

# **Community Service-Learning Program Evaluation Report for 2008-2009**

**December 2009**

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## Statistics-at-a-Glance

# AT A GLANCE

### COURSES / INSTRUCTORS

27 courses in 14 departments  
• CSL required in 10 courses  
23 different instructors  
• 11 taught a CSL course for the first time

- Overall positive impression: 92%
- Would recommend CSL to peers: 96%
- Changed teaching approach: 92%
- Able to incorporate CSL into course: 67%

### CSL STUDENTS

302 registered in CSL component of course  
Of 237 completed surveys:  
• 84% in a CSL course for the first time

- CSL completion rate: 98%
- Learned a lot in the course: 87 %
- Overall positive impression of CSL: 77%
- Would recommend CSL to peers: 75%
- Agreed adequate partners to choose: 72%
- Overall positive CSL experience: 75%
- Agreed placement was a good fit: 74%
- Able to incorporate CSL into learning: 80%

### Non-CSL STUDENTS

249 registered in the CSL courses  
Of 185 completed surveys:  
• 95% in a CSL course for the first time

- Overall positive impression: 62%
- Learned a lot in the course: 76%
- Agreed CSL enhanced learning: 33%
- Regretted not participating in CSL: 12%
- Would recommend CSL to peers: 47%
- Agreed adequate partners to choose: 50%
- Understood connection CSL & course: 59%

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS

86 community partners  
Of 38 completed surveys:  
• 53% were first time CSL mentors

- Not familiar with CSL before: 63%
- Agreed CSL staff gave helpful info: 81%
- Agreed adequate communication: 80%
- Overall positive impression: 100%
- Would recommend to colleagues: 100%
- Able to integrate CSL into work: 67%

## Background

2008-2009 was the fourth full year of evaluation of the CSL Program at the University of Alberta. Evaluation consisted of surveying instructors, CSL students, non-participating CSL students and community partners involved in CSL courses. Instructor and student surveys are administered in each course during the last two weeks of the regular term. Community surveys are disseminated at least one week after the end of term to ensure that students have had a chance to complete their CSL agreements.

In fall 2008-2009, all surveys were reviewed and modified. First, small modifications were made to wording for clarity. Second, open-ended responses were analyzed for key themes and coded accordingly. These codes were integrated into the surveys as closed-ended questions for statistical data entry. This reduced the number of open-ended questions. These modifications do not appear to have any negative effect on the quality of data obtained, and there were many fewer written-in comments than in previous years. This suggests that the response categories adequately reflected the experiences of almost all respondents. The community service-learning component in one course did not involve direct contact between the students and the community partner, although work was carried out for the community partner. As a result, many of the survey questions were not applicable to students' experiences in that course, and some students wrote in an "NA" for some questions.

As in previous years, this year's report summarizes findings on key indicators relevant to assessing implementation and outcomes of the CSL Program. In addition to these key findings, preliminary analysis suggested avenues for additional analyses. In particular, we were interested in whether there were differences between first-time and repeat CSL participants – students, instructors and community partners – on overall indicators of satisfaction and perceived contributions of CSL to teaching / learning strategies. Second, we examined the differences between CSL and non-CSL students' responses on particular questions pertaining to their understanding of CSL and its expectations, its value, and their reasons for choosing and not choosing CSL.

Analyses were based on:

- 423 completed student surveys from 26 regular-term courses.<sup>1</sup>
  - 77% of all students registered in CSL courses completed surveys, a high response rate, consistent with previous years
    - 80% of CSL students completed surveys
    - 74% of non-CSL students completed surveys
- 25 completed instructor surveys (out of a possible 26), a high response rate, consistent with previous years
- 38 completed community partner surveys (out of a possible 86), a relatively low response rate, consistent with previous years.

## Findings

### ➤ Most students new to CSL courses

- 89% of all students were in a course with a CSL component for the first time
  - 84% of CSL students
  - 95% of non-CSL students
- 37 CSL students and 9 non-CSL students had been in a CSL course before

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<sup>1</sup> Surveys were not made available to students in one course.

➤ **Half of students in CSL courses participated in CSL**

- Consistent with previous years
- CSL required in 10 courses, optional in 17

The university's registration system indicates there were 555 students registered in the 27 regular-term (September to April) courses that had a CSL component. (One course was an Independent Study.) These data were used as the basis for calculating CSL participation rates.

- 55% of registered students in CSL courses participated in CSL.
- 66% of CSL students were in courses in which CSL was optional.
- 45% of students in CSL courses in which CSL was optional chose to participate.

