



UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
FACULTY OF ARTS

2011-  
2012

University of Alberta Community Service-Learning  
EVALUATION REPORT



Community  
Service-Learning

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2011-2012

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## **Introduction**

The 2011/2012 academic year marks the seventh annual Community Service-Learning (CSL) Evaluation Report. The evaluation program assists the University of Alberta CSL program with learning more about the program's strengths and areas of improvement. The following pages outline our findings and analysis in key areas such as overall satisfaction with the program, areas of learning, reciprocal benefits of CSL to students and the community, and barriers for participation in CSL.

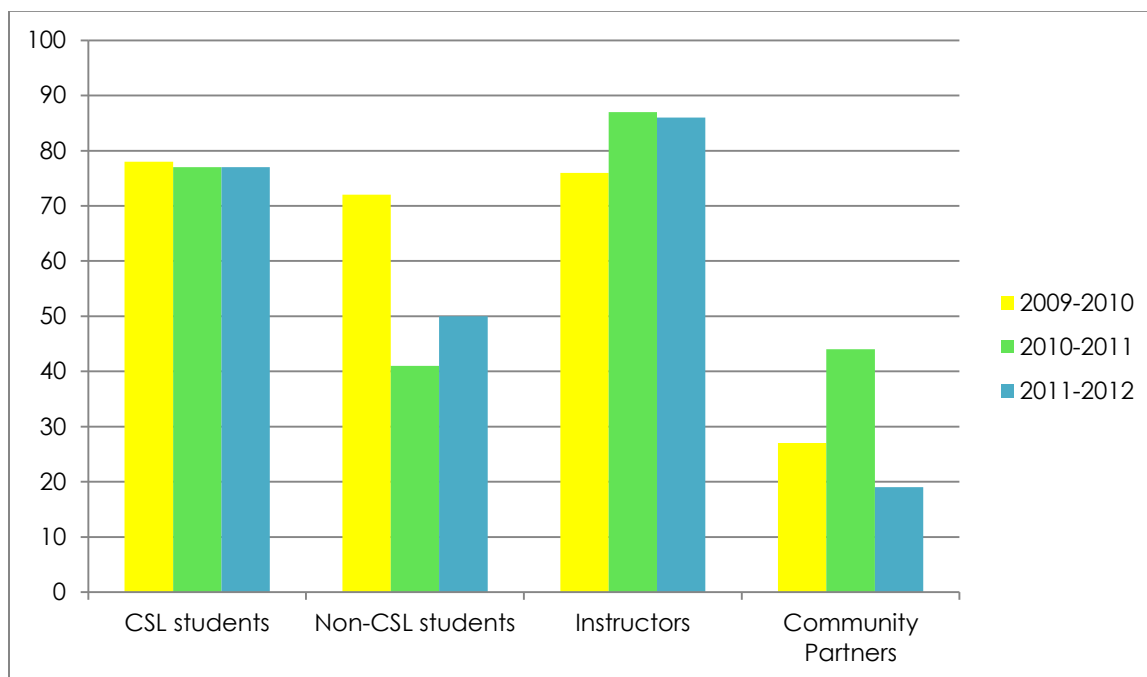
To see previous evaluation reports or to learn more about the CSL program at the University of Alberta, please visit our website at [www.csl.ualberta.ca](http://www.csl.ualberta.ca).

## Methodology

Surveys were distributed at the end of the term to CSL students, non-CSL students<sup>1</sup>, instructors, and community partners. Students and instructors filled out their evaluations during class time at the end of term. Community partner surveys were emailed as well as handed out at the end of the term at a CSL event. Quantitative results were entered into the SPSS statistical program and frequency tests were applied to the results. Qualitative results were coded for themes. In February, there were two focus groups held with community partners in order to gain more insight into the community partner experience. We sought to have a mix of more seasoned and newer community partners, as well as partners from a variety of campus and off-campus sites. Participants were invited based on these criteria. The transcripts of the focus groups were coded for themes.

The following are the response rates for the surveys that were distributed:

Figure 1



The response rate for community partners is significantly lower. This rate points to the need for more innovative ways to reach out to community partners in order to receive their feedback on CSL.

<sup>1</sup> Non-CSL students are students who choose not to participate in the CSL component of a course where CSL is optional.

