UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO | OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Assessing Community-Engaged Learning

Student Learning Outcomes • Rubrics • Portfolios



A framework for evidence, reflection, reciprocity, and continuous improvement

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Community Engaged Scholarship

Institutional Definition - Approved by Provost Rodriquez

Community Engaged Scholarship (CES) is the integration of research, teaching, creative activity, and service with community priorities through reciprocal, mutually beneficial partnerships. It involves meaningful collaboration with community partners in identifying priorities, shaping questions, and approaches, generating and interpreting knowledge, and determining how outcomes are shared and used. Through these partnerships, CES addresses societal challenges and generates knowledge, learning, creative work or other outcomes that contribute to both academic and community purposes.

Community Engaged Scholarship may include community based participatory research, place-based research, action research, public scholarship, community-engaged teaching, creative practice, evaluation, applied research, and other forms of scholarly inquiry. It maintains appropriate standards of disciplinary rigor while recognizing community knowledge, lived experience and expertise as essential contributions to the co-creation of knowledge. It also values accessible dissemination of knowledge, sustained relationships, and outcomes that are meaningful and useful to community partners as well as academic audiences.

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Outreach and Community Engagement

Institutional Definition - Approved by Provost Rodriquez

Outreach generally refers to the sharing or application of University knowledge, expertise, services, or resources with external audiences.

Community Engagement involves a relationship in which faculty, staff, and students and community partners have a meaningful role in shaping the work and in which knowledge, expertise, learning, or benefits move between the University and community partners. Such relationships should be grounded in mutual respect, ethical responsibility, reciprocity, and accountability, with the University and its faculty, researchers, staff, and students recognizing their responsibility to fulfill agreed-upon commitments and to engage responsibly with community partners.

Outreach and engagement are not mutually exclusive. An outreach activity may develop into engagement as relationships become more reciprocal and collaborative.

The distinction is therefore not based simply on whether an activity occurs outside the University. It is based on how the University and community partners relate to one another within the activity and whether that relationship is rooted in a responsible, ethical, and reciprocal partnership.

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Service and Community Engagement

Institutional Definition - Approved by Provost Rodriquez

Faculty, staff, and students engage in many forms of service that contribute substantially to communities and the public good. Community service, professional service, volunteerism, and public service should be recognized as valuable contributions even when they do not meet the definition of Community Engagement.

Similarly, Community Engagement may be appropriately recognized within teaching, research, creative activity, service, or multiple categories depending on the nature of the work.

The purpose of this framework is not to require that all public-facing work be classified as Community Engagement. Rather, it provides a consistent way to identify and describe work that involves meaningful reciprocal relationships with communities and to support reflection on how those relationships may contribute to learning, scholarship, creative practice, professional practice, and community priorities.

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Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Carnegie Defintion

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching defines community engagement as the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial creation and exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

The purpose of community engagement is the partnership—of knowledge and resources—between colleges and universities and the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.

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Start with the purpose of assessment

A SHARED FRAMEWORK—NOT A SINGLE UNIVERSAL INSTRUMENT

Assess what students learn through community-engaged experiences—and how effectively those experiences support reciprocal learning with community partners.

STUDENT LEARNING

What knowledge, skills, dispositions, and capacities do students demonstrate?

PARTNERSHIP QUALITY

Are relationships reciprocal, respectful, sustainable, and responsive to community priorities?

INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Is UNM building the policies, practices, and infrastructure to support engagement?

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Three foundational assessment tools

DEFINITIONS AND ROLES

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES (SLOs)

Statements describing what students should know, understand, or be able to demonstrate after a learning experience.

OCE question: What should students learn?

RUBRICS

Evaluation tools that define performance criteria and levels of achievement.

OCE question: What does quality engagement look like?

PORTFOLIOS

Curated collections of work and evidence demonstrating learning and development over time.

OCE question: What evidence shows learning?

SLOs establish the destination. Rubrics establish the criteria. Portfolios provide the evidence.

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How the tools work together

A CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT CYCLE



DEFINE

Articulate measurable learning outcomes

ALIGN

Choose assignments and evidence that match

EVALUATE

Apply shared criteria through a rubric

DOCUMENT

Collect student work in portfolios

IMPROVE

Interpret findings and refine learning design

Assessment is most useful when evidence leads to a documented decision about teaching, partnership practice, or institutional support.

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Proposed OCE student learning outcomes

A FLEXIBLE UNIVERSITY-LEVEL FRAMEWORK FOR ADAPTATION BY ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

01	**Civic and community understanding**	Explain the historical, cultural, social, and institutional context of a community-identified issue.
02	**Reciprocal collaboration**	Work respectfully with community partners, recognizing their expertise, priorities, and contributions.
03	**Application of disciplinary knowledge**	Apply disciplinary knowledge and methods to a real-world challenge or opportunity.
04	**Critical reflection and ethical practice**	Examine assumptions, responsibilities, positionality, and ethical implications of engagement.
05	**Communication and public impact**	Communicate findings and project outcomes in accessible and useful ways for academic and community audiences.

