



Center for Community Engagement  
and Service Learning

**2020: Mission, Vision, Strategic Directions**

**Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CCESL)  
Undergraduate Studies  
Western Carolina University**

## **BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE LEARNING (where we came from)**

Established as a department of the Student Affairs Division in 2002, the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CCESL) has a rich history of engagement with and development in western North Carolina communities and beyond. Over the past 15 years, new program initiatives have been developed and implemented to engage students, faculty, and staff with the community. The CCESL transferred to the Academic Affairs Division (2007) and since then we have been awarded the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification in 2008 and 2015, the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll has been awarded for eight consecutive years (2006-2014), and in 2010 we were recognized by The Washington Center as a Higher Education Civic Engagement Award Winner. Building upon 15 years of achievement, the CCESL is in a position to re-vision and re-group for the future, establish pathways to operationalize that vision, and develop processes, systems, and benchmarks to serve as signposts for documenting the next fifteen years of achievement. This document is intended to present the course and guide our decisions for the future.

## **OUR MISSION (who we are and associated pathways)**

Western Carolina University's CCESL, in all development, promotion, and measurement of programs and initiatives, engages all partners in the mutually reciprocal process that is community development with the intention of fostering a sustainable campus culture and personal habit of community engagement in our students and partners.

- We COLLABORATIVELY ENGAGE students, faculty/staff, and community partners in curricular and cocurricular approaches to learning designed to enhance understanding of course content and self, intentionally address community issues, develop career-related skills, and promote responsible citizenship.
- We DEVELOP and GUIDE faculty on how to engage students with the community in order to address relevant issues affecting our region.
- We primarily SERVE the needs of our region by collaboratively, intentionally, and mutually identifying the issues most relevant to our region's well-being and WCU's integrated curricular focus areas.
- We SUPPORT, RECOGNIZE, and REWARD exemplary community engagement efforts demonstrated by our students, faculty, and staff.
- We MONITOR and MEASURE the impact of our programs and initiatives.

## **VALUES (what guides and inspires us, and what we strive for)**

- A clear understanding of what we do
- Excellence and respectful approaches in all we do
- Collaboration with and respect for our region and partners
- Creative solutions to complex problems
- Informed and timely responses
- Measurement of success and knowing what it looks like

## **OUR VISION STATEMENT (who we want to be)**

By establishing a reputation that is founded on mutual respect, responsiveness, and a 'starting from yes attitude,' in all matters of community engagement and development, the CCESL will be a primary contact for WCU and the region and by so doing foster a campus culture and personal habit of engagement in those we serve and those who serve.

**Simplified Vision:** *To be a national model for community engagement that embraces its responsibilities as a center serving the needs of a regionally engaged university.*

## **OVERARCHING INTENTION (an imperative for WCU's CCESL)**

It is imperative that the CCESL clarifies the difference between pedagogical approaches associated with community engagement and the co-curricular ones, and research. While these three concepts are not mutually exclusive it is important that our constituents understand what it is we do and recognize their role in it.

**CURRICULAR: Class & community-based approaches**  
**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT => CO-CURRICULAR: External to class, but still includes community**  
**AS RESEARCH: Based in &/or engaged with partners & community**

### ***Strategic Direction #1***

#### **ENGAGE, DEVELOP, AND SUPPORT STUDENTS IN THE SERVICE AND COMMUNITY FOCUSED SIDE OF ACADEMICS**

Students represent the majority of our constituents. The CCESL is committed to working towards the best interest of the region (see Strategic Direction #2) and the preparation of people (educated citizens) who can make a difference in their respective fields and communities.

Goal 1.1: Intentionally engage students with structured community-based projects in curricular and co-curricular capacities that respect an order of increasing intensity of experiences.

*Initiative 1.1.1:* Develop and sustain the Lily Community Engagement Award Program as a system for incentivizing sustained student engagement with co-curricular community projects.

*Initiative 1.1.2:* Organize, advertise, and evaluate impacts of the CCESL's Days of Service (8-10 per academic year) and when possible integrate these experiences into students' courses (e.g., PAR345's Module System).

*Initiative 1.1.3:* Increase the number of alternative break options by having students become trained facilitators and organizers of these experiences and recognizing these leaders' work with the educational stipend program.

