Center for Community Engagement

Community Beyond the Classroom
Connecting students, faculty and the university to community-based learning

EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY
As a publicly-supported institution primarily focused on the needs of our region and state, engaging with the people of our hometown and of Connecticut is fundamental to our mission. We want to be seen as a public resource and a campus community committed to service.

Service-learning courses link the skills learned in class to community needs in the Windham region and beyond. Students who perform community service or engage in service-learning develop professional competencies as well as broad-based skills, including teamwork, decision-making and leadership and are more prepared to apply their learning in future career and life settings.

The Center for Community Engagement opened in 2009 and matches community needs with student experience, coursework and training. Our students have contributed thousands of hours to our community each year. When our students graduate they are ready to contribute to our quality of life as successful and engaged citizens.

President Elsa Núñez
**Why Community-Based Learning?**

Service-Learning, or community-based learning, has been shown to improve student learning outcomes and to improve students’ personal and social development. Faculty receive enhanced teaching, service and research opportunities and develop stronger faculty-student relationships. Service-learning improves cultural and racial understanding and has been shown to reduce stereotypes.

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**Benefits For**

**Students**
- Develop critical thinking, ethics, problem solving, leadership, collaboration and communication skills
- Identify subject area interest and career focus
- Gain real-world experience connected to academic subjects
- Connect to Eastern and local community

**Faculty**
- Increases satisfaction with the quality of student learning
- Faculty report using service-learning enhances the quality of their teaching
- Provides opportunities for faculty research and an outlet for faculty professional expertise
- Accommodates a wide variety of learning styles

**Community**
- Community partners benefit from additional resources provided by student service
- Communities benefit from faculty expertise
- University-Community relations are enhanced
Classroom to Community

Center for Community Engagement (CCE) staff cultivate valuable partnerships in the community to assist faculty and students in identifying relevant and meaningful opportunities for community-based learning or service-learning. Through semester-long experiences, students are able to challenge assumptions and reflect critically on what they have experienced first-hand.

Faculty are encouraged to discuss their curricula with CCE staff to develop personalized connections for their students. For example, faculty in the Business Administration department have worked with the CCE to create academic linkages for Human Resources and Business Technology. Here are a few examples of how students have been involved in community organizations and issues.

Tutoring and Mentoring

Working with youth in local schools offers students a great opportunity to positively impact the lives of children, both academically and developmentally, which can result in personal growth for the college students as well. Community programs are offered in 6 elementary after-school programs, Windham Middle School and Windham High School. Students who participate in the Jumpstart early literacy program work with low-income pre-school children to prepare them to enter kindergarten. Many students have reported that these experiences have been pivotal in their choosing a major as well as solidifying career choices.

Juvenile and Adult Rehabilitation

Learning about social problems and community issues are a primary focus of liberal education, and direct exposure to issues of social justice, inequality, trauma and abuse are critical to helping students better understand the issues they are discussing in class. Through a partnership at Radgowski Correctional Institution with the Petey Greene Program and the Journey House program at Natchaug Hospital, students have direct experience with prisoner-students and parole-status young women who are working on changing their lives for the better.
Hunger and Homelessness
Students learn about challenges that low-income residents face from organizations providing basic needs including the Covenant Soup Kitchen, WAIM (Windham Area Interfaith Ministry), and the No Freeze Hospitality Center. Through CCE Community Programs (semester-long programs), students have an opportunity to examine the impact of government policies on hunger and housing, analyze and evaluate the root causes of hunger and homelessness, and identify approaches to solving these problems.

Health and Wellness
Students engaged in service-learning in response to community-identified concerns and broad determinants of health and wellness see direct connections between what they are learning in the classroom and what they are seeing in their community. Programs are offered related to elderly, physical rehabilitation, addiction recovery, health education and disabilities. There are also many opportunities for community-based research.

ESL and Cultural Awareness
Eastern students are fortunate to reside in a community with a rich cultural heritage and pride. Structured programs for Eastern students to work with members of our community through English as a Second Language classes as well as cultural enrichment programs such as Puentes al Futuro/Bridges to the Future provide opportunities for expanded understanding of culture, as well as examination of larger social issues such as immigration and migration, poverty, discrimination, health care, politics, employment, and more.

Food and Environment
Eastern Connecticut has a rich biodiversity that is a tremendous learning laboratory for students. Organizations such as the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District, Connecticut Forest and Park Association and Joshua’s Trust work with Connecticut’s natural resources and provide hands-on opportunities for students. GROW Windham, Connecticut Food Corps and CLiCK, Commercially Licensed Cooperative Kitchen, expose students to food security, food production and small business development issues.

Community to Classroom
When you volunteer you not only give to the community—the community teaches you. It’s a mutually beneficial relationship. I was inspired to join the CCE and become a Team Leader after a wonderful volunteer experience at Windham Middle School as part of a sociology class. My work with students in the school system evolved into a legitimate form of social change and unity rather than a one-time project for class. I never thought this would happen. It was all thanks to the strong connection that the CCE has with Eastern and the region.

Community service learning has helped me process what kind of person I want to be, both inside and outside of academia. Learning what career path I wanted to take, based on the experiences and connections made during the learning process, have helped guide me. The connection between the classroom and the community seems like a simple one, but is the most influential connection I have made in my college career.

The CCE really shaped my college experience into an intentional, meaningful, and fun four years. I started volunteering through a service-learning class called Joyful Teaching. Then I joined the student staff as a driver and eventually became a Student Leader. Through working with the CCE in the community, I’ve discovered my true passion for service which led me to work for a year as an AmeriCorps VISTA Volunteer.

Working in the community and local schools has not only given me an outlet for applying concepts I’ve learned in classes, but has also been a place where I am exposed to real life community issues and broader societal issues. Volunteering has allowed me to submerge myself in the local culture and feel like I am a true part of the Willimantic community.

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Each year, the CCE honors the service work and partnerships between Eastern and the Windham community. Students share with faculty, administrators and visitors the impact the program has had on both themselves and on the individuals with whom they have worked. The Expo provides an opportunity for student reflection and synthesis of classroom learning and volunteer experience.
The Center for Community Engagement can connect you and your students to organizations and partners in the local community.

Bill Stover
Director of Family and Community Partnerships, Windham Public Schools

Eastern volunteers provide a tremendous benefit to students in our after-school programs, encouraging academic achievement, exposing the students to college life and providing positive mentoring experiences. Windham Public Schools staff and students benefit from the creativity and energy that the Eastern students bring. We appreciate the mutually beneficial partnership with Eastern and have many opportunities for faculty to engage their students in our programs and schools.

Ricardo Pérez
Professor of Anthropology & Coordinator, Latin American & Caribbean Studies Program

Since 2013, I have added a community-based learning component to my course Latinos in the United States (ANT 240). This addition has allowed me to organize and teach classes more effectively by enhancing the connection between course content and the service that students provide when they work with community groups in Willimantic. By engaging with community affairs, the students can understand better the course material and feel that their time at Eastern has been productive and enjoyable.

Nicolas Simon
Assistant Professor of Sociology

Through volunteering in the community my students are deeply engaged with course material and participate more during class by sharing their experiences. They gain a deeper understanding of Willimantic and feel safer off campus by becoming an active part of local life. As an educator, the CCE provides me with direct and easy connections to many established organizational partnerships. This saves me time and energy and helps students identify situations and contexts that are a strong match to their interests and potential future work.

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Let’s Get Started!

Kim Silcox
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