## Statistics at a Glance:

# EVALUATION 2011-2012

### CSL STUDENTS

- 799 registered in CSL component of course
- 77% completed surveys
- 80% in a CSL course for the first time

Gender:  
Female: 76%, Male: 22%

Age:  
74% 22 years or younger

Mean years of post-secondary:  
4 years

Working towards CSL certificate:  
15%

Learned a lot overall: 84%

Would recommend CSL to peers: 73%

Developed transferable skills: 66%

Placement enhanced understanding of course: 61%

Course work & instruction enhanced understanding of community: 74%

Received appropriate guidance from community partner: 64%

### NON-CSL STUDENTS

- 763 registered in CSL courses
- 50% completed surveys
- 84% in a CSL course for the first time

Gender:  
Female: 66%, Male: 34%

Age:  
79% 22 years or younger

Mean years of post-secondary:  
3.5 years

Knew the course had a CSL component when enrolled:  
14%

Learned a lot overall: 76%

Would recommend CSL to peers: 35%

Regret decision not to participate: 17%

Being in CSL class enhanced learning: 26%

Led to understanding of how can contribute to social change: 39%

Led to understanding of complexities of social issues: 46%

### INSTRUCTORS + COURSES

- 44 different instructors
- 86% completed surveys
- 63 courses

Gender:  
Female: 54%, Male: 46%

Mean years of teaching:  
10 years

CSL was a mandatory part of the course:  
39%

Taught CSL for the first time:  
31%

Students learned a lot overall: 88%

Would recommend CSL to peers: 98%

Provided students with opportunities to reflect on learning: 88%

CSL helped students to develop transferable skills: 88%

CSL helped students understand how to contribute to social change: 90%

Improved teaching skills: 73%

### COMMUNITY PARTNERS

- 102 community partners
- 19% completed surveys
- 12 participated in focus groups

Gender:  
Female: 63%, Male: 37%

Mean years in non-profits:  
7 years

Mean number of students mentored:  
4 students

Students completed projects:  
87% said "Yes"

Students learned a lot overall: 94%

Would recommend CSL to peers: 100%

Provided students opportunities to reflect on learning: 72%

CSL helped students develop transferable skills: 89%

CSL helped students understand how to contribute to social change: 89%

Deepened university relations: 89%

## Profile of Respondents

Below is a comparison of the profile of the respondents over the past three years. Because of the low response rate from community partners, their profile characteristics have not been included:

Figure 2

### CSL Students

Category	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
<b>Average age</b>	22 years	21 years	22 years
<b>Average years of post-secondary</b>	3 years	4 years	4 years
<b>Gender</b>	73% female 27% male	78% female 21% male	76% female 22% male
<b>Number of CSL participants</b>	287	459	799

Figure 3

### Instructors

Category	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
<b>Number of different instructors</b>	27	34	44
<b>Number of new instructors</b>	8	9	15
<b>Number of CSL courses</b>	41	55	63
<b>Courses where CSL is mandatory</b>	17	10	26

Figure 4

### Community Partners

Category	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012
<b>Number of Community Partners</b>	94	102	102

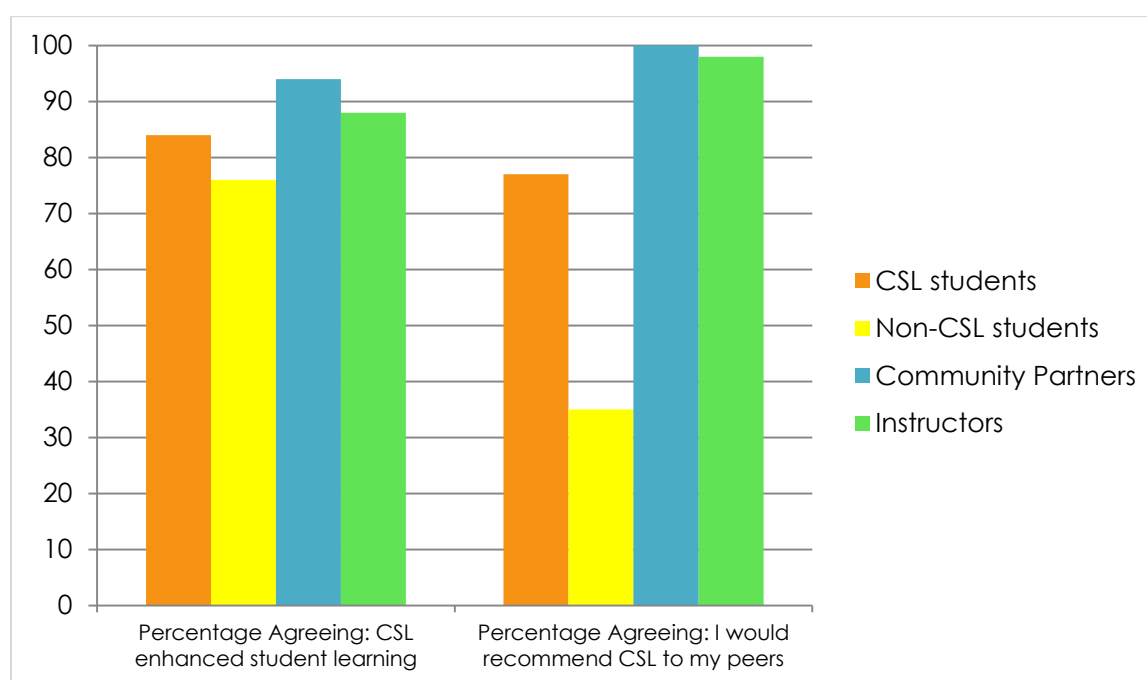
## Quantitative Findings and Analysis

The quantitative questions and results from the surveys have been divided into four categories: satisfaction rate for CSL as a pedagogical process, areas of contextual learning, the CSL program structure, and connections between course learning and placement learning. Similar questions have been asked of the different respondents in order to compare results across groups.

