Common well-intentioned mistakes people make with Community Based Learning (CBL)

Doing more harm than good

- Volunteers need training—training costs organizations time and/or money if we can’t provide that training/funding
- Providing and then removing a source of volunteers can do real damage

Prioritizing the college students above all else

- College schedules are not the schedules the rest of the world uses
- Reciprocity—community partners (schools, nonprofits, prisons, etc.) are not a resource for universities to use (up) and we hurt community groups and future attempts at CBL when we use an exploitative approach

Not adequately preparing our students

- We can feel like the “shock” of a fundamentally different experience is useful for our students (there is good research to support this), but we need to manage that shock so our community partners do not have to deal with the brunt of that shock.
- Managing expectations and turning shock into a useful learning experience is our job as instructors, but that should take place before/outside we meet with community partners.

Privileging academic knowledge at the exclusion of any other type of knowledge

- We and our students are “experts” at some sorts of knowledge, but there are other types of knowledge that community partners are expert in.
- Avoiding a Prometheus mindset

Being afraid to dream a little bigger

- Often, more traditional pedagogical models that aren’t well suited to the CBL setting
- Thinking “outside the box” is a unique possibility and also necessary for the success of the course

Further Reading


Northwestern’s Service-Learning online resource: [www.neu.edu/servicelearning](http://www.neu.edu/servicelearning)

https://www.northeastern.edu/communityservice/for-faculty-staff/service-learning/