➤ **Almost half of CSL instructors new to CSL**

- 44% of CSL instructors taught CSL for the first time
- 56% were repeat CSL instructors, sometimes integrating CSL into a particular course for the first time

➤ **CSL instructors a mix of ranks & years of teaching**

- 20 evenly split among tenured & tenure track faculty & contract academic & sessional staff (5 in each category)
- 6 identified with other categories: 1 faculty lecturer, 2 post-docs, 1 professor emeritus, 1 teaching assistant, 1 visiting professor
- Teaching experience ranged from less than a year to 29 years

➤ **Nearly all CSL students complete their community service commitments**

- 98% of students who enroll in CSL complete their community service

➤ **Females over-represented in CSL courses & across CSL stakeholders**

- Three possible categories provided to students in CSL surveys – female, male, other<sup>2</sup>
- Fall 2008 U of A Summary of Statistics for Full-time and Part-time<sup>3</sup> students show:
  - 56% of registrants female
  - 44% of registrants male

**Table 1. Sex of students in CSL courses by participant status, 2008-2009<sup>4</sup>**

Sex	CSL students	Non-CSL students	Overall
Female	80%	62%	72%
Male	19%	37%	27%
Other	1%	.5%	1%

<sup>2</sup> We recognize “other” as a problematic category. On the other hand, quite a few students have written in comments indicating they appreciate the inclusion of a category for other than female / male. In 2009-2010, gender is an open-ended response question; no pre-conceived categories are provided.

<sup>3</sup> University of Alberta, Data Book. Students. <http://www.ualberta.ca/~idoso/databook/08-09/students.html>

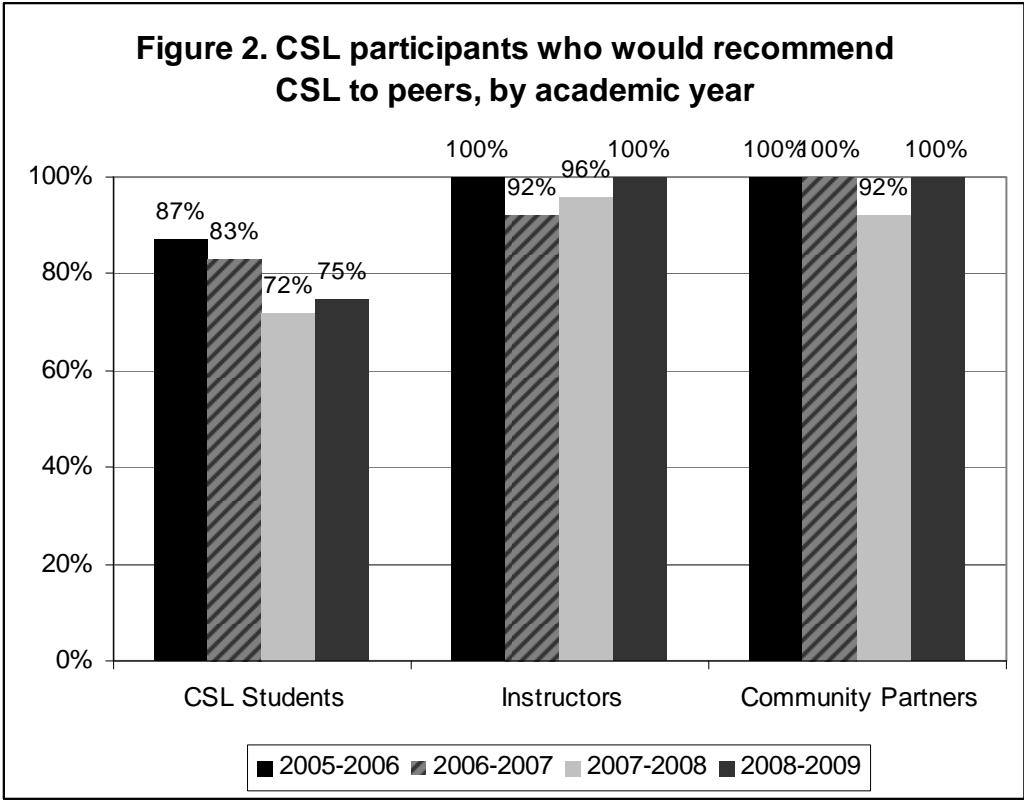
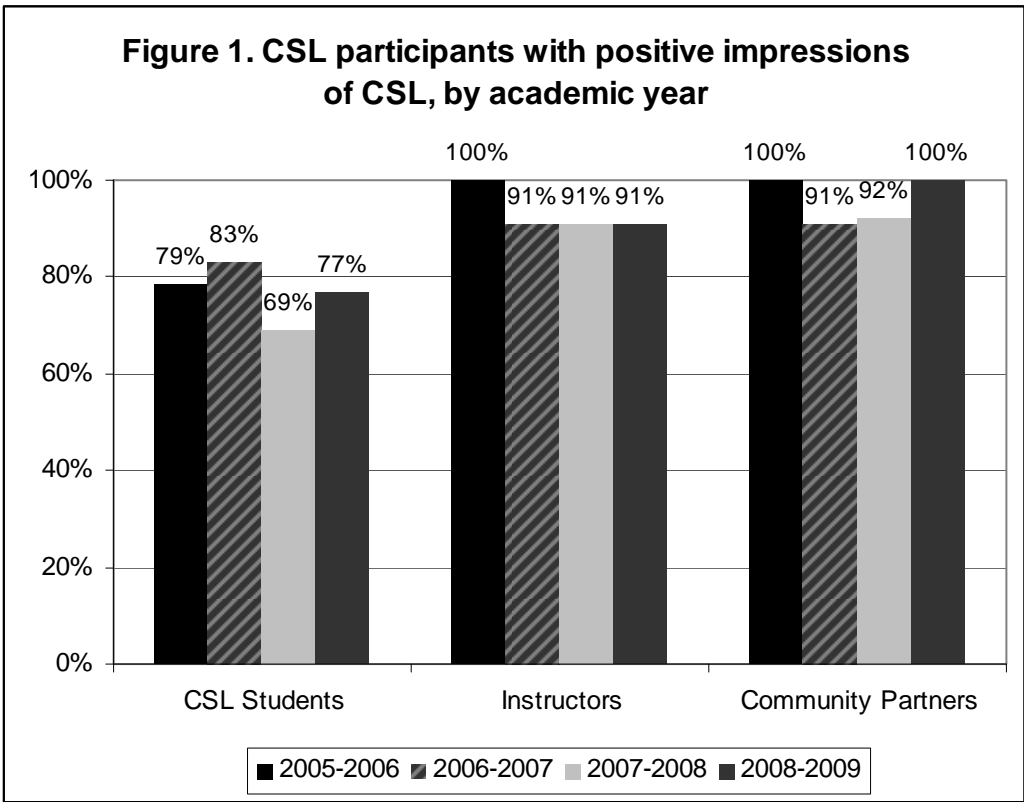
<sup>4</sup> No access to a sex breakdown for all course registrants.

