves. Realizing sustainable and visible transformation in order to solve these complex global challenges also requires working with and for society, and teaching our students how to do this. Community Engaged Learning (CEL) is an important strategy to make this happen.

In CEL, students use academic knowledge and skills in order to make a contribution to the solving of social issues together with external partners. This lets them not only learn about the complexity of social issues, but also about the value of academic knowledge. In that way, we are currently creating social impact and preparing students for careers in which they will create even more social impact as academically-schooled professionals.

Research has shown that CEL provides various benefits to both students, faculty as well as the community.² For instance, CEL can improve academic outcomes for students, and the experiential learning environment offers students the opportunity to develop valuable skills and competencies such as communication and listening skills, leadership skills, and social responsibility.^{3,4} For teachers, CEL provides a way to increase collaboration with societal partners,⁵ which can be beneficial for both teaching and research activities. By implementing CEL, teachers can also strengthen the practical relevance of the academic curriculum and improve general teaching practices.^{6,7} A great advantage of CEL for society is that students and academic staff can use their expertise to contribute to solving complex societal challenges, and in close collaboration with societal partners work towards sustainable solutions.⁸

Community Engaged Learning at Utrecht University

Community Engaged Learning comes in all different types and forms. Students can work directly, face-to-face, with individuals and organizations to investigate and/or address issue or need identified by the community. For instance, by giving a presentation to women with a migrant background about health risks while traveling (*Coschap in de wijk*) or by working together with residents and social enterprises to better understand societal challenges and develop sustainable solutions (*Learning Lab Overvecht*). Students can also work more indirectly with individuals and organizations by working with them on a product to address a community issue or need, such as collaborating with local stakeholders from civil society, social entrepreneurs and government (*Young Innovators Programme*). Other CEL projects may be more research-based, by collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data in order to address an issue or need identified by the community. For instance, by using community-based research approaches (*Community-based research in the humanities*), by performing data-driven research in interdisciplinary groups (*Utrecht Data School*) or gathering data on topics such as waste management and to give back the insights of the research to the community (*Field research Aruba*). In all different forms of CEL, academic learning and practice is connected through reflection and students work with community partners on issues or needs identified by the community.

More examples of CEL-education at Utrecht University:

	Course	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LUNETTEN
	Coordinator	Irina van Aalst, Stef Dingemans, and Gery Nijenhuis
	Description	Community Service Learning Lunetten brings the University to the society. In 9 weeks, students and local actors work together on relevant social issues. The focus is on joint identification and elaboration of a specific (spatial) issue, whereby both parties cooperate and contribute their knowledge and skills. The course offers a (rich) learning environment in which both students as well as local actors can flourish.
	More information	https://geografie.nl/artikel/community-engagement

 Course	DA VINCI PROJECT
 Coordinator	Bert Weckhuysen, Brianne McGonigle Leyh, and Appy Sluijs
 Description	Six groups of five students originating from different scientific backgrounds work together on a specific sustainable development-related challenge through design thinking. The challenges are provided by an external partner, ranging from private sector to local and national governments. Students focus on different global challenges like clean air, sustainable housing, and waste as a resource. Through an active learning-by-doing approach, students will be trained to collaborate transdisciplinary, thereby broadening their horizon.
 More information	https://students.uu.nl/onderwijs/honours/uu-honours-college/da-vinci-project

 Course	COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH IN THE HUMANITIES
 Coordinator	Jocelyn Ballantyne
 Description	How can researchers in Humanities use their knowledge to contribute to societal challenges? This is a central question in this course. Students from Humanities collaborate with stakeholders from societal organizations such as 'Creative Commons', 'Taal Doet Meer', 'de Voorkamer', and the target communities for these organizations. The students work with the stakeholders for a week, and incorporate the practical experiences and relevant insights in the design of a research proposal. Students learn to work with the complexity of community-based research and to do project-based work. After this course, students continue their research through an internship or thesis.
 More information	https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/community-based-research-for-the-humanities/about

The Community Engaged Learning Toolbox was developed as a collaboration between the Centre for Global Challenges, the Centre for Academic Teaching and the Community Engaged Learning Taskforce.

Resources:

1. <https://www.uu.nl/en/organisation/profile/mission-and-strategy>
2. Salam, M., Iskandar, D. N. A., Ibrahim, D. H. A., & Farooq, M. S. (2019). Service learning in higher education: a systematic literature review. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 1-21.
3. Warren, J. L. (2012). Does service-learning increase student learning?: A meta-analysis. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 18(2), 56-61.
4. Steinberg, K., Hatcher, J. A., & Bringle, R. G. (2011). A north star: Civic-minded graduate. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 18(1), 19-33.
5. Salam, M., Iskandar, D. N. F. A., & Ibrahim, D. H. A. (2017). Service learning support for academic learning and skills development. *Journal of Telecommunication, Electronic and Computer Engineering (JTEC)*, 9(2-10), 111-117.
6. Lasen, M., Tomas, L., & Hill, A. (2015). Potential of service-learning to promote sustainability competencies in pre-service teachers: A case study. *Teaching Education*, 26(4), 341-365.
7. Phillips, A., Bolduc, S. R., & Gallo, M. (2013). Curricular placement of academic service-learning in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 17(4), 75-96.
8. Rutti, R. M., LaBonte, J., Helms, M. M., Hervani, A. A., & Sarkarat, S. (2016). The service learning projects: Stakeholder benefits and potential class topics. *Education + Training*, 58(4), 422-438.