### Category 1: Satisfaction rate for CSL as a pedagogical process

This group of questions measures respondents' overall satisfactions with CSL as a pedagogical tool.

Figure 5



### Analysis:

Overall, there is a high satisfaction rate with CSL as a pedagogical approach. As *Figure 5* indicates, there is a slightly lower level of agreement among students. A possible explanation is that because CSL is a non-traditional form of learning which disrupts the notion of what is conventionally thought of as “good learning”<sup>2</sup>; community partners who are working in the field and instructors who have chosen to incorporate this form of

<sup>2</sup> Butin, D. W. (2005). “Service-Learning as Postmodern Pedagogy” in D. W. Butin (Ed.) *Service-Learning in Higher Education: Critical Issues and Directions*. Palgrave.

learning into their course, may be slightly more aware of its benefits. Moreover, because CSL placements are only 20 hours over one term, it may be difficult for students to determine in such a short period whether their learning increased. A follow-up study after the term may be helpful.

While most respondents would recommend CSL to their peers, there was a markedly lower rate of non-CSL respondents who responded affirmatively. The qualitative responses of non-CSL students that will be discussed in the following section suggest that this is not necessarily because non-CSL students do not value CSL. Rather, some non-CSL students have limited contact with the CSL component in their course, and therefore lack knowledge about the CSL program.

### Category 2: Areas of contextual learning

This group of questions measures how a student has developed their skills and knowledge in relation to their CSL experiences in the community.

Figure 6

		CSL Students	Non-CSL Students	Instructors	Community Partners
CSL helped students understand how to contribute to social change	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>90%</b>	<b>89%</b>
	2010/2011	78%	48%	95%	94%
CSL helped students to develop skills.	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>66%</b>	<i>N/A</i>	<b>88%</b>	<b>89%</b>
	2010/2011	71%	<i>N/A</i>	93%	92%
CSL helped students understand some of the complexities of social issues.	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>78%</b>
	2010/2011	80%	45%	98%	91%
Involvement in CSL made students more aware of the knowledge generated by both community organizations and universities.	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>83%</b>
	2010/2011	84%	55%	79%	79%

### Analysis:

The results in *Figure 6* show that there are slightly higher levels of agreement from instructors and community partners about knowledge and skill development. Again, these higher levels may be explained by the short time period for students to assess their



learning. These evaluation surveys are conducted during the last two and a half weeks of the term. Students may not have had closure on their placement yet before filling out these surveys and therefore may not be in a prime position to comment on all of their areas of learning.

There is also a slight decrease in reported levels of learning across all groups. A possible explanation is that the number of CSL participants nearly doubled this year compared to the previous year; therefore there may be some growing pains in providing the same level of support to all classes and community partners. An analysis for statistical significance would be helpful in order to assess whether this slight decrease is statistically significant, given the large increase in participants. Another possible explanation is that there was an increase in larger classes over the year with a CSL component. In most of these classes, CSL was not mandatory. Therefore, the instructors may have had less time to devote to helping CSL students develop their analysis of their learning experience than instructors in smaller courses, especially where CSL is mandatory.

As Figure 6 indicates, even non-CSL students have reported that CSL has activated their learning about social issues and different types of knowledge. While the values are somewhat lower, if we controlled for classes where CSL is addressed minimally for non-CSL students, the values could be higher. This topic will be discussed further in the qualitative results section.

### Category 3: The CSL program structure

These questions evaluate respondents' perceptions on how well the CSL program is set up.

Figure 7

		CSL Students	Non-CSL Students	Instructors	Community Partners
<b>Overall, there was a good fit between the placement and the course.</b>	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>71%</b>	N/A	<b>90%</b>	<b>100%</b>
	2010/2011	80%	N/A	90%	92%
<b>There was adequate communication between the student, the instructor, and the community partner to facilitate a meaningful CSL experience.</b>	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>66%</b>	N/A	<b>73%</b>	<b>78%</b>
	2010/2011	71%	N/A	81%	85%

		CSL Students	Non-CSL Students	Instructors	Community Partners
<b>CSL staff provided assistance and support in integrating CSL into my work.</b>	<b>2011/2012</b>	N/A	N/A	<b>94%</b>	<b>94%</b>
	2010/2011	N/A	N/A	91%	81%
<b>I knew enough about the aims of CSL before deciding whether or not to become involved.</b>	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>72%</b>
	2010/2011	44%	61%	93%	85%

### Analysis:

While the majority of the respondents believed that there was a good fit between the CSL placements and the courses, there is a lower rate of response among students. Again, a possible cause may be that the fit between the course and the placement may be more readily apparent to the instructors and community partners because they have spent a longer time planning the placement while the students are newly introduced. There has also been a large increase in the number of students completing CSL this year, especially in first year classes. CSL may be a newer concept to them and therefore they may not make the connections as readily between the course and the placement. Larger classes with only a small number of students completing the CSL component may also mean that instructors have less time to work with students to make the connections between the placement and the course.