- University of Alberta statistics<sup>5</sup> show that in 2008-2009:
    - 39% of full-time equivalent teaching faculty were female
    - 61% of temporary teaching faculty are female
  - 15 of the 25 (60%) of 2008-2009 CSL instructors were female
  - 81% of the 37 community partners who answered the question pertaining to sex were female<sup>6</sup>
- **Mean age similar for CSL and non-CSL students**
- CSL students: mean age of 22.68 years, range 18 to 52 years
  - Non-CSL students: mean age of 22.18, range 17 to 52 years
  - Consistent with previous years
- **Overall satisfaction with CSL Program, courses & experiences**
- Consistent with previous years
- ⇒ **Overall positive impressions of CSL across CSL participants**
- Proportions of CSL students with positive impressions of CSL have consistently been lower than the proportions of instructors and community partners.
  - Proportion of 2008-2009 CSL students with positive impressions of CSL closer to the first two years of the program. (See Figure 1)
- ⇒ **Participants would recommend CSL to peers / colleagues**
- Instructors and community partners overwhelmingly reported that they would recommend CSL to their colleagues.
  - A smaller proportion of students, but still a solid majority, has consistently reported that they would recommend CSL to their peers. (See Figure 2)

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<sup>5</sup> University of Alberta, Data Book. Full-time Equivalent Actual Female and Male Staff by Type of Activity. Retrieved from [http://www.ualberta.ca/~idoso/databook/08-09/data\\_files/DB450809.pdf](http://www.ualberta.ca/~idoso/databook/08-09/data_files/DB450809.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Because the response rate for community partners was not as good as for the other groups, it is not clear whether the survey data reflect the whole group of community supervisors.



⇒ **Most participants would consider CSL again in the future<sup>7</sup>**

- 70% of CSL students
  - 62% of first-time CSL students
  - 81% of repeat CSL students
- 93% of instructors
- 100% of community partners
- Consistent across years

➤ **CSL students value CSL for multifaceted reasons**

- 87% of CSL students learned a lot in their CSL courses

Findings suggest that students place value on learning in domains that are largely consistent with the pedagogical goals of CSL, and also to key pedagogical goals of academic courses. (See Table 2) This is important because there has consistently been a seeming disconnect between students' perceptions of the relative contribution of CSL to understanding course material and understanding their community experience. Overall, students have consistently been more likely to perceive that their coursework is useful to understanding their community experience than vice-versa. In 2008-2009, for example, 61% of CSL students agreed that their community experience was useful to understanding the course material, while 77% agreed their course work was useful to understanding their community experience.

**Table 2. Value of CSL to CSL students' learning, 2008-2009**

Domains	Proportion of CSL Students
<b>Pedagogical value</b>	
• critical analysis of the world in which they live	
- better understanding of the complexities of social issues	77%
- honed critical thinking skills	71%
- increased awareness of sites of knowledge	70%
• learning about the non-profit sector & the people it supports	
- understood the role of the particular organization	76%
- understood the work that organization does	74%
- understood the broader context that shapes the organization's work	69%
- understood the role of community organizations generally	67%
• engagement with social issues	
- had increased empathy for the challenges of particular groups	83%
- encouraged community participation	79%
- understood how their abilities can contribute to social change	75%
<b>Skills value</b>	
• developed new leadership skills	75%
• improved communication skills	66%
<b>Personal value</b>	
• personally rewarding	63%
• helped with future career goals	33%

<sup>7</sup> Includes only students who were NOT graduating.



