UBC-Community Learning Initiative

2007-2008

Not-for-profit community organization representatives, course instructors, project leaders, and UBC students shared their perspectives on the successes and challenges encountered during 2008 UBC-Community Learning Initiative Community Service Learning Projects.

Summary of Evaluation Highlights

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Introduction

Community Service Learning (CSL) integrates students' volunteer work with their classroom learning. The UBC-Community Learning Initiative (UBC-CLI) is a model for the advancement of curricular (academic course-based) CSL projects that take place in the non-profit sector. This document provides an overview of key themes that emerged during an evaluation of 2007-2008 UBC-CLI projects. Following a brief introduction to CSL at UBC and an overview of the evaluation methodology used, the majority of this report provides a description of CSL project experiences from the perspectives of the many participants: not-for-profit community organizations, UBC instructors, UBC students, and project leaders. The report concludes by identifying common themes that emerged through this evaluation process, and outlines some new directions being pursued on the basis of this valuable feedback. The UBC-CLI is jointly funded by the J.W. McConnell Family foundation and UBC.

Community Service Learning at UBC

Over the past decade, an increasing number of UBC students have participated in CSL through the UBC Learning Exchange and the UBC-CLI. During the 2007-08 school year, the number of students participating in CSL reached 1162[1]—a 36% increase from the previous year. While some students (such as those participating in the UBC Learning Exchange's Trek Program) engage in CSL as an extra-curricular activity, an increasing number of UBC instructors are offering CSL as an option within their academic courses. In 2007-08, the number of students engaged in academic course-based, or curricular, CSL increased by 76% from the previous year. This growing interest in curricular CSL on the part of students, community organizations and the university represents an exciting opportunity to enrich students' academic learning through community-based experiences that encourage students to draw connections between classroom and 'real-world' experience.

In 2007-08 the UBC-CLI supported nearly 550 students in 14 courses to participate in curricular CSL projects. Many of these projects took place in the City of Vancouver and other parts of the Lower Mainland; in addition, some projects took place in other regions of BC—including the Okanagan valley, Quesnel, and Bella Coola. Participating courses represented a wide range of disciplines including civil engineering, First Nations studies, geography, biology, English, health promotion, nutrition, agricultural sciences, and creative writing.

In 2007-08, UBC-CLI projects represented a diverse range of learning experiences.

Terra Nova School Yard Society: UBC students helped re-build the Living Seat (a solar-powered rain catcher that uses alternative energy sources) to run a simple school science project and showcase sustainable farming.

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[1] For a breakdown of the numbers of students who participated in each 2007-08.UBC-CLI and Learning Exchange program, see Appendix 1

Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden: UBC students worked with the Garden's architect to research, design, and build a traditional Ming Dynasty fence that can now be seen at the Garden

Downtown YWCA: UBC students researched structural designs and appropriate layouts, then constructed a rooftop trellis system to grow vines (such as raspberries)

These are only a few examples of the 28 UBC-CLI projects undertaken in 2007-2008. A complete list is included at the end of this report as Appendix 2.

Evaluation Sample and Methodology

This evaluation examined a subset of UBC-CLI-supported CSL projects, focusing on the 28 projects undertaken in the Lower Mainland over three days during UBC's Reading Week in February 2008. Each of these projects was hosted by a local not-for-profit organization. To implement these projects, UBC-CLI staff initially identified interested instructors and community organizations. Then, each emerging reading week project was assigned a UBC graduate student or staff member who took on the role of Project Leader. Project Leaders liaised with course instructors, not-for-profit organizations and UBC-CLI staff in order to jointly plan and implement a mutually rewarding project.

The perspectives summarized in the following sections of this report emerged through evaluation surveys and interviews conducted between February and July 2008. Surveys were completed by 202 students (a response rate of 95%). In addition, in-depth evaluation interviews were conducted with 16 not-for-profit organizations (a response rate of 100%), nine course instructors (a response rate of 100%), eight students (a response rate of four percent) and 10 Project Leaders (a response rate of 30%). Interview questions were semi-structured and sought feedback about all aspects of the Reading Week project experience including planning and preparation, implementation, timing, outcomes and impact. Interview participants were encouraged to share both successes and challenges in order to improve future project experiences for all stakeholders. The successes and challenges outlined in this report offer helpful learning to those involved in implementing CSL at UBC and elsewhere.

We are very grateful to all survey and interview participants for taking the time to share their thoughtful and insightful comments.

Student Perspectives

Immediately following their participation in CSL projects, students completed brief evaluation surveys through which they indicated their level of agreement with a variety of statements, and also provided open-ended comment. The response rate for surveys was 95%. In addition, in-depth semi-structured evaluation interviews were conducted with eight students, representing a response rate of only four percent.

Overall, students valued their CSL experience. Student survey respondents reported being happy that they took part in a Community Service Learning project. These students described their project as "fun" and agreed that they would encourage other students to choose a course that included CSL. Most survey respondents indicated they would choose to work on a CSL project again; student interview comments also reflected these positive sentiments:

> *"It was an amazing experience and I really enjoyed myself and it was a lot of fun. Other students should have the opportunity to do the same"*

Project Leaders played an important role, and facilitated effective student teams. Survey respondents were in strong agreement that their project group had worked effectively as a team; similarly, interviewees cited peer interaction and collaboration as a highlight of their CSL experience. Students were enthusiastic in their appreciation for project leaders; they consistently indicated that their project leaders had been supportive and effective facilitators, for instance:

> *"The group leader was amazing, motivating, fun, knew how to relate to the project team, did a very good job, made us think about stuff... The leader was not 'removed' as a prof would be. The leader put in so much effort every day, did her best. The whole group really appreciated her."* —Student interviewee

Students varied in the amount and type of support or structure they desired. When asked if they would like to have more "say" about their project work, student survey responses were somewhat mixed. Many survey and interview comments suggested improvements to project planning processes; however, while some respondents indicated they wanted more ownership or more opportunity to participate in advance planning, others suggested this would be best undertaken by project leaders and organizational contacts who could then simply inform the student team about the established project goals, schedule, and activities.