In terms of whether there was adequate communication between the CSL participants, the instructors, and the community partners, there was an overall decrease from 2010/2011. This may be explained by the high number of new instructors and community partners. A key finding in the 2008-2009 CSL evaluation was that instructors felt that their integration of CSL into their course increased with experience. In the Community Partner focus groups, discussed below, a number of community partners spoke about how CSL can feel a bit overwhelming when you are a new community partner.

Finally, although our survey findings show that there is a high satisfaction rate with support from the CSL office, the percentage of respondents who felt they had adequate knowledge about the aims of CSL before becoming involved is relatively low. This suggests that although there is satisfaction with the logistical support received around CSL, there may not be enough time for respondents to learn about the aims and theory behind service-learning. More opportunities to learn about CSL as a pedagogy may be needed.

#### Category 4: Connections between course learning and placement learning

This group of questions measures the respondents' perceptions about the pedagogical connections between course learning and placements.

Figure 8

		CSL Students	Non-CSL Students	Instructors	Community Partners
Students were provided with useful opportunities to reflect on and learn from my CSL experience.	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>75%</b>	N/A	<b>88%</b>	<b>72%</b>
	2010/2011	74%	N/A	83%	77%
Course work and class instruction enhanced students' ability to understand their community experience.	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>74%</b>	N/A*	<b>86%</b>	<b>61%</b>
	2010/2011	78%	N/A*	81%	77%
Students' community placement experience enhanced their ability to understand the course material.	<b>2011/2012</b>	<b>61%</b>	N/A*	<b>82%</b>	<b>72%</b>
	2010/2011	64%	N/A*	83%	75%

\*A similar question was posed to non-CSL student participants, which asked whether they could see the connections between the course and the CSL placement. 69% agreed that they could in 2011/2012 and 70% in 2010/2011.

#### Analysis:

There is a higher percentage of instructors who saw an interplay between the coursework and the community placements. A possible explanation is that from their particular vantage point, instructors may have a different perspective on other forms of learning taking place that are not readily apparent. Instructors are more used to judging whether learning has taken place. As discussed above, students sometime may need a gestational period after their 20 hour placement period to reflect on the connections between the course material and the placement. Instructors may also have more information than the community partners to make that judgment because they have the benefit of both knowing the course material in depth and reviewing student projects and assignments related to their CSL placement. Another possibility, which is addressed in the qualitative section below, is that students may not know enough about their impact on the community, and community partners may not know enough about the course content to comment on the strength of the connection

between the course and placement. Increased communication between the instructors, students, and the community partners around the syllabus may help to ensure that there is a stronger visible connection between the placement and the course material. This may also allow the community partners to assist the students with making connections with their course material.

## Qualitative Data

The qualitative section of this reports focuses on three areas: (1) CSL students, non-CSL students, instructors, and community partners were all asked about their perceptions of the benefits of CSL for both community organizations and students (2) Non-CSL students were asked an open-ended question about their reasons for choosing not to participate in CSL (3) Community Partners were invited to a focus group to discuss the community partner perspective and how our program could meet their needs. The findings are presented and discussed in this section.

The quotes used throughout this section are examples of representative quotes of the dominant themes that were found in the responses.

### Reciprocal Benefits

This year, the theme of the qualitative section of this evaluation study was to focus on the reciprocal benefits of CSL between students and community partners. The respondent groups were asked questions on the survey about their perceptions of what students and community partners gained from being involved in CSL. The findings for each group are presented below.

#### CSL Students

Figure 9

#### Survey Question: What did you learn from your placement?

##### **Community experiences reinforced course concepts:**

*"I learned that life exists outside the classroom. It is one thing to sit inside and read about a social issue. It is a completely different thing to see it and view people experiencing it."*

##### **Practical experience enhanced skill development:**

*"I learned a lot about how to deal with teaching difficulties that I had no idea how to solve before my placement. I feel like I gained a lot of great experience and knowledge about this field in which I'm striving towards."*

##### **Increased awareness of complexities in the community:**

*"I learned a sense of the challenges that organizations that work with marginalized women face, especially with regards to funding and resources. I also learned more about the lives and experiences of the clients that utilize the services and how difficult the transition out of prostitution can be."*