Understanding that 87% of CSL students report that they "learn a lot" in their courses, but that they value CSL for learning that goes beyond immediate course content helps to make sense of the seeming disconnect. Clearly CSL students valued CSL for a variety of reasons beyond its immediate benefit to their coursework.

- CSL students' learning met or exceeded expectations in most areas

To further understand students' ratings of CSL, we asked what they hoped to gain through participating in CSL and what they hoped to contribute. We compared their findings to the domains in which they said they valued CSL (discussed above). CSL students' learning met or exceeded their expectations in most areas. On the other hand, CSL learning goals were not met in selected areas. (See Table 3)

What CSL students hoped to gain (N=222)	Proportion of CSL students who hoped to gain in the area	What CSL students said CSL was useful for or what they gained (see earlier in the report)
No expectations	5%	-
A better understanding of class material	74%	61% CSL was useful to understanding course material
A better understanding of social issues	75%	77% CSL useful to understanding complexities of social issues 77% CSL useful to understanding the community experience
A chance to practice skills	66%	75% gained new leadership skills 71% honed critical thinking skills 66% improved communication skills
A better understanding of the community organization	72%	76% understood the role of their placement organizations
A better understanding of the challenges faced by the organization	48%	69% understood the broader context that affects the work of the organization
Resume building, experience or knowledge about future career choices	44%	33% CSL helped with career goals
Understanding of community activism	42%	75% CSL was useful for understanding how their skills could contribute to social change

➤ **Most students' community experiences positive<sup>8</sup>**

- 74% agreed their community placement was a good fit
- 75% had positive experiences with their community organizations
- 64% found their placements rewarding and engaging

<sup>8</sup> Satisfaction indicators are based first on Likert-scale and closed-ended nominal response questions, and second on categories provided. Categories were derived from analysis of responses to open-ended questions in previous years, and are of course open to multiple interpretations.

- 52% found the placement mutually beneficial to the organization & themselves
- 7% had negative experiences with their community service placements

Over the years, students' comments have consistently pointed to qualities of community experiences that make them positive (or, conversely, negative). In 2008-09, students' open-ended responses fell into the following key themes that illustrate some of the qualities of the placement that contribute to students' assessments of them: a) how busy the organization is and therefore the attention devoted to having a student; b) the type of work opportunity provided and the extent to which it is rewarding; c) the relevance of the CSL project work to the course; and d) skills or other gains the placement afforded. Positive experiences evoke comments like the following:

*"Absolutely amazing. Everyday I was scheduled to go in, I looked forward to it, and always had a positive experience."*

*"My communication with the coordinator was excellent."*

*"I developed presentation and research skills."*

*"It allowed me to experience social inequalities first hand."*

*"Staff were amazing. I developed so many new skills. I couldn't have chosen a better placement."*

*"After my second CSL placement, I am sure I want to do the Non-Profit Board Student Internship<sup>9</sup> and continue on to the CSL certificate because I feel it is an excellent use of my time!"*

By contrast, key factors that contributed to students' negative or neutral ratings of their experiences included a) lack of guidance from the organization; b) communication problems with the organization; and c) a general perception that the organization was not prepared to work with students, which resulted in some students feeling that they were not needed or could not use their skills. For example:

*"I wish there was more contact with the organization."*

*"I felt the organization was not entirely prepared for my placement."*

*"I felt the organization did not do 110% in organizing the program."*

*"Project activities changed unexpectedly."*

It is important to note that some students who had positive experiences also reported having these problems, but they appear to have worked through them differently. Some students recognized the limitations of the organization, but saw this as part of the learning. For example:

*"A good organization, but it had a lot on its plate already."*

*"At the beginning I felt I was only doing administrative work, but as it progressed more opportunities arose."*

*"I enjoyed the individuals from the organization, but the overall goals of this activity seemed 'hazy.'"*

*"It was a busy place, where I had to take a lot of initiative to do tasks. That was fine with me: the other volunteers helped with that understanding."*

*"The objectives of the project were not fulfilled to the extent I would have preferred. However, this was as a learning opportunity – to learn from the unexpected."*

Taken as a whole, these findings suggest that a) students have relatively definite ideas about whether or not they would consider CSL participation in the future; b) students weigh the relative value of CSL to them against the requirements of them; c) there is interest in CSL among students, beyond what is available in their programs; and therefore d) there is room for continued growth of community service-learning opportunities in academic programs. As in previous years, our findings suggest that students engage in a complex process of discernment in considering the value of CSL. Although we in CSL evaluate the Program using a set of discrete and seemingly simple indicators, students appear to

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<sup>9</sup> The Non-Profit Board Student Internship is another initiative of the CSL Program at the U of A.

assess the *overall* experience rather than the individual components, qualities or aspects of the Program, their courses and their community placements, in arriving at their conclusions about CSL.

Overall, many of the students' comments have implications for the organization of CSL placements, especially with respect to introducing CSL to new community partners to maximize understanding of what contributes to positive experiences for students.

