Designating ACE Courses: Definitions and Process

For more information about Academic Civic Engagement (ACE) or ideas about how to integrate ACE into a class, please visit the ACE website for more details.

St. Olaf Definitions

Civic Engagement: A large, umbrella term that denotes activities and experiences that "work to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and develop the combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes."[1] Civic engagement may occur in curricular or co-curricular settings as well as institution-wide initiatives and policies. Civic engagement focuses on meeting the Higher Learning Commission's[2] directive for higher education institutions to support the public good.

Academic Civic Engagement: a high-impact educational practice[3] through a for-credit course or mentored public scholarship[4] that enables students to apply academic knowledge and skills within a real-world context to address community issues and build the civic identity of all participants.

Based on research and best practices, ACE courses must have the following attributes:

- An intentional experience(s) with
  - identified and measurable student academic and civic learning outcomes
  - identified and measurable community outcomes
  - the collaborative, mutually beneficial, and reciprocal exchange of knowledge and resources between participants
- Critical reflection on personal outcomes, community outcomes, and civic identity
- Assessment of all participants[5] (students, faculty, and community partners), the extent, method(s), and the person(s) responsible for assessment to be determined with the ACE office as necessitated by the course's scope and data collection needs

Academic Civic Engagement courses incorporate a spectrum of experiences over varying degrees of time and intensity. Experiences may include the following activities:

- Direct-service or volunteering
- Community-based research and consulting
- Advocacy and policy change
- Community organizing and activism
- Digital Scholarship

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[1] Association of American Colleges and Universities. Civic Engagement Value Rubric. Retrieved from
https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/VALUE/CivicEngagementSample.pdf
[2] the accrediting body of St. Olaf College
[3] Kuh, G. D. (2008) *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, *Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U)*.
[4] Examples: DUR, IR/IS, and selected academic internships.
[5] Creating regular, consistent assessment practices of all parties (including the institution in addition to those listed above) is a hallmark of the Elective Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement and is a recognized best practice in the field. St. Olaf College is considering applying for the Carnegie Classification in 2025 and endeavors to implement these systems in preparation for our application.

- Dialogue and relationship building among diverse participants
- Internships
- Philanthropy
- Practicums
- Clinicals, student teaching, and other minimum-hour, required experiences needed to meet licensure requirements in Nursing, Education, and Social Work
- Social Entrepreneurship
- Creative Placemaking and Public Art

While valuable for building civic understanding and awareness of our students, the following are examples of civic encounter experiences which by themselves do not create collaborative, mutually beneficial, and reciprocal exchanges and would therefore not be considered an ACE experience:

- Learning about a community in a course without any direct engagement with that community
- Guest speaker from the community
- Job Shadowing
- Site visits in the community
- Attendance at community events
- Blogging
- Interviews with or surveys of community members

Through slight modifications, many of these civic encounter experiences can be revised or supplemented to deepen the campus-community exchange to a more reciprocal level, which could then be considered an ACE experience.

Community: may be a geographic-based community (campus, local/city, regional/state, national, and global) or identity-based community (race, ethnicity, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, ability, etc.). A community encompasses both organizations (for-profit and non-profit) and individuals.

Community Issues: opportunities, priorities, and needs that can be addressed using locally available skills, technology, and knowledge. Addressing community issues starts with a) identifying where they exist, b) listening to those who are affected, c) developing collaborative solutions tailored to community strengths, integrity, history, and assets.[6]

Civic Identity: When one sees her or himself as an active participant in society with a strong commitment and responsibility to work with others towards public purposes.[7]

Why designate or label a course as ACE

There are many reasons to teach an ACE course that have benefits for all parties involved: students, faculty, the community, and the institution. These are explored in more detail in "Why ACE?" page on

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[6] Adapted from "Community-Engaged Learning Student Experiences." Furman University.
[7] Adapted from: Center for Community-Engaged Teaching and Research, Duquesne University. "Community Engaged Learning Model, Approved 9/28/15."

the ACE website. After deciding to incorporate ACE pedagogy into your course, the following section shares why you might consider officially designating or labeling your course as ACE.

