



What is CBEL?

Community-based experiential learning (CBEL) is an overarching term that encompasses a number of community-based pedagogical practices, including Community Service Learning, and Community Engaged Learning. All CBEL activities involve students applying their academic learning within a community context.

CBEL is quite different from volunteering. The emphasis is on mutual benefit. Students have the opportunity to apply their academic learning in a community context, deepening their understanding of disciplinary content.

Community partners have the opportunity to draw on students' talents as a contribution to the work of their organization, while also teaching students about key issues in the sectors in which they are working. It is critical to the success of CBEL that community partners take on the role of co-educators of students – they define the priorities that students work on, and the contours of the student experience.

CBEL always involves an intentional learning process. Students engage in guided critical reflection throughout the experience.



What is CBEL?

An Example

Civil Engineering 202: Civil Engineering II

Instructor and Course: Dr Susan Nesbit, a faculty member in the Department of Civil Engineering, Faculty of Applied Science began integrating CBEL components into her CIVIL 202 courses by the 2007-08 academic year. The course learning objectives focus on developing student understanding of, and comfort with: the drivers of sustainable development, systems thinking concepts and tools, local and global societal and bio-physical issues that are relevant to civil engineering, and professional development skills and attitudes.

CBEL component: The CBEL projects in this course provide an opportunity for students to develop their project management and teamwork skills. Students connect their CBEL experience to their coursework via structured reflections and feedback from graduate student mentors. The CBEL component of the course has been constantly evolving with the support of CCEL staff to ensure its sustainability. In 2014/15 the CBEL component of the course was mandatory for all 136 students and there were eight partners – many of which were working with multiple groups of students. The CBEL component of this course was worth 30% of the final grade.

Community partners: This course has worked with a diverse range of community partners on projects that have spanned from design and build projects at the UBC Learning Exchange, to conceptual systems designs for Ray Cam Community Centre, to conducting research and creating recommendations for Metro Vancouver. The key to partner relationships has been clear communication at the outset about the capabilities and capacities of the students, and identification of appropriate projects that meet student learning goals and will contribute something valuable to the organization.



“Just as a coral reef, working as a team is an in depth and complex system. Our time as a project group for the Richmond Food Bank has aided our learning about systems thinking. These ideas are more concrete to us now through our learning based off two key concepts: communication and planning.

As a group of six members, we quickly learned that an easy means of internal communication was paramount to our project’s success. Interacting with others was daily procedure, and with the properly designed system we were able to achieve all of our communication needs successfully. This provided a concrete foundation for other aspects of our project. As a major project, communication was one system that overlapped in other areas such as planning.”

A CIVL 202 student team who worked with The Richmond Food Bank in 2013/14.



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An Example

LFS 250: Land, Food and Community I

Instructor and Course: LFS 250 is a required course within the LFS 'core series' - an interdisciplinary set of courses designed to create learning opportunities that encourage students to become citizens, professionals, and leaders who understand the opportunities and obstacles to creating regional, national and global food systems that are ecologically, socially and economically sustainable. The course is taught by instructors Dr Will Valley and Dr Hannah Wittman.

CBEL component: LFS 250 has had a CBEL component for 14 years. For the past five years students in this course have completed Community Impact Projects in elementary schools across Vancouver. Examples of recent projects include: planting school food gardens, carrying out food prepare and share activities, establishing vermicomposting systems in classrooms, and conducting surveys of the school food environment. Students complete reflection assignments on these projects and participate in class-based discussion sessions to draw out their learning.



Community partners: All of the partners for this course are Vancouver School Board Schools. Having an overarching organization like this to support and oversee the engagement is hugely beneficial.

"We had our workshop yesterday at Sexsmith, and I wanted to pass along some feedback...the student group did an amazing job! I was really impressed with their organisation (in setting up meeting times, and having everything completely laid out and ready when they said we'd start!), knowledge, and enthusiasm. Honestly, we often have presenters who come into the school having neglected to mention that they need this obscure item, or something set up ahead of time etc., so it was a pleasant and refreshing change to have people show up when they said they would, and be ready to go, with no last-minute panic. The group did a great job, which I did mention to them, but I wanted to pass on to you too...I know they're students, not teachers, which often comes through in presentations, but not this time! Their activities were well-suited to the students' age level, engaging, and presented new information in an interesting and fun way!"

A teacher at Sexsmith Elementary regarding a food literacy workshop run by LFS 250 students in 2014/15



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VISA 375 (formerly VISA 481) – Advanced Seminar II

Instructor and Course: VISA 375 is a required course within the BFA Visual Arts Program. This course intertwines critical theory and studio art practices while engaging students in issues around the artist's role in society today. Along with developing their art practice, students also refine their knowledge base and their ability to articulate how artistic practices influence and are influenced by structures of professionalization and institutionalization.