➤ **Students' rating of qualities of CSL courses high**

- 75% thought their courses provided enough opportunities for reflection on CSL experiences
- 69% said the course fostered connections between course objectives and service-learning
- 74% thought instructors' processes for assessing the CSL of the course were appropriate

Additional comments from CSL students for whom CSL "worked" included:

*"Fabulous program! Makes me proud to be a part of the U of A. I wish it was offered in all of my classes. I also wish I had been made aware of the CSL Certificate earlier in my university career or even in high school."*

*"Excellent. CSL provided a unique experience and our prof incorporated it very well."*

*"I found CSL to be incredibly helpful with the learning process and to further spark my interest in social issues."*

*"It's overall a good way to learn how to do volunteering work."*

On the other hand, students' comments also suggest that some instructors would benefit from more thoughtful incorporation of CSL into the course syllabus. In particular, activities that increase the extent to which in-class learning engages both CSL and non-CSL students in sharing their knowledge generated in different sites appear to be warranted. This type of integration may come with experience, as repeat CSL instructors were much more likely (89%) than first-time instructors (25%) to report that they incorporated mutual sharing opportunities into their classes as one strategy for integrating CSL.

➤ **Instructors value CSL for multifaceted reasons**

Instructors reported the value of participation in CSL across several teaching / learning domains. This suggests that they valued CSL for reasons beyond teaching core content in their courses. Some of their teaching objectives align with the commonly-stated aims of CSL. (See Table 4)

**Table 4. Value of CSL to instructors' teaching / learning, 2008-09**

Domains	Proportion of CSL Instructors
<b>Teaching objectives</b>	
• helped students understand themes from different perspectives	91%
• contributed to social change by fostering citizenship & service	79%
• good opportunity for students to learn about community	79%
• helped their courses contribute to social change	64%
• students benefited by creating relationships with community partners	63%
• allowed me to better achieve course objectives	61%
<b>Teaching environment</b>	
• enhanced the learning environment	84%
• effective way to make theoretical material engaging & relevant	75%
• deepened relationships with students	68%
<b>Teaching practices</b>	
• changed teaching approach at least to some extent	92%
• more thoughtful in designing their course syllabus	73%
• more flexible	64%
• improved teaching skills	50%
• improved teaching practices	30%

Moreover, a majority of instructors thought CSL was useful to students in some of the areas that are consistent with the teaching objectives identified in Table 4 above. These are identified with an asterisk in Table 5.

**Table 5. How instructors thought CSL was useful to their students, 2008-09**

Instructors' perceptions of use of CSL to students	Proportion of Instructors
• developing critical thinking skills*	88%
• encouraging participation in the community*	84%
• understanding the community*	84%
• improving communication skills	80%
• understanding course material*	68%
• contributing to social change*	68%
• improving research skills	52%
• developing leadership skills	50%

Interestingly, each year smaller proportions of instructors and students have thought CSL contributed to students' understanding of course material than to students' understanding of their community experiences. While the direction of this discrepancy is consistent for the two groups, larger proportions of instructors than students perceived CSL contributing to these kinds of learning.

- In 2008-09, among instructors:
  - 68% thought CSL contributed to students' understanding of the course material
  - 84% thought CSL contributed to students' understanding of their community experiences
- In 2008-09, among students:
  - 61% though CSL contributed to their understanding of course material
  - 77% thought CSL contributed to their understanding of their community

The high degree of satisfaction - measured by the proportions with positive impressions, proportions who would recommend CSL to their peers, and the proportions who would consider CSL again in the future - along with identification of the domains and learning areas for which students and instructors think CSL is useful, reinforces an interpretation that these CSL participants value CSL for reasons that go beyond academic course content. It is possible that they consciously distinguish between teaching / learning strategies useful to achieving pedagogical learning outcomes relevant to CSL and those useful to achieving academic pedagogical outcomes related to course content *per se*.

➤ **Community partners value CSL for multifaceted reasons**

All community partners who responded to surveys said they had positive impressions of CSL, would recommend it to colleagues, and would consider participating again in the future. (See above)

It is important to note that, despite the challenges facing non-profit organizations, almost all community partners indicated that they participate in CSL primarily for reasons beyond extending the amount of work they can get done. (See Table 6) These results suggest that community partners appear to be more interested in the longer-term or less tangible benefits of partnership. However, their reasons may simply reflect a realization that only limited projects can be completed through CSL because of the 20-hour time commitment required in most courses. In other words, they may concentrate on other kinds of benefits. For example, one community partner commented, "It is difficult to do a 20 hour project that is meaningful to the mission of the organization and [students'] course work."

**Table 6. Reasons community partners gave for considering future participation in CSL, 2008-09**

Reason cited	Community partners
Encourages social awareness	92%
Promotes knowledge of the organization	84%
Provides opportunities to recruit students as staff	54%
Allows projects that wouldn't be possible otherwise	49%

Although community partners have often pointed to examples of tangible hands-on help as an important outcome of participating in CSL, many of their reasons for considering future participation in CSL are consistent with anticipating longer-term less immediately tangible outcomes. (See Table 7) CSL contributes to outcomes for the mentor herself, as well as to the organization.