These are proposed common outcomes—not mandatory identical outcomes for every course or discipline.

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Write outcomes that can be assessed

FROM BROAD INTENTION TO OBSERVABLE EVIDENCE

TOO BROAD

"Students will understand community engagement."

MORE ASSESSABLE

"Students will identify community priorities, integrate community knowledge with disciplinary perspectives, and develop a collaborative response."

Use observable verbs:

Analyze	Demonstrate	Process	Evaluate
Collaborate	Communicate	Reflect	Apply

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Rubrics: make quality visible

ILLUSTRATIVE OCE COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING RUBRIC

CRITERION	EMERGING	DEVELOPING	PROFICIENT	ADVANCED
Community context	Limited contextual understanding	Identifies key factors	Demonstrates contextual understanding	Integrates historical, cultural, and systemic perspectives
Reciprocity	Limited recognition of partner perspectives	Acknowledges partner input	Demonstrates meaningful collaboration	Shares decision-making; recognizes community expertise
Application	Limited disciplinary application	Applies some relevant knowledge	Effectively integrates disciplinary knowledge	Synthesizes knowledge to address complexity
Reflection & ethics	Primarily descriptive	Identifies assumptions	Examines assumptions and responsibilities	Demonstrates sophisticated ethical reflection

Use rubrics to evaluate evidence of learning and guide improvement—not simply as another grading instrument.

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Portfolios: document learning over time

A POSSIBLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LEARNING PORTFOLIO

01 Project overview

Partner, issue, objectives, student role

02 Research & process

Research, fieldwork, interviews, maps, images

03 Critical reflection

Learning, assumptions, ethics, challenges

04 Project deliverables

Reports, designs, media, findings, presentations

05 Partner perspective

Feedback on collaboration and usefulness

06 Learning synthesis

How the experience shaped academic, professional, and civic development

A portfolio captures both the process and the product of community-engaged learning.

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Best practices for CE assessment

SIX PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE IMPLEMENTATION

1 Start with outcomes

Define what students should demonstrate; align outcomes with course and program goals.

2 Assess process and product

Evaluate collaboration, reflection, and ethical practice alongside final deliverables.

3 Include community partners

Invite partner input into goals, evidence, and judgments of usefulness.

4 Use multiple forms of evidence

Combine rubrics, journals, portfolios, reflections, partner feedback, and participation data.

5 Look over time

Identify patterns across courses, departments, programs, and sustained partnerships.

6 Close the loop

Use findings to improve teaching, partnership practice, and institutional support.

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A three-level CE assessment framework

CONNECT STUDENT LEARNING, PARTNERSHIP QUALITY, AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT

LEVEL 1 | STUDENT LEARNING

What are students learning?

SLOs • Critical reflection • Rubrics • Portfolios • Civic and professional competencies

LEVEL 2 | COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Are relationships reciprocal and beneficial?

Partner feedback • Shared priorities • Collaboration quality • Mutual benefit • Community-defined outcomes

LEVEL 3 | INSTITUTIONAL IMPACT

Is UNM advancing its community engagement mission?

Faculty participation • Engaged courses and research • Cross-campus collaboration • Sustainable partnerships • Infrastructure

Each level requires distinct outcomes and measures; evidence can inform the others.

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Applied example: a community-engaged design project

ILLUSTRATES ALIGNMENT FROM OUTCOME TO EVIDENCE

SLO

Students integrate historical research, community knowledge, and digital documentation to interpret a culturally significant site.

RUBRIC

Evaluate historical understanding, technical competency, community collaboration, ethical interpretation, and communication.

PORTFOLIO

Archive research, 3D scans, digital models, interpretive narratives, reflections, and final presentation.

Partner feedback: Does the work accurately reflect community priorities and provide useful documentation or interpretation?

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RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Build a shared framework. Preserve disciplinary flexibility.

01	**Develop**	A university-level community-engaged learning outcomes framework.
02	**Adapt**	A common OCE rubric informed by AAC&U VALUE Rubrics.
03	**Explore**	A digital portfolio model to document learning across courses and experiences.

Assessment should demonstrate the educational and public value of reciprocal community engagement—and lead to continuous improvement.

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Selected resources for further development

STARTING POINTS FOR OCE AND ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

AAC&U VALUE Rubrics	Civic engagement, integrative learning, ethical reasoning, teamwork, intercultural knowledge. https://www.aacu.org/initiatives/value-initiative/value-rubrics
Campus Compact	Assessment tools and resources for community engagement and service-learning. https://compact.org/resources
Engaging Community toolkit	Reciprocal teaching and learning beyond the campus; assessment and partnership practice. https://www.aacu.org
Carnegie Community Engagement Classification	Institutional framework for reciprocal partnerships, community participation, and evaluation. https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu
National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA)	Guidance on student learning outcomes, evidence, and closing the assessment loop. https://www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

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