CBEL component: A CBEL component was recently integrated into VISA 481, providing opportunities for students to connect theory and practice while gaining awareness of the impact artistic and cultural practice has on society. Instructor Christine D'Onofrio developed partnerships with a wide range of local galleries and art centres so students could experience the breadth of cultural missions and activities in Vancouver. Examples of projects carried out by students in partnerships include: archival work with the Christa Dahl Media Library and Archive at VIVO,

education programming for a youth program offered by Satellite Gallery, and photo research for a public art project developed by Other Sights for Artists' Projects. Students participated in reflective discussions and writing exercises to make connections between theoretical readings, studio practice, and their work with local art institutions.



Community partners: All of the partners for this course recognize the importance of mentorship in arts and culture. The key to partner relationships has been regular communication about the course goals and the range of possible projects that mutually benefit partners and students. The instructor provides opportunities for feedback from partners and continues to modify aspects of her course in response.

"Students utilized the knowledge gained from years of academic study in the visual arts, towards tangible projects within the Vancouver arts community. The results were multi-faceted. Students developed a deeper understanding of the functions they perform and the potential effects of applying their knowledge and skills in the arts, while also building confidence in their abilities and a sense of accomplishment in making an important contribution."

Christine D'Onofrio on the value of CBEL for her students.



Who is Involved in CBEL?*

Faculty members from a diverse range of Faculties across UBC integrate community-based experiential learning (CBEL) into their courses, and through these CBEL experiences, students work with community partners in a multitude of sectors in Vancouver and beyond. A wide range of students across UBC participate in these course-based experiences, as well as co-curricular CBEL programs, e.g. Trek and Reading Week, managed through the Centre for Community Engaged Learning.

For CBEL experiences to be successfully implemented, faculty and community partners are encouraged to co-design the experiences, with the support of the Centre for Community Engaged Learning as needed. The responsibilities of everyone involved in CBEL are detailed below.



Faculty

- Articulate learning outcomes
- Consider options for CBEL experiences
- Develop and maintain long-term relationships with community partners, as appropriate to experiences
- Develop syllabus with integrated CBEL component
- Create assignments to draw upon CBEL experiences
- Prepare students for CBEL experiences
- Structure reflection activities throughout term
- Monitor CBEL experiences and attend efficiently to any issues that arise
- Evaluate CBEL experiences to determine if the experiences fulfilled course learning outcomes
- Share culmination of student work with community partners
- Debrief with community partner at the end of the CBEL experience

Centre for Community Engaged Learning (CCEL)

- Assist faculty in development of CBEL courses, quality CBEL experiences that fulfill learning outcomes, and/or learning activities
- Support faculty to determine grading and rubrics for CBEL experiences
- Identify potential community partners and assist with scoping of robust CBEL experiences that fulfill learning outcomes
- Provide resources, examples, and grading rubrics for reflection activities
- Conduct orientation and reflection sessions, if requested
- Conduct TA training sessions
- Assist with troubleshooting if any issues or challenges arise during the term
- Provide evaluation resources for faculty and community partners