**Table 7. What community partners found useful for themselves or their organizations from CSL participation, 2008-09**

Use of CSL to organizations / themselves	Community partners
<b>Valuable to themselves</b>	
Developed volunteer mentoring skills	92%
Learned new forms of community engagement	76%
Contributed to networking with other organizations	37%
<b>Valuable to the organization</b>	
Developed relationships with students	95%
Promoted the organization to students	79%
Developed relationships with university instructors	74%
Built organizational capacity	71%
Contributed to social change	68%

Community partners were also asked to indicate how they thought CSL was useful to students placed in their organizations, based on a set of categories provided. (See Table 8)

<b>Table 8. How community partners thought CSL was useful to students, 2008-09</b>	
Community partners' perceptions of use of CSL to students	Community partners
encouraging participation in the community	89%
understanding of community	87%
developing critical thinking skills	84%
understanding the organization	79%
developing leadership skills	76%
contributing to social change	65%
understanding of course material	64%

➤ **Instructors' effective integration of CSL increases with experience**

Evaluation over the years has shown that many instructors find that effectively integrating CSL into a course for the first time can be challenging. In 2008-09, repeat instructors were more like to think they had effectively incorporated CSL into their courses than first-time instructors.

- 67% of instructors said well (42%) or very well (25%)
  - 77% of repeat instructors
  - 55% of first-time instructors

Some repeat instructors had taught CSL many times, while others had taught CSL only once before. Their comments suggest that increasing proficiency at integrating CSL into courses is not a straightforward path. It is shaped by a number of factors beyond the control of the instructor, including whether it is the same course and even in the same field, the particular students in the course, and the quality and relevance of the community experiences. However, their comments also suggest that experience does contribute to improving integration of CSL through adjusting expectations and strategies. Of the 14 repeat instructors in 2008-09:

- 50% said their ability to incorporate CSL into their course(s) had increased, commenting:
  - "Used assignments more to have students share experiences – the particular class was a factor in making this work well."*
  - "I had a much better understanding of CSL as pedagogy. Used student blogs to find connections with seminar materials – raised those examples constantly. More regular communication with community mentors and invited them to attend class presentations."*
  - "It gets easier to anticipate how much time successful integration will entail."*
  - "This time I was able to give students better advice on how to make use of their CSL experience for their final projects, because I better knew what they were doing."*
  - "It was smoother and I had made minor adjustments to the administration of the course."*
  - "More direct relationship of class participating in some form of activism."*
- 29% said it had stayed the same
- 21% said it had decreased, commenting that challenges arise because of
  - class size
  - teaching in a different field, to which previous experience may not necessarily transfer
  - new or different placement sites

Overall, instructors pointed to several key types of factors that shape the extent to which they feel they effectively integrate CSL into their courses:

- finding the time even when they know what to do
- characteristics of the particular course in terms of relevance to CSL and quality of the community experiences
- dynamics within the class
- their chosen teaching strategies

Comments worth noting in 2008-09 surveys were that integrating CSL “was a steep learning curve” and incorporation of CSL “could improve.” These are worth noting because for first-time instructors of CSL, it is not unusual that it is a steep learning curve. It is therefore important to help first-time instructors anticipate this, while at the same time not dissuading them from attempting it!

The comment “could improve” is worth noting because it is a way of flagging the reality that CSL is not about achieving the perfect course, classroom environment, or teaching practice, but rather to act as a catalyst for thinking and rethinking pedagogical intentions.

Knowing this, we were interested in knowing whether the experience of teaching CSL differs for first time and repeat CSL instructors, and if so, in what ways it differs. It was interesting that among first time instructors, the most frequently identified change was to the course syllabus, whereas repeat instructors were also identified other types of changes to their teaching approaches. Some changes that repeat instructors identified can be seen as shifting power from top-down to a more egalitarian instructor-student relationship, or a decentering of sole responsibility of the instructor for the teaching/learning process. These types of outcomes are consistent with CSL goals, and suggest that instructors can model democratic ideals, even though they ultimately retain control over assessment and grading. (See Table 9)

**Table 9. How instructors thought CSL changed their teaching approach, 2008-09**

Type of change	First-time (N=11)	Repeat (N=11)
I was more thoughtful in designing my course syllabus	73%	73%
Able to keep students' learning more accountable	55%	18%
Made me more flexible	36%	64%
I became more of a facilitator rather than a lecturer	18%	36%
I talked less; students took the lead in discussions	9%	36%

These findings suggest that it would be useful for the CSL Program to undertake more up-front work with instructors with a prospective syllabus to maximize a good fit between stated course goals & objectives, teaching strategies, alignment of assessment of student learning in light of course objectives, as well as relevant placement sites and projects. This is particularly important because:

- 31% of *first-time* instructors reported that they were not familiar with CSL before they decided to teach a CSL course for the first-time
- 82% of first-time instructors said they knew enough about the aims of CSL and had enough information about the expectations of them as CSL instructors
- 72% agreed that they knew how to connect the course objectives to the CSL component of their courses (compared to 93% of repeat CSL instructors)
- repeat instructors were more likely to have attended a CSL syllabus-building workshop than first-time instructors.