*Initiative 1.1.4:* Create leadership and experiential opportunities at the local, regional, and national levels, ensuring that all students participate in such opportunities and can document (see Initiative 1.1.1) how these learning experiences are interconnected with their program of study.

*Initiative 1.1.5:* Collaborate with and include faculty in establishing a process to integrate community based projects and critical reflection assessments into appropriate curricula (e.g., from integrating Days of Service and alternative breaks into relevant curricula to identifying/developing year-long community-based projects).

*Initiative 1.1.6:* Identify and invest in robust, yearly interdisciplinary themes that set a context whereby students can explore various points of view on issues and begin to better understand the perspectives of others and the content associated with each interdisciplinary theme.

*Initiative 1.1.7:* Position the CCESL's staff to teach courses that align with community engagement, leadership, development, and social issues (e.g., USI, LEAD, ENT, and other appropriate courses).

*Initiative 1.1.8:* Expand international experiences for all WCU students by offering a yearly (or every other year) study abroad course that looks at community engagement, social justice, and other world issues from a global perspective – simultaneously endorse other study abroad initiatives on campus.

*Initiative 1.1.9:* Collaborate with Career Services to identify high level internship opportunities for students interested in experiencing higher, more robust levels of community engagement (e.g., Farm to School Fellows, CCESL internship initiative, etc.).

Goal 1.2: Foster active citizenship among WCU students.

*Initiative 1.2.1:* Provide every student with an opportunity to participate in student-led outreach projects that focus on civic and community engagement by bringing in, training, and relying on students to organize their own projects and invest in issues that are interesting to them (e.g., graduate assistantships, internships, externships, educational stipends, work-study, and non-work-study opportunities).

*Initiative 1.2.2:* Increase the number of academic learning (and living-learning) communities that integrate active, collaborative, and interdisciplinary learning experiences with curricular goals, ensuring necessary logical and administrative support – the Ripple Effect learning community and the Ripple Effect House operationalize this initiative by intentionally bringing together those students who are interested in and passionate about community engagement, service, and social change.

*Initiative 1.2.3:* Create a culture of participating in the democratic process as demonstrated by large percentages of students who are registered to vote and who vote – stay abreast of changing voter registration regulations and develop appropriate voter registration, awareness, education, and action systems.

*Initiative 1.2.4:* Identify and support an AmeriCorps VISTA position in the CCESL to engage students in curricular and co-curricular capacities with the greater intention of active citizenship, enhanced awareness, and engagement on food insecurity/healthy future initiatives in our region.

### ***Strategic Direction #2***

#### **DEVELOP AND GUIDE FACULTY TO ENGAGE STUDENTS WITH OUR COMMUNITY**

While engaging students in community-based projects is paramount, a logical and robust avenue for an exponential and sustainable increase in students' engagement with these types of projects can (and should) be fostered by faculty teaching courses relevant to their degree.

Goal 2.1: Prepare and develop interested faculty on teaching methods associated with community-based learning (e.g., service-learning, service internships, study abroad experiences, etc.).

*Initiative 2.1.1:* Communicate with faculty in order to determine their needs associated with the integration of community-based projects and service into their curricula.

*Initiative 2.1.2:* Research and develop programs that address the needs and questions of faculty so they are better prepared to integrate the necessary components of a high quality community-based learning experience.

*Initiative 2.1.3:* Identify and invite top community engagement faculty to appropriate development opportunities in the state and nationally (e.g., Civic Engagement Institute, Pathways to Active Community Engagement Conference, International Association for Service Learning and Community Engagement).

*Initiative 2.1.4:* Continually identify roadblocks and challenges that faculty face when trying to engage their students in community-based projects and remove the roadblocks (e.g., liability waivers, transportation, logistics, partnership agreements, and other resources).

*Initiative 2.1.5:* Investigate an appropriate avenue for involving the most engaged faculty in the matters of community engagement, which would include exposure to the concept/pedagogy, curriculum design, assessment and evaluation methods, and how to identify and publish findings in appropriate avenues.

Goal 2.2: With faculty, create a campus culture that recognizes the value and advocates for the use of community-based learning approaches in classrooms.

