

Lewis University



Office of Community Engaged Learning

Annual Report



2020-2021

Mission

The Office of Community Engaged Learning at Lewis University promotes the common good through the development of academic opportunities to apply learning by meeting real-world needs. In collaboration with community agencies and faculty members, students engage with the community through service, explore realities of justice and injustice, and are transformed by reflecting on their experiences in light of course and program objectives.



Reflections on the Last Year

REFLECTIONS ON THE LAST YEAR

For most of us, the last year was challenging, strange, and exhausting. From the perspective of our office, trying to engage students in the community during a global pandemic that limited us to primarily virtual engagement made our work look remarkably different.

Despite the circumstances, it was a true joy to watch community and faculty partners, along with our students, think creatively about how to provide the services and resources that organizations offer to community members. Many agencies also found new needs arise as so many people experienced challenges related to isolation, limited childcare availability, and ongoing changes in how school or resources were being offered.

While the number of students engaged in the community through Community Engaged Learning courses went down this year – from 600 in the 2018-19 academic year to 471 students during the 2020-21 school year – I was genuinely surprised by how robust offerings remained. Students shared positive feedback, such as these words from an undergraduate student: “The thing that had the greatest impact on me [were] the relationships that I created along the way. They will follow me for the rest of my educational career.”

I am encouraged to know that community engagement can happen in ways we often avoided or judged negatively in the past. While I truly look forward to being in-person with greater frequency as we look toward next year, I am excited to explore how we continue to use all that we learned during the last 16 months to grow relationships, develop deep student learning experiences, and utilize new types of technology to do our work together.

Be well,



Laura Wilmarth Tyna
Director of Community Engaged Learning

"This class gave me the room to grow and succeed because it gave me the opportunity to learn not just with lectures and notes but also hands on learning."

"This course changed my views on life and situations which will definitely help me in my future relationships, work, and school."

2021 De La Salle Medallions
Photo by: Lewis University

Imagining Restorative Justice in Will County Virtual Event
Photo by: Office of Community Engaged Learning



Conversations from Stritch Episode 28
Photo by: Office of Community Engaged Learning

Nursing students at the Greater Joliet Area YMCA
Photo by: Greater Joliet Area YMCA

"After working together to try to make a change, I was able to connect and grow close with everyone. Now I feel very confident that I can work with any group and productively work for a change."

"I know more about the cultural richness of this area. I have also developed a new sense of commitment to my community and its needs."

Data

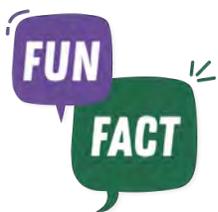
2020-2021 Community Engaged Learning Collaboration

During the 2020-2021 academic year, OCEL...

- Worked with **40 Lewis faculty and staff** to integrate community engagement into their classroom.
- Supported **20 Lewis instructors** teaching **designated CEL courses**.
- Connected with **109 community organizations** to provide CEL opportunities to Lewis students.

Educational Development

- OCEL held **8 Coffee & Conversations** events across the academic year bringing together **66 participants** from Lewis and surrounding communities to share best practices in community engagement and continue building relationships.
- **Twenty-seven Lewis faculty/staff and 25 community partners** registered to participate in the Spring 2021 Faculty-Partner Roundtable event.
- The annual Faculty Forum gathered **11 faculty participants** virtually to reflect on the CEL successes and challenges of the year.
- **Forty-five participants from Lewis and surrounding communities** gathered for a virtual workshop on CEL innovation.



OCEL has placed CELFs in **70 classrooms** and community-based settings since the program's inception in 2017!

Community Engaged Learning Facilitator Program

2020-2021 Community Engaged Learning Facilitators	Fall 2020	Spring 2021	CELf Program Growth				
			2017- 2018	2018- 2019	2019- 2020	2020- 2021	
Community-based CELFs	4	8					
Classroom-based CELFs	6	5					
CELf Coordinators	2	2					
First-Semester CELFs	5	7					
Returning CELFs	7	8					
			New CELFS Trained	6	7	12	11
			Total CELFS Placed	8	15	19	28

CEL Impact for Lewis Students

Regular interaction with community partners, critical reflection alongside peers, and support from CEL faculty instructors and CELFs all contribute to the transformational growth that students experience as a result of their participation in CEL. These data provide a glimpse into the impact of CEL for students during the 2020-2021 academic year.