➤ **Community partners' integration of CSL differs with experience**

Like instructors, community partners often find it challenging to effectively integrate CSL into their ongoing work. We anticipated that it might become easier to incorporate CSL with experience. In 2008-09, repeat community partners were more likely to agree that they had been able to incorporate CSL into their goals in the organization:

- 69% had been able to incorporate CSL into their organizational goals at least to some extent
  - repeat: 75%
  - first-time: 63%

An explicit aim of CSL is to encourage students to bring their community- and academic-generated knowledge into dialogue. This aim has implications for community organizations. We were therefore interested in knowing whether community partners experience supervising university students differently from supervising others who carry out voluntary community work. Community partners have consistently indicated that supervising university students is different at least to some extent. In 2008-2009,

- 81% of community partners thought supervising students differed from supervising volunteers



Interestingly, first-time and repeat community partners identified different ways in which supervising students is different from supervising other kinds of volunteers. (See Table 10)

**Table 10. Community partners' perceptions of how supervising CSL students differs from supervising volunteers, 2008-09**

Difference reported	First-time (N=12)	Repeat (N=11)	All community partners
Requires more supervision & instruction	50%	73%	61%
It is more challenging to link with class requirements	67%	45%	57%
Students require more interaction	67%	27%	48%

Findings suggest that community partners understand the aims of CSL, and that they take seriously their role as co-educators. In particular, their comments recognized that the placement was oriented to learning.

*"It requires more thinking / critical insight." (repeat partner)*

*"Identify what they expect to learn." (first-time partner)*

*"They have an added pressure because of their other classes and assignments." (first-time partner)*

*"The roles and expectations are different." (first-time partner)*

As shown earlier (see page 9), some students' comments showed sensitivity to community organizations' challenges of integrating CSL effectively.

These comments, along with community partners' own reflections on their experiences, suggest that community placement organizations would benefit from greater understanding of the role / contribution & connection of community work to course and course work. It would be useful for the CSL Program to undertake more up-front work with potential first-time and repeat community partners with respect to the qualities of CSL placements that create positive learning opportunities for students. This is particularly important because they are interested in knowing more, and:

- 56% of community partners thought they knew enough about the aims of CSL
- 63% of first-time community partners were not familiar with CSL before participating
- 63% of first-time community partners felt they had appropriate knowledge to make the placement relevant to the student(s)

➤ **Non-CSL students also benefit from CSL**

⇒ **Non-CSL students relatively satisfied with their CSL courses**

- 76% learned a lot in their CSL courses (compared to 87% of CSL students)
- 62% had a positive impression of CSL
- 57% would consider CSL in the future (only 10% would not, 33% not sure)
- 47% would recommend CSL to their peers

⇒ **Non-CSL students' learning consistent with CSL aims**

A relatively small proportion of non-CSL students (12%) regretted not participating in CSL. Yet at least 1/3 of all non-CSL students identified learning from being in a CSL course in domains consistent with CSL aims. (See Table 11) These results suggest that even students do not want to participate in CSL benefit from being in a CSL course.

**Table 11. What non-CSL students found useful about being in a CSL course, 2008-09**

What non-CSL students found useful (N=173)	Proportion of non-CSL students
I became aware of several organizations I did not know about before.	83%
I enjoyed learning about the projects CSL students were involved in.	44%
I learned about the struggles faced by community organizations.	36%
It was useful to learn that Edmonton has so many organizations engaged in my area of interest.	35%
CSL students brought learning from outside experiences that we would not have known about otherwise.	34%

Illustrative comments from non-CSL students who observed that CSL “worked.”

*"CSL sounds like a very interesting and helpful way to give back to the community. It is a unique way to look at volunteering."*

*"It gave a great experience to those involved, which sparked interests in others to know more about the various volunteer programs."*

Finally, a number of students who regretted not participating in CSL noted that they appreciated the possibilities of CSL, especially after hearing the presentations; thought that applying their classroom knowledge would have enhanced their knowledge; and that it would have been “more enjoyable” than the assignment they had completed instead. Some who had anticipated that CSL would be too time-consuming had altered their opinions after hearing the presentations.

➤ **Learning style may be a factor in students' decisions to participate in CSL**

⇒ **CSL & non-CSL students make different choices under similar circumstances**

All CSL students are “busy” (in terms of course loads, amount of paid work, and other commitments). Non-CSL students identified a number of reasons for choosing not to participate in CSL. Some of these were associated with logistics of CSL partners and sites. However, among non-CSL students,

- the most frequently cited reason (70%) for choosing not to participate in CSL was lack of time
- 37% gave their learning style as a reason for not participating, checking the category "I prefer to work on my own, at my own pace."

