What is Service Learning?

Service Learning (SL) is a specially designed learning experience in which students combine reflection with structured participation in community-based projects to achieve specified learning outcomes as part of an academic course and/or program requirement. By participating in Campus-Community partnerships at the local, national, or international level, students gain a richer mastery of course content, enhance their sense of civic responsibility, and ultimately develop a more integrated approach to understanding the relationship between theory, practice, ideas, values, and community.

Service Learning at UC

As identified in UC’s mission statement, “experience-based learning,” engaged citizenship, and community partnership constitute core institutional values. Based in Division of Professional Practice, the Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement operates as the coordinating and facilitating agent for service learning (SL) and Civic Engagement at The University of Cincinnati. Some of the ways in which the Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement facilitates fulfillment of UC’s mission include: (a) assisting in development and listing of SL-based courses; (b) identifying and connecting appropriate community partners with UC faculty and students; (c) educating faculty on effective SL pedagogies and activities; (d) facilitating university and public recognition and university incentives for SL.

Service Learning within UC’s Third Century

Because of its foci on meaningful student engagement, knowledge building, community service, and leadership development, service learning fostered by the Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement within the Division of Professional Practice and Experiential Learning (ProPEL) is fundamental to supporting the goals of UC Academic Master Plan, including:

1. Transforming lives through facilitating deep and meaningful student engagement in curriculum and applying the benefits of knowledge to the betterment of all;
2. Transforming education through a commitment to integrated academic experiences emphasizing purposeful student development, rich in contextual learning;
3. Transforming knowledge through innovation in multidisciplinary collaborative education, leveraging UC’s relationships with the business, civic, cultural, educational, health care and professional communities composing our urban environment

The Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement will help define the University of Cincinnati as the “first-choice destination for students, patients, faculty, and staff.” We will strengthen the relationships forged with the surrounding community, transform UC into a 24/7 learning environment, and improve the overall quality of student learning and success. Toward achieving these goals, this center will help implement, support, and promote Service Learning and Civic Engagement as ways to increase student satisfaction and retention, academic learning, graduation rates, and career placements for students. Reaching these goals will simultaneously help address the many real-world problems found in our local and global communities.

Our long-term goals will align with the larger vision of the Division of Professional Practice and Experiential Learning, those of the Third Century Academic Master Plan, and the Integrated Core Learning initiative (ICL) by creating mutually nourishing relationships with the surrounding community, invigorating experiential education, and by sustaining ongoing development of Service Learning and Civic Engagement faculty researchers and teachers. This will create a learning environment for our students and with the larger community in which the university can be seen as a valuable and accessible community asset.

The Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement (CSLCE) will help oversee and support service learning pedagogies and will further help to continue the development of its programs and resources, including assessment of its activities. This center will be responsible for helping to guide the development, implementation, and assessment of interdisciplinary, community-engaged, and experientially grounded courses for a growing number of students throughout the university community. Continuing and sustaining the partnership forged with the Center for Community Engagement, this office will develop collaborative relationships with a variety of related positions and offices, such as the General Education Program, the Integrated Core Learning initiative, the First Year Experience program, the Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, International Affairs, the Honors program, the Action Research Center, UC International, the UC Foundation and all relevant initiatives within Faculty Senate and Student Affairs. Some of the specific responsibilities will include:

1) Working with faculty, staff, students and community to craft mutually beneficial on-going SL partnerships

2) Increasing faculty, student, and community support for the Service Learning and Civic Engagement academic model

3) Helping to assess outcomes for students, faculty, and community partners

4) Helping to disseminate ideas and findings to faculty, students, and community partners

5) Representing the ongoing and emerging role of service learning and civic engagement within the Division of Professional Practice, the Integrated Core Learning initiative, and UC’s Third Century
6) Participating in the growing national and international conversation on the pedagogy of Service Learning and Civic Engagement.

The Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement will also help maintain the service learning web site and develop informational and educational materials about Service Learning and Civic Engagement. This center will deliver progress reports providing evidence of student learning outcomes resulting from Service Learning and Civic Engagement and data concerning value to community partners, students, and faculty. This center will convene the Service Learning Advisory Council and be responsive to their suggestions and input, and it will facilitate the offering of at least 100 sections of service learning courses per year.

The four major areas of emphasis will include: Service Learning and Civic Engagement course design, Service Learning and Civic Engagement assessment tools, Service Learning and Civic Engagement Scholarship, and the development of collaborative relationships among university stakeholders and between the university and greater surrounding community.