Students reported that their CEL experience** :

- ... **deepened their understanding** of the course material (93%)
- ... **increased their confidence** in their ability to support community organizations (95%)
- ... helped them **learn about the community's strengths** (95%)
- ... **increased their awareness** about how social problems impact the community (96%)
- ... encouraged them to **reconsider assumptions** they make about people (90%)
- ... helped to **consider other perspectives** that differ from their own (95%)

By the Numbers

471 students were enrolled across
33 designated CEL course sections*

Most students interacted with their
community partner at least once a week (50%)
or every other week (FA20 – 26%; SP21 – 16%)**

In Their Own Words

"This course has expanded my sense of civic engagement and global citizenship by allowing me to be conscious of the people around me,... to be mindful of people who may be in need, and what I can do to help them."

"Working with teens was intimidating at first but I was so surprised at the evolution over the weeks that happened. It was great to challenge myself to get outside my comfort zone and to feel the reward of lending support to the teens."

*Data from Banner course enrollment data

**Data from OCEL designated CEL course anonymous student assessment survey (n=226)

Student quotes from OCEL designated CEL course anonymous student reflection prompt

Highlights

ROUNDTABLE

On March 18th, 2021, OCEL partnered with Lewis' Center for Community Research and Education to host the first Virtual Faculty-Partner Roundtable. In non-pandemic times, this event would be hosted in person, with faculty and staff from Lewis sitting at tables labeled to their expertise and our community partners would spend time moving around the room to discuss ways in which they could partner.

This year, the event was hosted in a virtual format via Zoom. Individual faculty and staff members spent time in their own breakout rooms and community partners were free to jump in and out of those virtual spaces as they saw fit. While not quite as flexible as our traditional, in-person program, the event was successful and a good alternative to ensure the health and safety of participants. Post-program surveys indicate that most of the participants appreciated having the chance to explore new relationships despite not being able to meet in person. In looking to the 2021-2022 academic year, OCEL hopes to host the event again in person, if circumstances allow.

COFFEE AND CONVERSATIONS

Coffee and Conversations was started in September of 2020 as a monthly gathering of community partners and Lewis faculty and staff. It was created by OCEL staff to provide a space to build relationships and explore issues related to our mutual work, including best practices in community engagement. During these 90-minute virtual gatherings, participants discussed topics ranging from the relationship between institutions and the communities they serve, to breaking down Amanda Gorman's inauguration poem "The Hill We Climb." Every month our conversations were full of some amazing minds discussing extremely important topics.

While participation varied from month to month, OCEL staff were pleased to see consistent participation among both faculty members from across the University and community partners in the region. The virtual nature of this program made participation more accessible and, as such, the Office will continue to host this event online in the future.



 The Community Innovation Room for Collaborative Leadership (CIRCLE) is a space that OCEL staff and student leaders envisioned to empower students in meaningfully engaging with each other and the community. The space, located on the third floor of the Learning Resource Center (LRC) on the Romeoville campus, will offer a meeting space for Community Engaged Learning Facilitators (CELFs) and other student leaders who need to meet with community partners or each other to facilitate interaction with the community.

Scheduled to officially open at the start of the Fall 2021 academic year, CIRCLE is meant to foster a sense of collaboration and creativity, in addition to being a practical resource for community-engaged students.



COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND EDUCATION



In Fall 2020, OCEL helped to welcome the newly established Center for Community Research and Education (CCRE) in the College of Education and Social Sciences at Lewis. CCRE's work focuses on supporting Lewis faculty and community partners in planning and carrying out community-based research and training opportunities. OCEL partnered with CCRE to bring together Lewis and community stakeholders during the Spring 2021 Faculty-Partner Roundtable event, and staff look forward to continuing to work together to support community-based initiatives that benefit Lewis' faculty, staff, students, and the local community.