Figure 10

**Survey Question: What effects do you think your presence and participation had at your community organization?**

**Positively impacted the users and clients of community organizations:**

*"We have helped to build a library for immigrants to read to their children in their first language, which helps with the first and second language literacy and effective parenting."*

**Helped to increase the capacity of the organization:**

*"I think my presence minimized the amount of smaller tasks that the organization had to do. By having me doing these smaller tasks, the organization could work and focus on bigger jobs."*

**Contributed skills and knowledge:**

*"The teacher was able to use an evaluation technique we introduced. I think this tool helped the kids be more critical of their participation."*

**Not sure/hope they helped:**

*"Not sure. Hopefully it was a positive experience for the children. I hope that the students gained confidence and esteem from their successes in the challenges I asked them to engage in."*

## Community Partners

Figure 11

**Survey Question: What do you think CSL students learned by being with your organization?**

**Practical experience enhanced skill development:**

*"[Students] developed interpersonal skills, and ways to engage our clients in a therapeutic manner. They practiced listening skills, assisting clients with life skills, and working in a team treatment environment."*

**Increased awareness of complexities in the community:**

*"I think the students were able to have a 'real' experience of the social issues in Edmonton. I think all of the students were able to use all of their senses to have a better understanding of the issues facing individuals facing multiple barriers and to have a greater understanding for themselves that issues are not all black and white."*

Figure 12

**Survey Question: What effects do you think the presence and participation of CSL students had at your organization?**

**Helped to increase organizational capacity:**

*"[CSL students] have supported us in developing tools we likely would not have been able to do without them."*

**Contributed new ideas, skills, and enthusiasm:**

*"[CSL students] were admired by our other volunteers for their interest and enthusiasm in promoting [our organization]. Staff appreciated their ideas and help with special projects."*

**Instructors**

Figure 13

**Survey Question: From what you observed, what did the CSL students and the community partners learn from one another?**

**Students enhanced skill development through practical experience:**

*"Students developed teaching skills and leadership, which was beyond the course's goals."*

**Students gained community work experience:**

*"CSL students learned how to function in a 'real' research environment and began to understand the complexities of working for a local organization."*

**Students developed their understanding of how community experiences reinforced course concepts:**

*"Students learned how the class work they do and skills they acquired can help others in the real world."*

**Community partners benefitted from students' knowledge and skills:**

*"CSL partners learned some new skills and resources from the students."*

**Community partners benefitted from increased organizational capacity:**

*"The partners benefitted from dedicated, capable students who really worked hard to meet the needs/requests of the partners."*

## Non-CSL Students

Figure 14

<b>Survey Question: From what you observed, what did the CSL students and the community partners learn from one another?</b>
<b>Students enhanced skill development through practical experience:</b> <i>"They learned how to work with children with behavioral issues, how to adapt/modify games based on space, available equipment, and participants."</i>
<b>Don't know what the reciprocal benefits were:</b> <i>"Placement weren't discussed very often during class time."</i>
<b>Students developed their understanding of social issues and of working in the community:</b> <i>"The complexity of addiction, the differences in ways of living, the stigmas different types of people face."</i>
<b>Students developed their understanding of how community experiences relate to course concepts:</b> <i>"Sounds like they learned about the difficulties of practically applying concepts learned in class as well as difficulties and the importance of modification."</i>

Figure 15

<b>Survey Question: What did you learn from having a CSL component in your course?</b>
<p><b>Developed understanding of how community experiences reinforced course concepts:</b></p> <p><i>"I learned about the difficulties one can have in a classroom and that just knowing a theory is not enough and theories do not always work out. It helped me see what I had been taught in class in a real world situation."</i></p>
<p><b>Did not learn much from CSL:</b></p> <p><i>"As a non-participant in this class we never had anything to do with the CSL component."</i></p>
<p><b>Learned more about the community sector and opportunities to do CSL:</b></p> <p><i>"Since I did not participate, I guess my biggest lesson was that the opportunity for CSL exists. I didn't know what it was before and now I know for possible future participation or recommendation to others."</i></p>
<p><b>Developed understanding of social issues:</b></p> <p><i>"The relationships between global issues in the past like imperialism, colonialism, and dichotomies and current issues faced by the disabled, the immigrants and other individuals."</i></p>
<p><b>Learned about developing practical skills:</b></p> <p><i>"I learnt what it is like to evaluate a program. How much work it requires."</i></p>

### **Analysis:**

There were common themes across all groups of what respondents perceived to be the benefits to students and community partners. All groups perceived students to be gaining skill development, an increased awareness of the connections between course concepts and community experiences, and an increased awareness of social issues and the community sector. Some of the types of developing skills that were listed were group facilitation, translation, and problem-solving. Within the community sector category, students described both the benefits of learning more about community organizations as well as getting to know and learning from different populations such as children, immigrants, and the homeless who used these organizations. Interestingly, when non-CSL students were asked about their learning in a CSL course, many students listed similar areas of learning. This suggests that non-CSL students benefit from being in CSL courses. In a number of classes, CSL was not discussed in detail and therefore a number of respondents in this category indicated that CSL had a reduced impact on their experience in the course.