Five-Year Vision: By 2019

1. UC will be the leading institution of Experiential Learning higher in the Mid West. In eight years (2019), UC will be one of the national leaders.

2. Every college at UC will have identified structures to develop a Service Learning and Civic Engagement initiative, which will include an identified liaison from their respective faculty/administration to sit on the Service-Learning Advisory Council.

3. Every graduating UC student will have had the opportunity for a beginning (FYE), mid collegiate, and senior capstone Service Learning and civic engagement experience relevant to their program.

4. The Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement, working within the Division of Professional Practice and Experiential Learning, will hold regularly scheduled Service Learning Seminars to help inform best practices for the pedagogies of Service Learning and Civic Engagement.

5. UC will adopt and implement an institutional definition for Service Learning among other types of experiential learning at UC.

6. The university will recognize faculty members who actively participate in Service Learning and Civic Engagement with their students.

7. Data will be collected from students, faculty, and community partners on a regular basis and analyzed for continuous improvements and goal-setting.

8. Faculty study and practice of Service Learning and Civic Engagement will be significantly incentivized and supported.
9. This office will help obtain external research grants and endowment support that will help to advance the above goals within the context of the Integrated Core Learning initiative and UC’s Third Century AMP.

How will we do this: Collective Impact

Since the time of the beginnings of semester conversion, UC’s SL Executive Steering Committee has recognized the growth/expansion of SL around the university, and the committee is very supportive of those individual, decentralized efforts. With that said, the SL Executive Steering Committee understands the importance of Collective Impact, and as such, we request that any Service Learning efforts at UC abide by these five conditions:

1. **Common Agenda**: All participants (colleges, departments, programs, faculty) support and participate in the shared vision for Service Learning and Civic Engagement at UC, including a common understanding of the initiative and a joint approach to implementing it across the university.

2. **Shared Measurement**: Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensure efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable. We anticipate discipline-specific assessment tools in addition to university wide assessment (ILEAP).

3. **Mutually Reinforcing Activities**: Participants' activities must be differentiated while still coordinated through mutually reinforcing plans of action. We must celebrate the diversity of SL programs in a collective way.

4. **Continuous Communication**: Consistent and open communication is needed across many stakeholders to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation and vision.

5. **Backbone Support**: Collective impact requires a separate organization and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies. The Center for Service Learning and Civic Engagement, which is housed in the Division of Professional Practice, will act as the supporting and coordinating backbone structure.

The Service Learning and Civic Engagement initiative has grown exponentially over the past 5 years, and while we should applaud, support, and empower the individual efforts of colleges and programs, it critical that we, as a university, evolve the initiative in a coordinated and integrated way. Doing so required a strong backbone support structure (Collective Impact Condition #5).
How can SLCE support UG Colleges:

1. **Service Learning and Civic Engagement Spotlight**: Yearly public-facing report highlighting the Service Learning coursework occurring in your college. This publication can be used for promoting the reach and impact of your college and the units there in.

2. **Service Learning and Civic Engagement Matching and Tracking System**: Campus-Community Connection system that faculty can catalogue their respective SL courses, post those wants and needs to community, and search for potential SL opportunities in the community (filterable by location, time, interest, etc.).

3. **Service Learning and Civic Engagement Assessment Tools**: In addition to I LEAP, your college will have access to developed assessment tools that will focus on the SL experience from the standpoint of all SL Stakeholders (faculty, students, community partners).

4. **Service Learning and Civic Engagement Library**: In partnership with UC Libraries, stakeholders will be able to request SL resources (books, articles, journals, videos, etc.).

5. **Service Research Ally Program**: In partnership with UC’s Action Research Center and The Office of Undergraduate Research, Scholarly Endeavors, and Creative Practices, SL classes and faculty will have the opportunity to work with a designated UG student that will help with the assessment of the SL course.

6. **Servant Leadership Program**: In partnership with the Academic Internship Program and the Pre-Professional Experiential Learning Track in ProPEL, Servant Leadership Externships are experiential learning opportunities that are specifically structured as practical leadership experiences and are fueled by the student’s academic program. The Service Leadership Externship Program (SLEP) is for students who have a desire to lead others through service, and who are interested in building relationship with the underserved and connect their passions and skills to their leadership stance. This is an opportunity for students to integrate their classroom study with real life experience through leading and to reflect a belief in the power of young people to contribute constructively to the good of society. SLEP places youth at the center of their own and their personal, academic, and professional development, moving students from passive receptors of development, to agents of positive change.

