COMMUNITY LEARNING AT TRINITY
September 2011

Introduction
Hartford is a powerful educational resource, and Trinity is distinctive among colleges for its broad connections to the city. There are many ways in which a course can connect with our area; among them is Community Learning, in which your students, you, and our neighbors collaborate on projects of mutual learning and benefit. Elsewhere this is often called “community service learning,” but at Trinity we particularly emphasize the mutuality of community partnerships and collaborations. Thus, we resist the one-way connotations of “service” and emphasize the collaborative concept of community.

Community Learning has been applied in just about every discipline taught at Trinity, with many variations. Yet within those variations we have observed a number of features that constitute our best examples, and these have become the criteria for attaching a “CL” designation to a course. The criteria below form a checklist to assist in planning courses with Community Learning components. Within these guidelines, however, are many possibilities in scale and setting (in Hartford, but also in the region and around the globe).

If you are interested in teaching a Community Learning course, you are not alone! At Trinity there are many people with experience and expertise in this area, including (probably) one or more colleagues in your department. The program faculty coordinator is Carol Clark, and Anne Lundberg (x4242) in the Center for Urban and Global Studies can assist you in finding and contacting appropriate community partners. The Community Learning Initiative Advisory Group comprises faculty with experience in CL, and they are all happy to hear from you too. Current members are Dina Anselmi, Joseph Barber, Carol Clark, Alison Draper, Andrea Dyrness, Jonathan Gourley, Laura Holt, Dan Lloyd, Theresa Morris, Clare Rossini, David Tatem, Jim Trostle and Homayra Ziad.

Essential elements of a CLI course
CLI typically involves three partners (the instructor, students, and the community members), and the goal is to further student learning and the work of the community. The instructor’s role is to ensure these twin goals are met by structuring the community learning project so that the students and the community members learn together in a partnership that results in a mutually beneficial outcome for Trinity and the community.

Initial Stages: Defining the CLI project for both the students and the community:
   i) Working with the community partner before the course begins to define and structure the project;
   ii) Integrating the project into the learning objectives for the course and articulating clearly how the work in the community will be integrated into the academic learning process.
Beginning of the Course:
   i) Introducing the CLI project, including information on the community partner, to your students;
   ii) Preparing your students for their work/activities in the community, including any necessary training on how to conduct themselves when working with community members and on how to use specific research instruments (if applicable);
   iii) Setting expectations for your students in terms of the process of CLI, the anticipated outcome (project, report, performance, etc.) and the method for sharing the outcome with the community members/group;
   iv) Providing, as appropriate, opportunities to discuss experiences, problems and/or issues with students and the community partner during the CLI process.

Academic Learning Components:
   i) Offering opportunities for your students to reflect on their CLI experience. Reflection can occur in different forms (writing, telling, performance, creative project), depending on the course and the discipline.
   ii) Including student reflection, effort and work in relation to CLI as part of course assessment. Assessment criteria should be communicated clearly at the beginning of the course. The type of evaluation depends on the CLI project itself, but can take a variety of forms. If appropriate, the evaluation of student performance may include input from the relevant community members.

End of Course:
   i) Reviewing the experience and bringing the partner back in. Review the different parts of the CLI project and discuss possible revisions to enhance experience for both the community and your students. Input should come from both students (e.g., CLI evaluation form) and community members.
APPENDIX ONE

A CLI course, by its design and through its execution, can lead to various positive outcomes for your students. In thinking about your goals for your CLI course, you may wish to consider the following:

Personal Growth and Development:
• CL as an opportunity to increase students’ civic engagement and responsibility.
• CL as an opportunity for introducing to students various mechanisms and possibilities for social change
• CL as an opportunity for helping students to reframe their ideas about unfamiliar social and/or ethnic groups
• Helping students to see the community as an active collaborator in their learning

Enhanced Academic Learning:
• CL as challenging students to move outside comfort zones – ambiguity and uncertainty of real world as a tool for student learning and developing more complex critical thinking skills
• CL as an opportunity to expand boundaries of inquiry/methods of inquiry in one’s discipline
• CL as an opportunity to expand training in quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis in the social and natural sciences
• CL as an opportunity for seeing techniques and theoretical ideas applied in the real world with an appreciation for how the results/outcomes affect people’s lives

Additional Training and Skill-building
• CL as offering opportunity for different groups of students to take a leadership role, develop their own area of expertise, “find their voice”
• CL as developing new valuable skills and helping to shape career goals
APPENDIX TWO

Requesting the CLI Designation for Your Course

The CLI designation is appended to courses at the discretion of the CLIAG Committee. If you are interested in obtaining the CLI designation for a course, you should consult with a member of CLIAG, the Faculty Coordinator or the Director of Urban Programs and Fellowships. They will be happy to work with you to develop courses that are consistent with the guidelines elaborated in the preceding pages. In preparation for that consultation, it will be helpful to provide the following information:

- identify the community partner
- identify community project objectives
- describe how community project objectives integrate with course learning objectives
- indicate the academic expectations for students and how they will be assessed
- indicate how project outcomes will be shared with community members at semester’s end
- if students will be in direct contact with community members, include a description of how students will be prepared for appropriate, professional behavior
- identify potential benefits to the community members
- if necessary, specify that IRB approval will be secured.