INNOVATION IN PARTNERSHIP

COMMUNITY ENGAGED LEARNING FACILITATOR PROGRAM

The COVID-19 pandemic caused most work to look different this academic year and that was equally true in community partnership. Academic programs and community-based organizations needed to reimagine how to accomplish their goals, which resulted in some really creative collaborations, including:

- Education students who were scheduled to be in local schools through their field placement course engaged with youth who were participating in remote learning at childcare centers hosted by the Greater Joliet Area YMCA.
- Introduction to Social Work students communicated with senior citizens through the Catholic Charities Foster Grandparent Program. The seniors would have worked in schools to accompany kids and instead developed relationships with college students.
- Special education students who would have worked with students through their field placement experience, designed and taught lessons in the SKILLS program through the Disability Resource Center in Joliet. The program supports young individuals with disabilities who are growing their skills for independent living.

The Community Engaged Learning Facilitator (CELf) Program had another successful academic year, which was marked with growth and stability. Started in the fall of 2017, the CELf program successfully concluded its eighth semester this spring, boasting the largest number of CELFs to date, with 15 student leaders. In total, 27 students served as a CELf this year, engaging with courses (i.e., course-based CELFs) and community partners (i.e., community-based CELFs).

The community-based CELf role, which is the newer of the two, engaged student leaders directly in facilitating student engagement with a community organization. They worked with organizations like Heart Haven Outreach, Habitat for Humanity, and Community Lifeline Ministries to maintain or grow Lewis' relationships there, which was particularly important during a time when working together collaboratively was challenging because folks couldn't safely be together.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The 2020-2021 academic year was like no other. While they stretched us in many ways, the challenges of the pandemic also caused the Office of Community Engaged Learning (OCEL) team to be creative and reflective about our work. We took time to evaluate what we do and found new ways to offer those things that felt most critical.

As the academic year closed, the OCEL team embarked on a strategic planning process that has given us a clear sense of where we plan to focus our time over the next 3- 5 years. While we are still finalizing the plan, at the time of the writing of this message, we had outlined the following strategic priorities:

- **Collaboration** – Developing and growing on and off-campus collaborations that allow the OCEL staff to offer educational development and other opportunities, while focusing energy more directly on community engaged learning (CEL) initiatives.
- **Community Engaged Learning Courses** – Offering a robust number of high-quality community-based courses, including both designated CEL courses and those that are community oriented without designation.
- **Community Engaged Learning Facilitator (CELf) Program** – Facilitating a student leadership program that meaningfully engages students in the community, assists them in building relevant skills, and prepares them for future work.
- **Faculty Support and Development** – Providing effective, individualized, high-quality faculty support, resources, and development opportunities.
- **Continued Focus on Relationship Development with Community Engaged Learning Stakeholders** - Growing strong, collaborative, mutually beneficial relationships with community partners, faculty members, and students.
- **Innovation in Communication** – Raising the profile of the office by utilizing effective communication to tell the OCEL story and invite others into collaboration.

We will utilize these strategic priorities to guide our future work and to reimagine the structure in which we do it so that our Office can continue to offer high-quality programming and initiatives, focused on students, communities, and justice. Here's to healthier, happier times ahead!

Laura Wilmarth Tyna
Director of Community Engaged Learning

Contact The Office of Community Engaged Learning:



LAURA WILMARTH TYNA
DIRECTOR
815-836-5848
WILMARLA@LEWISU.EDU



DR. GRETCHEN HOGE
CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT
ADVISOR
815-836-5383
GHOGE@LEWISU.EDU



FRANK VOLTATTORNI
AMERICORPS VISTA
815-836-6848
FVOLTATTORNI@LEWISU.EDU



LIZ ANDERSON
GRADUATE ASSISTANT
815-836-5023
EANDERSON3@LEWISU.EDU



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LEWIS UNIVERSITY
1 UNIVERSITY PKWY, UNIT #1094
ROMEOVILLE IL, 60446 - 2200