*Initiative 2.2.1:* Examine and redevelop the Service Learning Course Designation (SLCD) process to align with the current body of literature on community-based learning approaches and to be more accessible to faculty participating in the SLCD process.

*Initiative 2.2.2:* Establish better tracking and management of the SLCD process by extending the approval window from one semester to four semesters; in turn making the process easier for faculty to complete.

*Initiative 2.2.3:* Examine and research the value in having a Service Learning Department Designation (SLD), which would be based on the number of faculty teaching SLCD's and have an associated incentive program for departments to apply to be recognized as an SLD.

*Initiative 2.2.4:* Work with the faculty and the Interdisciplinary Theme committee on a yearly basis to integrate the theme, community-based projects, experiences, and appropriate disciplines (see Initiative 1.1.6 in this plan).

Goal 2.3: Identify research and scholarly outputs (tenure-worthy) associated with the scholarship of teaching and learning and service-learning/community engagement, and increase the awareness of these avenues for faculty who facilitate community-based experiences.

*Initiative 2.3.1:* Identify appropriate research and scholarly outputs for community engaged faculty.

*Initiative 2.3.2:* Develop and implement integrated faculty workload expectations and policies that facilitate exemplary teaching, scholarly productivity, and public service in alignment with WCU's commitment to external engagement.

*Initiative 2.3.3:* Ensure that all division and departmental personnel processes, including those related to annual faculty evaluation, tenure, promotion, and review, provide faculty and staff the formal opportunity to detail and describe educationally based external engagement activities.

### ***Strategic Direction #3***

#### **IDENTIFY AND ALIGN OUR RESOURCES WITH THE REGION'S PRESSING ISSUES**

The issues of our region and the resources we have access to represent two separate points. These two points can be bridged through intentionally focused community engagement concepts and processes.

Goal 3.1: Assess and better understand the current state of our formal community partnerships.

*Initiative 3.1.1:* Develop and administer an annual Community Partner Survey designed to better understand the impact our work has in our community.

*Initiative 3.1.2:* Organize annual focus groups with community partners that are issue specific (e.g., hunger, homelessness, environmental, etc.).

*Initiative 3.1.3:* Continue the Annual Service Learning Fair and look to develop an additional component that provides an opportunity for community partners to communicate their needs in a sustainable manner.

*Initiative 3.1.4:* Organize and facilitate needs assessments with our community to determine issues and the role we can play in solution development.

*Initiative 3.1.5:* Develop and facilitate training or preparation materials/sessions that help support them in their collaborations with students and faculty.

Goal 3.2: Identify and invite the university and community representatives to address regional needs/issues in a formalized way.

*Initiative 3.2.1:* Support and assist with the annual conference for regional government, nonprofit, community, education, and business leaders to focus attention and action on regional strategies for economic and community development.

*Initiative 3.2.2:* Establish ad hoc advisory boards (Community Issue Advisory Boards) to address relevant regional needs that align with our integrated curricular focus areas (e.g., health needs of aging population of our region).

*Initiative 3.2.3:* Establish and support the Provost's Academic Community Engagement Advisory Board.

*Initiative 3.2.4:* Identify and support curricular directions and connections between appropriately identified needs/issues and our resources through the work of the Provost's Academic Community Engagement Advisory Board.

*Initiative 3.2.5:* Identify and support an AmeriCorps VISTA position in the CCESL focused on addressing a specific issue being faced in our community (e.g., food insecurity) and then build capacity, which sustains beyond the VISTA's post, create awareness, and get students involved in the identified issue.

## ***Strategic Direction #4***

### **RECOGNIZE, SUPPORT, AND REWARD EXEMPLARY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

The recognition and identification of exemplary community engagement achievements and efforts of our faculty, staff, and students is essential to bringing relevance to their work. Moreover, sustained support through rewards, awards, recognition, and tenure/promotion will inspire others to get involved and in turn raise the quality of our community engagement work.

Goal 4.1: Align internal processes and reward systems to foster external engagement amongst faculty.

*Initiative 4.1.1:* Establish and support the Provost's Academic Community Engagement Advisory Board (see initiative 3.2.3 in this plan).

*Initiative 4.1.2:* Develop and sustain the WCU Integrated Award for Excellence in Community Service by faculty (\$1,000 reward). The Provost's Academic Community Engagement Advisory Board will serve as the review committee for selecting the most qualified of the faculty members nominated for this award.