There was less material in the data on how the community partners benefitted. This was due to the low response rate of community partner surveys as well as the fewer and more tentative responses from instructors, CSL students, and non-CSL students about the benefits to community partners. Yet there were still common themes across groups. Most respondents named increased organizational capacity and benefitting from



student skills and knowledge as two of the most common benefits to community organizations. However, most CSL students also named their positive impact on clients and on users of CSL organizations as the biggest contribution to community organizations. This may be the most apparent benefit to students, as many of them commented that the clients were often appreciative of their work and their presence. Many CSL students also used tentative language and spoke about how they were not sure of their benefits and that they hoped they helped. Similarly, there was a low response rate from non-CSL students and instructors on their understanding of the benefits of CSL to community partners. This finding suggests that the CSL model at the University of Alberta would benefit from an increased opportunity for community partners to communicate how CSL fits within their organization and benefits it. Strengthening this concept could help to develop the overall understanding of CSL as a pedagogical approach and to develop students' perceptions of the type of learning that is taking place through CSL.

### **Barriers to Participation**

In the qualitative response section of the student evaluation surveys, non-CSL-participants were asked to respond to the following prompt: "Briefly describe your reasons for not participating in CSL this term. (For example, some aspect of the course, the placements, or your personal circumstances, etc. Please elaborate.)" The following are the most dominant themes that emerged from the data.

Figure 16

#### **Time**

The overwhelming majority of students identified time and availability as barriers to participation. The challenges of balancing a heavy course load with other volunteer positions and/or paid employment were most frequently identified as the causes of time constraints. Students also flagged sports, social life, and personal commitments as preventing them from having time to participate in CSL. Other students simply had schedules that conflicted with the meeting time(s) offered by the community partner(s). For some students it was a matter of prioritizing academic engagement over community engagement.

*"I work to be able to pay for my tuition. The demands of work plus a full course load does not allow me the time to participate in CSL."*

*"I'm currently in 6 courses and about to graduate so I wasn't willing to commit to the additional hours. It was a very tough decision but I definitely would have done it if I had the time."*

Figure 17

**Transportation**

A number of students were dissuaded by the location of the community placement. Either they did not have a car and were uncomfortable with public transit, or they lived outside of the city and the daily commute was a limiting factor in their schedule. Some students stated that they would have participated in CSL had there been a placement situated closer to their home.

*"I don't have a vehicle and I was worried about getting to and from placements."*

*"I live in Sherwood Park and work minimal hours as it is so I can focus on school. I did not want to have to commute into Edmonton and fit extra time into my busy schedule even though I wanted to. If there were placements closer to Sherwood Park, I would have done it for sure as it sounded great."*

Figure 18

**Didn't get the opportunity**

Many students registered in their class late and either missed the deadline to enroll in the CSL component or missed the introduction to CSL and therefore were uninformed about the option. Some indicated that they would have liked to participate had the opportunity been presented to them. Others said they had wanted to participate in CSL but were unable to because there were a limited number of placements available in the class. A few students intended to participate but did not get the opportunity due to failed communication with the community partner.

*"I enrolled in the class too late to participate in CSL."*

*"I spoke with the prof about doing CSL – I was very interested but the spots had already filled up."*

Figure 19

**Not beneficial**

Students expressed a few different reasons as to why they did not believe the CSL placement would be beneficial to them. Some did not see the connection to course content and felt that it would not reinforce in-class learning. Many were already volunteering elsewhere and did not feel the need to connect with another not-for-profit organization. Others did not see the value in participating if they were not able to obtain a CSL certificate.

*"Didn't seem applicable to course content."*

*"I have reached my credit limit and it is my final semester. Would have willingly participated if I knew about it earlier in my degree."*

Figure 20

**Qualifications**

A few students felt that they didn't have the appropriate skill sets to be able to do a good job in the service-learning component and therefore decided to opt out.

*"English is my second language. Most CSL tasks are helping other's language or homework. I don't think I can help."*

*"Did not know anything about Latin American studies, wouldn't have been that much of an asset."*

Figure 21

**Preferred the other option**

There were a number of students who simply found that the other option available in their class appealed to them more than the service-learning option.

*"I am good at writing essays so I chose to do that for 40% of my mark instead."*

*"I do have a busy schedule, but also we were offered the option of taking a more theoretical rather than practical route in this course. Since my Spanish is not very strong and I don't plan to pursue it, I wanted to study theory because it can be applied to the language that I am planning to pursue."*

Figure 22

**Placements didn't appeal**

Commonly, students found that the particular placements offered in their class didn't align with their interests.

