Potential Questions to Support Reflection in CEL

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Reflection is a critical component of Community-Engaged Learning (CEL). CEL is facilitated by “reflection whereby experience enhances understanding [and] understanding leads to more effective action” (Eyler & Giles, 1999). This document is based on a literature review and environmental scan of questions to support reflection in CEL. Contact the CEL Office to find out more.

Prepared by the Community-Engaged Learning Office
Personal Development
A gentle reminder that could be shared with students: Keep in mind that while it is often helpful to connect with your emotional learning and development, reflective writing is about making connections between those emotions (when relevant) and your knowledge, experiences, observations, and more. Learning - especially through experience - can be triggering and provide an opportunity to heal, but remember that this is an academic course, not a counselling session.

- Why do you do service? for self-interest or altruism?
- How are you similar/different to the others (others in your service group? others seeking services? Your learning cohort, etc.)? Did you feel like and “outsider” or “insider” and how did that impact your experience? In what ways did being different help/hinder the group?
- If you were one of the people receiving services, what would you think of yourself?
- What are the personal strengths that you relied on and developed during your experience?
- What are characteristics that you need to develop in light of the experience? What will you do to improve?
- How did this experience make you feel (e.g. frustrated, excited, motivated, apathetic) and why? How did you handle your emotional reactions?
- In what way did this experience challenge or reinforce your values, beliefs, or attitudes?
- What do you understand better about yourself as a result of the experience?
- What is the most interesting thing that you discovered about yourself from the experience?
- How did this experience challenge your assumptions and stereotypes?
- How can this experience and the way you navigated it apply to other situations in your life?
- What about your community involvement has been an eye-opening experience?
- How do you motivate yourself to go to work for or with community when you don’t feel like it?
- Do you see benefits of doing community work in relation to your studies and/or as a citizen? Why or why not?
- How are your values expressed through your community work?
- Has the experience affected your worldview? How?
- What sorts of things make you feel uncomfortable when you are working in the community? Why?
- Complete this sentence: Because of my community-engaged learning, I am....
- Have you changed any ideas you used to have on this subject?
- How did those changes come about?
- What does that tell you about yourself and how you learn?
- What questions did your experience raise for you in relation to ______?
- How do you think you will continue to be a part of community after this experience ends?
- What is one thing you did today that made you proud?
**Professional Development**
- How has your service contributed to your growth in any of these areas: civic responsibility/engagement, political consciousness, professional development, spiritual fulfillment, social understanding, intellectual pursuit?
- How can your solutions apply to other problem(s) of other groups?
- What experiences from your past prepare(d) you for this experience?
- Have you done a similar kind of work in the past (earlier in the year or in a previous grade; in school or out of school)?
- In what ways have you gotten better at this kind of work?
- Did you give your best effort? If so, what supported you? If not, what hindered you?
- What insights did you gain from the experience about your professional goals, skills, expertise and direction(s)?
- What is a professional skill that you saw others using during the experience? Describe these skills.
- What professional skills do you want to practice during the experience? Why are these important to you? How will you go about this? How will you know if you are improving?
- Did the experience confirm your expectations about careers and roles in this area or were you surprised?
- Talk about any disappointments/frustrations or successes of your project, in terms of both product and process. What did you learn from it?
- What's one goal you would like to set for yourself for next time?
- What things you might want more help with?
- If a time warp placed you back at the first day of this program, what would you do differently? What would you do the same?

**Social Justice**
- What have you learned about a particular community or societal issue?
- Do you think these people (or situations) are unique? Why or why not?
- What public policies are involved and what are their implications? How can they be improved?
- Who determines what's best for the community?
- How do you define community?
- How can society better deal with the problem?
- How can society be more compassionate/informed/involved regarding this community?
- What is the difference between generosity, charity, justice, and social change?
- How was the situation connected to larger systems/issues?
- What privilege did you and others bring to the situation?
- What were the sources of power and who benefited? Who was harmed? Who was excluded?
- Who has a voice in decision making and priority setting? Why?
- Did your actions support systemic social change or provide immediate change/relief (i.e. will anyone be immediately affected by your contributions)?
- Evaluate your approach/others’ approaches in terms of the prospect for long-term, sustainable, and/or systematic change
- How have the environmental and social conditions affected the people that you are working with in the community?
- What institutional structures are evident in the community you are working with? How do they affect the people you work with?
- Why does the organization you are working for exist?
- How can you educate others or raise awareness about this group or social issue?

Describing the Experience
- Describe the atmosphere of the CEL site.
- Describe some of your interactions.
- Why do you think [the activity described in previous questions] happened?
- What did the "body language" of the people tell you?
- What brings people to the CEL site (both people seeking service, volunteers and employees)?
- Are "strangers" welcomed at the CEL site? Why or why not?
- Describe what a typical day might be like for someone who uses the services of the organization you worked with.
- How would you do this differently if you were in charge?
- What was the best/worst/most challenging thing that happened?
- Describe an internal or external conflict that has surfaced for you during your CEL experience. Explain the factors that contribute to it and how you might resolve or cope with the conflict.
- What could this group do to address the problems you saw at the CEL site?
- What could each participant do on his/her own?
- Where do you go from here? What’s the next step?
- Who was involved in the experience? What roles did they play? What role did you play? How were roles decided? Could this have been done differently?
- What objectives or goals were you trying to achieve? Were these shared with or by the group?
- How were decisions made? How did you know?
- What strengths did each person bring to the situation? Were these leveraged effectively to meet the goal?
- How well did you communicate with others? How do you know if you were communicating effectively?
- Were there things that other people did that helped you learn or work toward your goal? Were there things that you did that helped others with their goals and learning?
- Was there conflict or disagreement? How was this handled? Do you think it was handled effectively?
- Describe a person you’ve encountered in the community who made a strong impression on you, positive or negative.
- Did anything about your community involvement surprise you? If so, what?
- What did you do that seemed to be effective or ineffective in the community?
- How can you continue your involvement with this group or social issue?
- What process did you go through to produce this piece?
- What problems did you encounter while you were working on this piece? How did you solve them?
- What resources did you use while working on this piece? Which ones were especially helpful? Which ones would you use again?
- Does this work tell a story?
- What were your goals for meeting this piece of work and how did you set them? Did your goals change as you worked on it? Did you meet your goals?
- Name three things that stuck in your mind about the CEL experience and explain why. (this could also relate to personal development/learning)

Academic integration
- What theories/concepts are relevant to the experience?
- What do you need to know or research before engaging in this experience?
- Which theories/concepts do you anticipate being helpful in understanding this experience?
- In light of [a particular theory/concept], what do you expect to experience?
- In light of [a particular theory/concept], were you surprised by what you experienced?
- Did the experience enhance your understanding of a theory/concept? Did it support the theory or did it challenge it?
- What similarities or differences are there between the perspectives offered by the academic concepts discussed in class and the experience? Describe how you could apply different frameworks to the experience. Which fit best? Which do not fit?
- How would an expert in the field approach this situation?
- What academic/disciplinary skills did you use or could you have used to approach the situation?
- How much did you know about the subject before we started?

Questions compiled and adapted from:


