Creating Community-Engaged Courses
Recommendations from UCLA's Community Partners

Relationships with Faculty and Students
Community partners highlighted the central importance of building relationships with both faculty members and students. The most successful community-campus partnerships, defined by community partner satisfaction with the partnership experience, were those that had a positive relationship with the course faculty member and with the students.

Recommendations:
- Prioritize relationship building with community partners and emphasize to students the importance of building relationships with community partner staff
- Schedule at least one in-person meeting when developing the partnership or when any partnership logistics change
- Discuss expectations, visions, and ideas for student tasks/projects with community partners
- Get to know the mission, values, and structure of the organization so that coordination is improved and students have a greater understanding of the organization
- Communicate with community partners at the beginning, middle, end of the quarter and when any issues or changes arise
- Ask community partners about any partnership challenges or unmet needs
- Make coordination check-ins part of the relationship: Ask community partners about experiences scheduling and building relationships with students
- Encourage students to take initiative to learn about the community organization, the work that they do, and the communities they serve
- Emphasize the importance of being proactive in engaging with community partner clients
- Discuss any student concerns about engaging with clients and explore how these concerns can be addressed
- Encourage students to communicate their experience level with their community partner and identify how staff can support them to improve their skills
- Stress the importance and value of building relationships with staff and with community partner clients
- Inform students that they must avoid stacking hours at the beginning or end of the quarter because community partners and clients value consistency week by week

Course Objectives
Most community partners had a generalized knowledge of course objectives. The course objectives most often identified included engaging students in community work and educating students about community needs. However, the community partners were divided about the relevance of course objectives to the students' community engagement experience on site. Some community partners felt that the course objectives and content were more relevant in the classroom than within the context of the community organization, while others felt that integration of course objectives with the on site work was essential to a complete community engagement experience

Recommendations:
- Communicate with community partners about the course objectives and course content
- Assess if the course objectives are relevant to the work of the community partners
- Explore community partners' interest in being involved in designing course objectives and course content
- Provide community partners with opportunities to give feedback and input on course content if interested
- Encourage students to integrate course content into their community engagement experience
- Work with community partners to think of ways that the course content can be integrated into the community engagement work (e.g., reflection questions, research-related projects, and student presentations) if organizational capacity allows
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss and reflect on their experiences in the classroom if students are not able to do so at their site
- Explore community partner interest in presenting to the class and try to make room for this type of engagement. Bringing interested community partners into the classroom may improve relationships, increase community partner involvement in the partnership, and incorporate important community perspectives from the community partner experience.

Student Activities and Projects

Community partners shared that student activities and/or projects largely depend on the organization's current programming. None of the community partners created new tasks or projects solely for students in community-engaged courses. However, many community partners stated that they are open to students creating new activities and projects if they are willing to create, lead, and pitch the activity to the community partner.

Recommendations:
- Deprioritize completion of a set number of hours and instead prioritize quality and impact of community engagement experiences
- Talk to community partners about their interest in having students create new projects for the organization
- Provide students with resources needed to create new activities and projects
- Ensure that student tasks and projects are clearly defined and meaningful for the organization
- Negotiate student activity and project details early in the quarter

Student Hours

Many community partners stated that the hour requirements associated with service-learning courses have presented a number of challenges. Community partners shared that many students expressed feeling overwhelmed by the 24-hour community engagement requirement on top of their coursework. However, community partners feel that 24 hours is not enough time to allow for a rich community engagement experience.

Recommendations:
- Consider implementing a policy that prevents students from stacking hours at the beginning or end of the quarter
- Consider implementing weekly hour requirements
- Provide community partners with a platform to view weekly or monthly student schedules on one platform
- Emphasize the professional aspect of community engagement with students – consider policies for student cancellation of shifts including requiring at least 48 hours of advance notice
- Inform students that day time shifts will allow them to interact with clients, and that this interaction is valued by community partners and clients
- Encourage students to maintain a consistent weekly schedule so that relationships with clients and staff can more easily be built