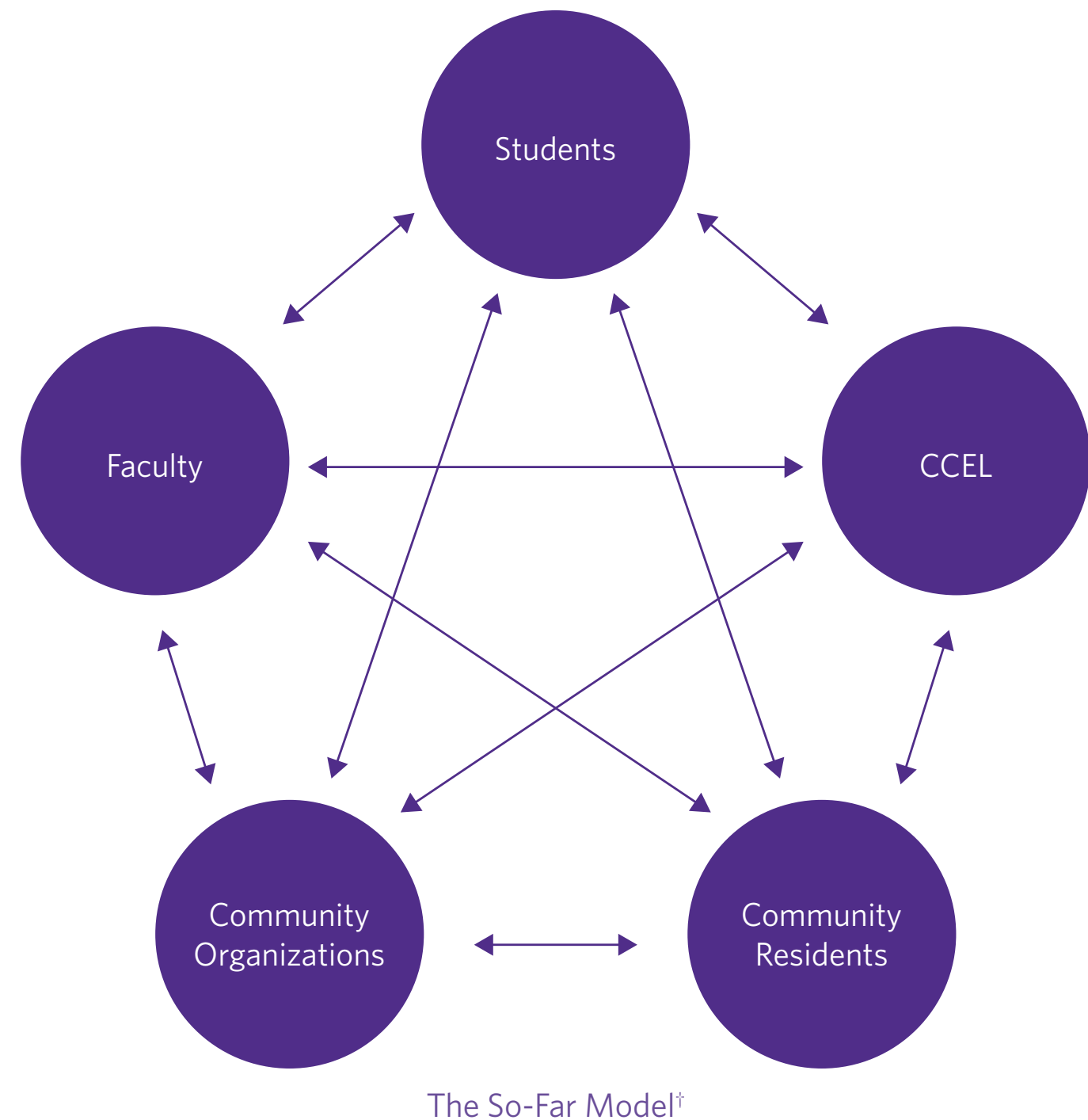
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Community Partners

- Identify the organization's priorities or needs that CBEL could fulfill
- Identify appropriate responsibilities and tasks for students and co-design CBEL experiences with faculty and/or CCEL
- Orient students to organization's mission and specific CBEL work and communicate expectations
- Designate a primary contact for students
- Notify faculty member if problems arise
- Provide feedback on student performance
- Debrief with faculty at the end of the CBEL experience

Student

- Select a CBEL experience if there are multiple options, considering personal, professional, and academic goals
- Participate in orientation sessions, trainings, and other activities in preparation for CBEL experience
- Carry out CBEL experience professionally, respecting the community partner's guidelines and following the agreed upon schedule and deliverables
- Reflect critically on experiences
- Seek out feedback and guidance during CBEL experience
- Complete all assignments and work, as agreed with team members, community partner, and faculty



* References consulted:

Gallagher et. al. "Faculty Guide to Service-Learning: Information and Resources for Creating and Implementing Service Learning Courses." Experiential Learning Center, University of Colorado Denver.

McMaster University Student Success Center. "Community Service Learning: Resource for Faculty."

[†] Bringle, Robert, Patti H. Clayton, and Mary F. Price. SOFAR Model from "Partnerships in Service Learning and Civic Engagement." Partnerships: A Journal of Service Learning & Civic Engagement. Vol.1, No.1, Summer 2009.