- Benefits for Students
  - Allows for courses to be searched by the ACE tag and designated as ACE in the Notes section of the Class & Labs systems, signaling to students, during the registration process, of the type of experience they are signing up for when registering for a particular course. The courses will also be listed on the ACE website.
  - (future) Allows for courses to be designated as ACE on the official student transcript
  - Helps students communicate the nature of these experiences to others because the experience is contextualized as "civic/community engagement." (graduate schools, potential employers, other faculty, etc.)
- Benefits for Faculty
  - Opens access to course implementation mini-grants and support from ACE office
  - Helps faculty communicate the nature of these experiences as engaged teaching and scholarship for tenure and promotion review
- Benefits for Community Partners
  - Allows for better tracking of ACE activities and relationships with community partners, which we share via publicly accessible website
  - Ensures that community partnerships are reciprocal in nature through the course design and assessment process, protecting the community and the reputation of the college
- Benefits for the Institution
  - Aligns with and addresses the strategic goal of student participation in high-impact practices which can then be tracked through Class & Labs
  - Helps to systematically institutionalize civic engagement in alignment with best practices that can be leveraged for fund development and national recognition, such as the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement.

Process for Designating an ACE Course

The decision to designate a course as an ACE course is determined jointly by the individual instructor and the ACE office using the definition outlined above. After a course is determined to be an ACE course, the ACE office will alert the Registrar to designate in the Class & Lab system.

Beginning in the 2018-19 academic year, all ACE courses that receive course funding from the ACE office must complete the following established best practices in order to retain the ACE designation and help maintain the highest impact possible for ACE courses:

- Include St. Olaf definition of Academic Civic Engagement and the ACE student learning outcomes [see section below] achieved through the ACE experience in the course syllabus/instructional materials
- Conduct some type of formative or summative reflection[8] with the students to assess the ACE experience and intended outcomes (and when possible share results with the ACE office).

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[8] Abundant resources exist to help assist with reflective practices. For instance, see "The Purpose of Reflection" and "Facilitating Reflection: A Manual for Leaders and Educators."

- Submit the course syllabi and relevant ACE instructional materials to the ACE office prior to the release of course implementation funds. These materials will be retained by the ACE office in a syllabi bank; syllabi may be shown to other St. Olaf faculty (but *will not* be shared outside of the institution without the consent of the faculty member) as examples of ACE courses unless the original faculty expresses otherwise.
- Conduct evaluation with the community partner on the ACE experience
- Complete brief faculty evaluation on ACE experience

All faculty, regardless of whether they receive course implementation funds, should follow these best practices and will be strongly encouraged to do so.

ACE Student Learning Outcomes[9]

Each ACE course will address at least two of the seven ACE Learning Outcomes listed below. Through participation in an academic civic engagement course, students will demonstrate two or more of the following:

1. Civic knowledge Ability to describe the social, political and historical contexts of civic/community organizations.

2. Civic learning Ability to apply academic knowledge and proficiencies (such as written and oral communication, teamwork, critical and creative thinking, information literacy, intercultural competency, quantitative skills, etc.) in service of a civic/community aim.

3. Civic self-understanding Ability to evaluate one's academic knowledge and proficiencies (such as written and oral communication, teamwork, critical and creative thinking, information literacy, intercultural competency, quantitative skills, etc.) in service of a civic/community aim.

4. Civic reflection Ability to describe and evaluate one's civic/community aims and accomplishments.

5. Civic efficacy Confidence in one's ability to contribute effectively to civic and community endeavors.

6. Civic action Commitment to pursue civic, community and work roles that foster the common good.

7. Vocational integration Ability to articulate how to use one's knowledge and skills to contribute in personal, civic or work roles.

The ACE Advisory Committee developed these guidelines to clarify what constitutes an ACE course. These guidelines may change as new models and teaching innovations emerge.

Contact Assistant Director for Academic Civic Engagement, Alyssa Herzog Melby, <melby1ATstolaf.edu>, for more information about ACE Course designations.

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[9] These Student Learning Outcomes were drafted November 5th, 2010 by Mary Carlsen, Bruce Dalgaard, Eric Fure-Slocum, Dana Gross, Dan Hofrenning, Naurine Lennox, Paul Roback, Kathy Tegtmeyer Pak and Nate Jacobi (Center for Experiential Learning, now called the Piper Center for Career and Vocation).