7. **SL High School Alliance**: This alliance proposes a collaborative teaching and learning partnership between several educational entities for the purpose of inter-institutional and trans-disciplinary learning. In particular, a partnership between post-secondary and secondary educators, along with their respective students and community partners, will be forged in order to offer coordinated service learning experiences.
How can SLCE support Faculty

1. **Service Learning Collaboratory**: The goal of this course is to provide students with the opportunity to explore Social Enterprise as part of an interdisciplinary team charged with completing a specific project for an external educational partner. These experiences will span a variety of industries/disciplines and will include a service learning focus. This course intentionally disrupts the boundaries between teachers, learners, and community, and attempts to dissolve the dichotomy between for-profit and not-for-profit organizing.

2. **Service Learning Chautauqua**: The goal of the Service Learning is to bring together an eclectic handful of teachers, learners, practitioners, and scholars who are interested in developing relationships with others while exploring Service Learning. The organizers will combine entertainment, culture, and education for the whole community, with speakers, teachers, musicians, entertainers, preachers and specialists of the day.

3. **Service Learning and Civic Engagement Fellows**: In partnership with the Center for the Enhancement for Teaching and Learning (CETL) The Faculty Fellows program is designed to significantly enhance the capacity of UC faculty to offer courses and conduct SL research that directly engages the university with the community. The goals is to develop innovative approaches to SL teaching and research that promote problem-driven, problem-solving, strategic, academically-grounded civic engagement.

4. **Service Learning Publication, Research, and Scholarship opportunities**: The Service Learning Advisory Council is consistently looking for platforms to present scholarship, conduct research, and publish findings pertaining to SL.

5. **Service Learning Reflection Support**: Reflection is one of the most academically rigorous components of a service-earning course. Students who take the time to reflect on service-earning experiences will get more from those experiences. This is why reflections are a required part of service learning classes at the University of Cincinnati. Reflection helps students thoughtfully process their community work. It helps them critically assess and understand what they are seeing and doing. Service learning practitioners and researchers have concluded that the most effective service learning experiences are those that provide structured opportunities for learners to critically reflect upon their service experience.

6. **Greater Cincinnati Regional Service Learning Network (Project Hope)**: Faculty will have access to a robust network of SL faculty from several universities and colleges in the Greater Cincinnati Region.

7. **Jack Twyman Award for Service Learning**: The Jack Twyman Award for Service Learning is given to a collaborative educational team engaged in a service learning project that exemplifies the values Jack Twyman demonstrated in his life. The award will be given annually to one educational
team that exemplifies the “Bearcat Bond” in the following ways: (1) **Curriculum:** The educational team’s service learning project must meet the University of Cincinnati’s definition of curricular service learning; (2) **Collaboration:** The educational team’s service learning project must display a fundamental understanding of, and consistent commitment to, collaborative relationships with community partners; (3) **Character:** The educational team’s service learning project must uphold the values of respect, responsibility, and inclusiveness and display a strong commitment to the highest level of personal and academic integrity (Bearcat Bond); (4) **Creativity:** The Educational Team’s SL project must find creative, "out-of-the-box," ways to support organizations in our community and the people that those organizations serve; (5) **Care:** The educational team’s service learning project must identify plans to continue the effort through long-term relationships after the project has ended.

8. **Service Learning Handbook for Faculty:** Access to a completed handbook that helps to address issues of risk management, best practices, and FAQs. Included in this handbook are multiple memos of understanding.

**How can SLCE support Students**

1. **Develop the Whole Student:** By participating in SL courses, students will: (1) Apply what the student is learning in the classroom to a civic setting, thus deepening understanding of course materials; (2) Apply and further develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills; (3) Work meaningfully with people of varied cultures, socioeconomic backgrounds, lifestyles, and learning styles; (4) Foster a sense of civic responsibility; (5) Appreciate the needs of the Greater Cincinnati community, while also recognizing how he/she may meet the community’s needs through his/her unique education, interests, and talents

2. **A Better Place Project:** In partnership with the Center for First Year Experience and Learning Communities, freshmen students will have the opportunity to participate in service learning partnerships with surrounding communities.

3. **Student Ambassadors for Service Learning:** Students can participate in this inter-collegiate student group, and will have the opportunity to build their personal and professional networks while they build a robust resume.

4. **Service Learning Handbook for Students:** Access to a completed handbook that helps to address issues of risk management, best practices, and FAQs. Included in this handbook are multiple memos of understanding.