Potential Benefits & Outcomes of CBEL¹

Adapted from University of Minnesota Career + Learning Centre and the University of Alberta Community Service Learning Guidebook



Students

- Deepen understanding of academic content
- Apply academic content to complex “real-world” situations
- Work across disciplinary boundaries and integrate information from multiple subject areas
- Develop critical thinking and problem solving skills
- Develop a sense of social responsibility
- Gain an understanding of community context and the systemic factors underlying community issues
- Build professional skills such as communication, teamwork and leadership
- Developing self-awareness, clarifying values and refining career goals

Faculty

- Gain experience with active teaching methods
- Foster reciprocal learning among all involved – students, teachers, community partners
- Promote students’ active learning as they bring new insights and dimensions to class discussion
- Learn firsthand knowledge of community issues
- Develop relationships with the community – providing opportunity for collaborative work
- Discover new avenues for research – including the scholarship of teaching and learning

Partners

- Inject new energy, enthusiasm, and perspectives into the organization’s work
- Gain additional human resources needed to achieve organizational goals
- Co-educate youth about community issues – perhaps correcting misperceptions
- Increase public awareness of key issues
- Network with colleagues in other organizations and agencies
- Identify and access other University resources; build relationships with faculty and staff
- Expose future professionals to a range of career pathways

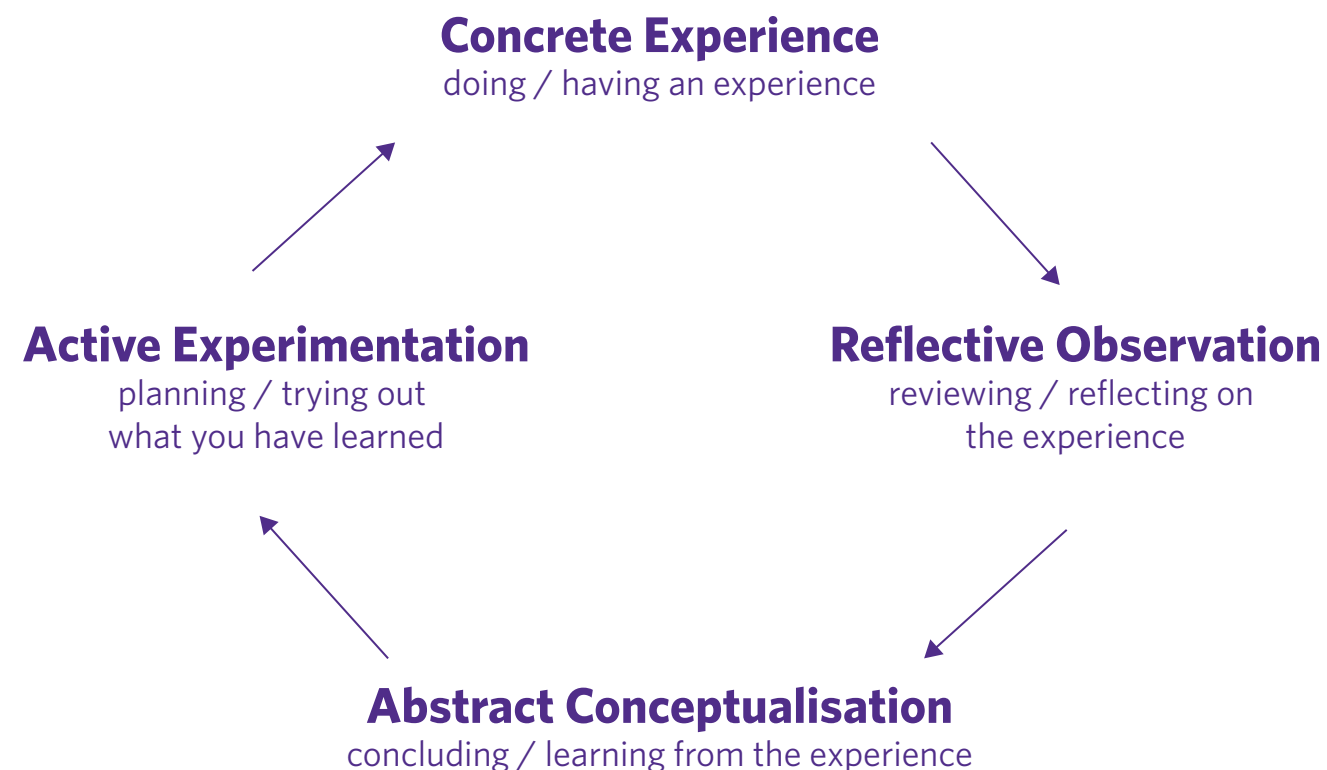
¹ Adapted from the CSL Instructor Guidebook, University of Alberta, Faculty of Arts Community Service Learning. http://www.csl.ualberta.ca/en/~media/Community%20Service%20Learning/Documents/Forms%20Guidebooks%20etc/CSL_INSTRUCTOR_GUIDEBOOK_2015-2.pdf



The Importance of Reflection ‡

“Reflection is simply another word for learning. What distinguishes it from some other forms of learning is that ‘reflection’ grows out of experience” (Morton in Moffatt and Decker, 2000). Reflection is a vital component of CBEL because it is how students make connections between learning in the classroom and their experiences in community.