⇒ **CSL & non-CSL students experience or perceive information about CSL differently**

Further, it seems that CSL and non-CSL students have very different experiences or perceptions of information provided about CSL at the beginning of term, or they internalize and / or assess it differently. This result reinforces the hypothesis that learning style shapes the choice to participate in CSL, suggesting that CSL and non-CSL students differ in some respects pertinent to learning. (See Table 12)

Some students suggested that the CSL Program and the CSL partners need to do a better job of introducing the purpose of CSL and the projects to students in CSL courses.

**Table 12. Selected perceptions of CSL, 2008-09**

Selected perception	CSL students	Non-CSL students	Total
I had enough information about the aims of CSL.	77%	68%	73%
I had enough information about the expectations of me as a CSL student.	72%	60%	67%
I was able to see how to integrate CSL in to the course objectives.	80%	59%	70%
There was an adequate number of partners from which to choose a suitable placement.	72%	50%	62%

➤ **Directions for the CSL Program**

Taken together, the 2008-2009 results suggest that the CSL Program will benefit from more up-front work in the following areas:

- with community partners with respect to the qualities of CSL placements that create positive learning opportunities for students.
- with instructors with a prospective syllabus to maximize a good fit between stated course goals & objectives, teaching strategies, alignment of student assessment with course objectives, as well as relevant placement sites and projects.
- with students to provide clear information about the parameters and expectations of community service-learning.
- with all CSL participants to maximize understanding of the role / contribution & connection of community work to course and course work.

➤ **Directions for further exploration**

The 2008-2009 evaluation surfaced a number of interesting questions for future exploration, including the following:

⇒ **What teaching / learning strategies foster links between coursework and community experiences?**

Over the years, a larger proportion of CSL students has consistently reported that coursework contributed to understanding of their community experiences than community experiences contributed to understanding course material. One explanation is that students learn in different ways and that therefore some students likely make connections through their community experiences, while others make connections through their coursework. In other words, it is likely that CSL students “latch onto” different dimensions of CSL. Additionally, the finding that 37% of non-CSL students who chose *not* to participate in CSL attributed their choice to they learning style - working on their own, at their own pace – supports the notion that there may be differences in learning styles between CSL and non-CSL students.

Over the years, instructors have identified new types of assignments they have used when integrating CSL into their courses. Among these are journals, a course pack, project guides, on-line assignments, new written assignments, and ethics review / protocols. However, from

the data we have at this time, we do not know how these new assignments are used and how they facilitate teaching/ learning through CSL.

More broadly, ongoing evaluation of instructors' experiences with CSL raises questions about what makes good teaching in CSL and other experiential approaches to education.

- What is the link between good teaching and learning? Is teaching a conscious act?
- What do instructors mean when they report on improved teaching skills or practices?

Perhaps a better question for the CSL Program to ask is whether instructors tried something new in their teaching, what it was, and what pedagogical purposes it served.

- Since CSL students and instructors clearly value CSL for reasons that go beyond academic course content, how do or how can instructors use these reasons as entry points for teaching and learning?

⇒ **How do CSL participants assess the potential and actual value of CSL?**

- What indicators shape instructors' perceptions of the value of CSL to their students? What are instructors seeing and hearing that would be helpful for the CSL Program in evaluating the value of CSL?
- How do CSL and non-CSL students assess the applicability of CSL projects and organizations to their learning and to the course prior to participating in them?
- What indicators shape community partners' perceptions of the value of CSL to students? Are their perceptions generic – that is related to their hopes for what students will gain from their CSL involvement, or are they specific to the particular students involved in their organizations?
- How do students, instructors, and community partners understand increased skills as an outcome of CSL? In other words, when participants say that CSL has contributed to increased skills, what is it they are experiencing or observing?

⇒ **How do community partners assess the value of their involvement in CSL?**

- In what ways does CSL help community partners to develop their volunteer mentoring skills? And what are the implications of this contribution?
- In what ways does involvement in CSL help community partners contribute to social change?
- What is it that community partners do to foster the longer-term less tangible outcomes of student placements?

⇒ **How can the differences in instructors and community partners' ratings compared to students' ratings of CSL be understood?**

- Why is it that the proportions of instructors and community partners with positive impressions of CSL have consistently been higher than the proportions of CSL students with positive impressions of CSL?

⇒ **What do students mean by they learn a lot in the course? What are the implications of this for CSL?**

⇒ **What contributes to students' understanding of the work that an organization does?**

- Does it come from their experience and the mentoring in the placement? Or from the theoretical insights gleaned from course work and the way in which organizations are taken up in class? Or both?

⇒ **What is it about CSL that enhances some *non-CSL* students' learning?**

- Do these benefits to non-CSL students occur only in particular CSL courses? For example, are these courses in which CSL is more effectively integrated through such strategies as making CSL visible and fostering sharing of CSL learning through discussion and other whole-class opportunities?

The 2008-2009 surveys place emphasis on gaining better understanding of the teaching / learning strategies that result in positive and integrative learning experiences for students, from the perspectives of instructors, students and community partners.