*"I'm not interested in becoming a teacher or working with children so it didn't really apply to me."*

*"The placements weren't too different from what I've done previously so it held no interest for me."*

**Analysis:**

The majority of responses in this section indicated time and scheduling as the primary limiting factor to participation in CSL. This trend aligns with general feedback from CSL participants who commonly identified time management and expectations as a significant challenge in their service-learning experience. This finding is consistent with previous years of our program evaluation. The other most prominent barriers included

missed opportunity due to late registration, lack of interest in the available placements, and transportation concerns. Based on these findings, there are three fundamental routes to encouraging greater participation rates:

1. Bolstering acknowledgment and recognition of the value of service learning for a particular course so as to increase student desire to participate and increase student motivation to overcome logistical challenges such as time management.
2. Exploring how we can diminish logistical barriers such as limited availability of CSL placements within a class, scheduling conflicts, transportation issues, and communication lapses that arise from high frequency of late registration in courses.
3. Addressing time commitment barriers by encouraging instructors a) to explore more possibilities for their students to integrate pre-existing volunteer commitments into course content and b) to demonstrate to students at the beginning of the term how the CSL and non-CSL option require an equal amount of time commitment.

### **Community Partner Study**

Two focus groups were carried out with community partners this past year in order to gain more insight into the community partner experience and learn about areas where support may be needed. The results of the focus group were coded and categorized into dominant themes. Sub-themes are presented below each theme.

Figure 23

#### **What Community Partners get/hope to get from CSL**

##### **Enriched workplace:**

*"In a practical way, having the students arrive, it makes us more aware of our deadline and ensure[s] that we are moving forward."*

##### **Program supports and increased capacity:**

*"Because we're a non-profit, we want to use students' talents & skills as much as possible."*

##### **Further organization's commitment to public engagement and education:**

*"Our organization has an interest in working with diverse areas of the university in order to promote its own vision of integrative education as well as nurture stronger relationships between the university & our clients."*

Figure 24

<b>Ways in which community partners view their role</b>
<p><b>Part of a larger partnership:</b></p> <p><i>“Frequent communication and laying out expectations early [with students and professors], striving to meet those expectations and discussing where there are failings and how to overcome them if it doesn’t work.”</i></p>
<p><b>Responsive to student needs:</b></p> <p><i>“[It is important to have] empathy. If a student doesn’t understand a situation, we need to take the time to explain to the student something that seems obvious to us.”</i></p>
<p><b>On a continuum between supervisor and co-educator:</b></p> <p><i>“Unfortunately, I feel more like a supervisor rather than a co-educator. Feel that this is a challenge we have.”</i></p>

Figure 25

<b>Barriers faced by Community Partners</b>
<p><b>Feelings of partnership inequity:</b></p> <p><i>“[I] always feel like the ‘responsible’ one for making sure the placement goes smoothly.”</i></p>
<p><b>Internal organizational:</b></p> <p><i>“We work in an industry where the ground is always shifting and things can change in the office. [We are] not always able to be a co-educator and provide the support [that we would like to].”</i></p>
<p><b>Logistics and pre-planning:</b></p> <p><i>“Can be difficult [to plan] when don’t know how many students we will get.”</i></p>
<p><b>Unknown factors about students:</b></p> <p><i>“[If] CSL students tend to be younger, sometimes have to give them little pointers – eg., no texting, dress appropriately.”</i></p>

Figure 26

**Additional supports needed****Placement-oriented supports:**

*"I don't want to be a police, but there should be something where we can sign off on for the hours so we are aware of the hours."*

**Supports for the community organization as a whole:**

*"If the CSL team expands, I would love to see it include faculty who have sustainable funding expertise as well as evaluation expertise and who may be able to connect community-driven projects/coursework with industry, philanthropists, government policy so that the shelf-life of some of these valuable experiences is extended. A media educator/graphic artist would also be a valuable addition."*

**Analysis:**

The theme of what partners get and hope to get from participating in CSL provides more insight into the benefits of CSL for community partners. While partners re-iterated the important role that CSL can play in increasing organizational capacity, a common theme that emerged was also how student presence enriched their workplace. This theme is consistent with the prevalent student response in the previous section where students felt that they contributed a positive presence and positive impact on clients.

When reflecting on their roles as community partners, many partners spoke of the importance of communication between themselves, professors, and students in order to make the CSL placement successful. They also spoke about how this could be difficult when everyone was facing time constraints. This suggests that an important role that the CSL program could continue to play is to help the different partners in the CSL process communicate more easily, especially under time and resource constraints.

Community partners also felt that it was important for them to be responsive to student needs. When they spoke about their role in relation to students, they used a number of different titles such as role model, life skills teacher, problem solver, advocate, and CSL facilitator. This suggests that community partners, to some extent, see their role as changing and organic. However, community partners also expressed constraints inherent in their role, particularly in terms of whether they saw themselves as a community supervisor or a co-educator. More partners saw themselves as a supervisor because they simply did not have the time to be a co-educator. However, as *Clayton*

*et al.*<sup>3</sup> have argued, a co-educative role is not always better in all contexts, and in a short, 20 hour placement, a supervisory role may be more appropriate.