Kolb’s experiential learning cycle offers a useful model to understand the role of reflection in student learning. A student can begin anywhere in the cycle, however it is important that they have opportunities to work through the entire cycle.



Reflection is most effective when following these **four** guidelines.

1. Continuous

Reflection is an ongoing activity that happens before, during and after experiences.

2. Connected

Reflection directly connects academic learning with experience in the community.

3. Contextualized

Reflection activities and topics are appropriate and meaningful to the experience.

4. Challenging

Reflection challenges assumptions, prompting critical thinking about the experience.

Reflection activities generate, deepen, and document learning through:

- Writing, discussion, oral presentation and/or creative production;
- In the classroom, in community and/or online;
- Individually, in small groups, or as a class

These reflection activities provide learning artifacts that are used to evaluate student learning. For more information about the role of reflection in CBEL, developing reflection activities, and assessing student learning using rubrics for reflection assignments, connect with the UBC Centre for Community Engaged Learning.

‡ References consulted:

Eyler, Janet, Dwight E. Giles Jr, Angela Schmiede. A Practitioner’s Guide to Reflection in Service Learning. Vanderbilt University, Nashville TN. 1996.

Moffat,J.,&Decker R. (2000) Service-Learning Reflection for Engineering: A Faculty Guide. In E. Tsang

(ED), Projects That Matter, Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Engineering (pp.31-39) Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.

Kolb, D. (1984). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development (Vol. 1). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.



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How Do I Get Started?

We can support the creation of a new course, the modification of a pre-existing course to include CBEL, or the re-development of a CBEL course. It's ideal to contact us a year in advance of the course start date to ensure there is ample time to engage with the collaborative course and partnership development processes described below; however we can accommodate shorter time frames.

Selecting the best CBEL course design

There are many different ways to approach CBEL. Experiences with community can happen with a range of student program levels and at various levels of intensity from a single visit to a community organization to an in-depth semester long collaborative research project. We can assist you with making informed decisions about CBEL course design that will ensure a meaningful experience for your students and community partners.

Developing or modifying course learning outcomes

We can support the development of learning outcomes or review existing outcomes and advise on how best to meet them through CBEL. Separate learning outcomes are not required for CBEL; rather learning with community is a way to achieve the learning outcomes already identified for a course.



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Identifying and initiating relationships with community partners

We can support you with identifying partners, approaching them and developing a respectful and reciprocal relationship. If you already have partners that you are interested in working with, we can provide resources and advice for developing and maintaining those relationships.

Scoping student engagement with partners

There is a range of ways that students can engage with community partners, including service provision, research and development projects, and design and build projects. We can advise on scoping student engagement with partners to ensure that community partner priorities and course learning outcomes are well connected and the level of challenge is appropriate for your students.

Learning activities to support CBEL

CBEL is most effective when students have the opportunity in class to prepare for and reflect upon their experiences in community. We can assist with the creation of learning activities that will integrate CBEL into the course framework and help students make connections between academic content and their experiences in community.

Student preparedness

We can come to your class and deliver presentations and activities to help orient students to CBEL and prepare them to engage fully with community. We can also guide reflection activities to help students integrate their learning.

Student assessment and evaluation

We can support you to determine the appropriate portion of a course grade to allot to CBEL activities. We can also assist with the creation of assessment criteria for CBEL activities and rubrics that can be used for evaluation.

CBEL course evaluation

New CBEL course initiatives benefit from assessment and modification. We offer course evaluation advice and services that will support you in the ongoing development of your CBEL course.





Planning for Success

Allow for lots of time

Contact us early so we can support you in the planning of your course and developing community relationships. Community organizations have different schedules and time pressures than universities. Additional time allows for greater flexibility when collaboratively creating learning experiences for students in community.

Be open to collaboration with community

It's important to seek opportunities with mutual benefit for student learning and community partner priorities. Taking a collaborative approach with community partners and involving them as co-educators that bring valuable knowledge and experience to the course will ensure a reciprocal and respectful partnership that benefits university and community. Building partnerships is rewarding but it also takes time, effort and commitment from everyone involved.

Share why you've chosen CBEL with your students

Many of your students will be new to CBEL, so information and guidance on what CBEL is and why it is a valuable learning experience in relation to the course content and discipline will prepare them to engage more fully.

Don't try to do it all

Be prepared to take some activities and materials out of your course, in order to make room for the time commitment CBEL requires of students. CBEL is a way to achieve course learning outcomes so it can take the place of other activities without displacing important learning.



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