*Initiative 4.1.3:* Identify and nominate our top faculty in the field of community engagement work for state, national, and international awards that recognize exemplars (e.g., Robert L. Sigmon Service Learning Award, The Governor James E. Holshouser, Jr. Award for Excellence in Public Service, International Association for Research in Service Learning and Community Engagement awards).

*Initiative 4.1.4:* Audit and ensure that all division and departmental personnel processes, including those related to annual faculty evaluation, tenure, promotion, and review, provide faculty and staff the formal opportunity to detail and describe educationally-based external engagement activities.

*Initiative 4.1.5:* Recognize engaged faculty at the annual Service Learning Awards banquet for teaching, service, and research.

Goal 4.2: Develop and where appropriate align internal recognition systems to inspire and incentivize exemplary external engagement amongst students.

*Initiative 4.2.1:* Develop a systematic process (e.g., Lily Community Engagement Award) to track, assess, evaluate, and provide reflection opportunities for students who engage in co-curricular activities organized by the CCESL and other organizations on campus that recognizes and rewards students' sustained involvement with service work during their time at WCU.

*Initiative 4.2.2:* Expand on and intensify the Lily Community Engagement Award to include an academic course (e.g., USI400: Community Engagement in the Disciplines and How to Bring about Development) that would allow the Lily Program to offer an academic certificate (12 credit hours) in Community Engagement, Change, and Development.

*Initiative 4.2.3:* Recognize engaged students at the annual Service Learning Banquet for activism, engagement, and sustained development in service.

*Initiative 4.2.4:* Identify and nominate our top students in community engagement work for state, national, and international awards that recognize exemplars (e.g., Campus Compact Community Impact Award, John Barnhill Award, Frank Newman Civic Fellows program, etc.).

Goal 4.3.: Align internal processes and reward systems to foster external engagement amongst staff.

*Initiative 4.3.1:* Promote and increase awareness of the University's support of staff-initiated community service.

*Initiative 4.3.2:* Collaborate with the University's Staff Senate to engage faculty in service opportunities.

*Initiative 4.3.3:* Make available our community-based service opportunities (e.g., Days of Service) to staff.

*Initiative 4.3.4:* Recognize engaged staff at the annual Service Learning Banquet for activism, engagement, and sustained support of service.

### ***Strategic Direction #5***

#### **SYSTEMATICALLY MONITOR AND MEASURE OUR IMPACT**

The quality of the CCESL is directly correlated to the extent program data is monitored and measured and subsequently used to make informed decisions. A clear system of monitors and measurements can assist in determining when (and if) a goal has been met and in turn helps guide future decisions. An organization must empirically know where they were, where they are, and where they want to go in order to be successful. Our monitors and measurement systems strive to do this.

Goal 5.1: To build systems that effectively and efficiently measure and monitor our students, faculty, and staff's community engagement and community-based learning on our campus and to determine the impact of these activities.

*Initiative 5.1.1:* For students and faculty, establish macro-systems to determine the extent of community engagement on our campus (e.g., National Survey of Student Engagement, Faculty Survey of Student Engagement, National Assessment for Student Community Engagement, and other barometers).

*Initiative 5.1.2:* For students and faculty, establish micro-systems to determine the extent of community engagement on our campus (e.g., Student Post-Service Learning Course Survey, Lily Award Student Post-Reflection Survey, Faculty Community-Based Learning Survey, and other barometers).

*Initiative 5.1.3:* When appropriate, identify and seek recognition from local and national organizations for the quality and quantity of WCU's community engagement work (e.g., Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, President's Community Engagement Honor Roll, etc.).

*Initiative 5.1.4:* Align internal systems with the state-wide systems being implemented by the University of North Carolina – General Administration's Community and Economic Engagement Metrics initiative.

*Initiative 5.1.5:* Apply collected data to make informed and data-driven decisions for community engagement on our campus.

*Initiative 5.1.6:* Develop and administer annually the Community Engagement Partner Survey and facilitate focus groups based on the most important issues being faced in our local community (e.g., the CCESL website divides our partners into 13 different areas and each of these areas could serve as a preliminary categorization of our focus groups).