When asked about the challenges facing community partners, the lack of time, resources, and ability to plan were prevalent throughout the listed barriers. Some community partners expressed the desire to have a closer relationship with the professors and more frequent visits from professors and/or CSL staff to their site. Another barrier was related to internal organization where partners felt that they did not always have the resources or time to take on as many students or to support them in the way that they would like. The other two barriers (logistics and student unknowns) relate to community partners needing to be responsive to factors that they do not find out about until the beginning of term. The CSL program will need to examine these different stressors and decide which ones can most readily be addressed (e.g., providing students with workplace guidelines on appropriate dress, time management etc. at the beginning of term) and which ones will need to be approached more cautiously.

When asked about supports that the CSL program could provide, it was difficult to categorize the responses beyond placement-specific supports and broader organizational supports. This underscores the uniqueness of each organization and suggests that there is a need for the CSL program to provide differentiated supports that are responsive to community needs. The CSL program has recently hired a second partnership coordinator in order to assist with significant growth in the CSL program, which could also assist with providing more differentiated supports to partners.

## Conclusion

Key findings of the 2011/2012 CSL Evaluation at the University of Alberta included the following:

- The number of students participating in CSL placements nearly doubled from the previous year.
- Overall, the CSL program is perceived as an effective pedagogical model with a high satisfaction rate.
- Students' perceptions of their CSL learning was slightly lower than the perceptions of instructors and community partners. There is also a slight decrease from the 2010/2011 evaluation results.
- When responding to questions about how the CSL program is set up, there is a very high satisfaction rate with the level of support that respondents received from the CSL program office. However, there was a decrease in the number of

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<sup>3</sup> Clayton, P, Bringle, R., Senor, B., Huq, J. & Morrison, M. (2010). Differentiating and Assessing Relationships in Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Exploitative, Transactional, or Transformational. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 16(2), 5-22.

respondents indicating that they knew enough about the aims of CSL before they chose to become involved with the program.

- The majority of respondents reported that there were strong connections between the placements and the course materials. This rate was markedly higher for instructors.
- The majority of respondents indicated that students were benefitting from skill development, increased opportunity to make connections between the course and the community, and increased knowledge about the community sector and the populations with whom they work. Most respondents demonstrated less knowledge of the benefits of CSL to community partners; however, common themes were increasing organizational capacity, receiving specialized skills and knowledge, and benefitting from positive effects on the organization's clients.
- Non-CSL students, in courses where CSL was discussed in class, indicated that they benefitted in similar ways as CSL students (e.g., making more connections between the course and the community, learning more about the community sector, learning about skill development).
- The most common barrier listed by non-CSL students for not participating in the program was lack of time. Other reasons for non-participation included transportation, late registration in the CSL course, and lack of interest.
- Community partners enjoy participating in CSL and gain an enriched workplace, program supports, and an opportunity to further their commitment to education and public engagement. They perceive their role as responsive to students and highly value positive communication between students, instructors, and community partners. The majority of challenges that they face in fulfilling their role as community partner are related to time, resource, and pre-planning constraints.

The following suggestions could assist in strengthening the CSL model:

1. Consider doing regular follow-up studies with a sample of students in order to determine if further learning has taken place after students have finished a course and have had more time to reflect on their CSL experiences.
2. Analyze the student data based on class size and mandatory vs. optional CSL classes in order to gain a deeper understanding of the learning that is taking place among both CSL and non-CSL students. This will also help identify areas in need of extra support.
3. Test the quantitative data for statistical significance.
4. Ensure that community organizations understand the goals of the course and that they have opportunities to communicate to the students and to instructors the benefits of CSL to their organization.
5. Continue to work towards creating more opportunities for all participants in the CSL program to learn about the underlying aims and theory of service-learning.



For example, holding a few brown bag reading and learning opportunities throughout the year.

6. Bolster acknowledgment and recognition of the value of service learning so as to increase student desire to participate and increase student motivation to overcome logistical challenges such as time management.
7. Explore how we can diminish logistical barriers such as scheduling conflicts, transportation issues, and communication lapses that arise from high frequency of late registration in courses.
8. Address time commitment barriers by encouraging instructors a) to explore more possibilities for their students to integrate pre-existing volunteer commitments into course content and b) to demonstrate to students at the beginning of the term how the CSL and non-CSL option require an equal amount of time commitment.
9. Create a section in the CSL manual that addresses workplace guidelines for students who have little work experience (eg. topics such as conduct, dress, punctuality etc.).
10. Further explore the time, resource, and pre-planning stressors for community partners and take steps to provide specialized support to the community organizations.
11. Explore different forms of outreach and evaluation tools in order to increase the response rate of community partners.