Similarly, several survey and interview comments indicated that students felt rushed, or that there was insufficient time to complete project work. However, while some student respondents suggested reducing the scope of their project activities, others indicated willingness to devote *more* time and/or take on more ownership—for instance, through more skills training, more time for planning or project design, or more time at the project site. When asked about the value of their pre-project in-class orientation, student opinions were once again mixed. However, on-site orientations offered by community organizations were widely perceived as valuable.

Students appreciated CSL experiences that had relevance to their coursework. In general, survey respondents agreed that their participation in CSL projects was relevant to their academic coursework. This connection between community-based and classroom learning was a feature that students appeared to value highly. For instance, one interviewee cited 'real-world' application of theory as a highlight of CSL learning:

> *"I love CSL; I learned differently. I prefer it to just classroom learning. I would love it if school was all about going out into the community. In this course, we learned the theory and then saw it in the community".*

Many survey and interview comments echoed this desire for integration of CSL projects and coursework. Several student responses emphasized the importance of offering relevant projects; others suggested that project work should count for a greater portion of their course grade.

Structured reflection activities are valued by students and enrich student learning; refinement of this component of CSL would further enhance these benefits. Overall, students agreed that reflection had helped them to think about community issues in an in-depth way, and to see connections between their course and community issues. In addition, students indicated that project experiences helped them to understand what it means to be a responsible citizen. One interviewee stated that:

> *"Reflective journals bring out the human element and they make you stop and think about the big picture - not only in the sense of your course, but how you can affect other people. I think it is important that we get in touch with that, and especially, get in touch with how we feel about things. I am surprised about what I feel when I write things out as opposed to what I think I feel."*

At the same time, a number of survey and interview responses suggest the importance of continuing to develop and refine this valuable aspect of CSL. Some student interviewees indicated that certain topics or types of reflective activity were overly challenging or uncomfortable:

> *"I think the reflection activities had two purposes. The first was to discuss the actual progress of the project which was very beneficial—it was helpful to have the teams getting together, talking about mistakes and what we had learned from the mistakes. The other aspect, the 'how do we feel about things'—I would much rather do this non-professional, personal thinking on my own"*
> —Student Interviewee

Further, several survey and interview respondents indicated that for some students, frequent requests to reflect felt forced, or served to decrease the overall impact of such activities:

> *"The questions were interesting and I participated, but at the end it was way too much..."* —Student Interviewee

Structured Critical Reflection
A key element of CSL—and a particular focus for the UBC-CLI—is structured reflection opportunities through which students connect 'real-life' experiences with classroom learning. Reflective activities might include journaling, small group dialogue with peers, writing academic papers or presentations based on students' community volunteer work, or dialogue with community professionals, faculty, or staff. The intent of such activities is to encourage students to gain new understandings about how their academic studies relate to community issues, and to critically assess their worldviews, values, and educational or career goals. In some cases, these new insights can become a catalyst for significant personal growth and change.

For many students, Reading Week was not an ideal time to participate in CSL. The most common criticism from students related to their project's timing during Reading Week. A few suggested that project hours be spread out to allow for longer, more meaningful involvement with community members.

Students were positive about the community-based element of their project work. Survey respondents consistently indicated that, through CSL, they had learned about community issues; further, they believed their project work was of value to community members. In addition, both survey and interview comments suggest this community connection was important to participants; several students indicated they would have liked more interaction with community members, or that their CSL experience had created or reaffirmed a desire to do more community work:

> *"Human-to-human interaction is much better than human-to-paper".* —Student Interviewee

Community Organization Perspectives

Community organization interviewees were satisfied with project outcomes. All interviewees stated that projects had contributed to their organizational mission or priorities. Important project outcomes included practical improvements to physical space or programs, the production of communications tools, contribution to sustainability initiatives, and positive impact on community members. One interviewee stated that:

> *"The projects were very useful; one was interactive so the participants loved it. The students were fun; they were great to have in the building. Our service users like having the UBC students around."*

When asked to describe the most important outcomes, or highlights, of UBC-CLI projects, organizational representatives most commonly described watching UBC students learn. All interviewees described how, through CSL, UBC students had gained awareness of important community issues. One respondent stated:

> *"Listening to the students, you could tell they had learned so much. You would have thought this was their area of expertise! The students really 'got it.' I was thrilled about how much they've learned. That's what we need going into the future—professionals who understand ecological issues."* —Organization Interviewee

In fact, most interviewees cited student learning as a key reason for their involvement in CSL. Many arranged extra learning opportunities (such as tours or guest speakers) for students.

Project planning experiences varied from organization to organization. Organization interviewees outlined a range of successes and challenges in establishing project goals and activities. While some required support developing project ideas, about half of interviewees indicated they identified projects easily, often because of a clear organizational need.

Many interviewees believed early planning was key to success, and appreciated flexibility on the part of project leaders, student teams, and UBC-CLI staff who adapted to their needs. Planning was enhanced by prior experience working with students, advance information about student skills and interests, and visiting students' classes to 'pitch' projects to students.

Organization interviewees also highlighted areas for improvement. Many felt the planning process was somewhat unclear or cumbersome because there were too many people involved (the process often included the leader, instructor, and UBC-CLI staff). About a quarter of interviewees believed time pressures compromised their ability to participate in planning; the same number reported that projects took more staff time or resources than expected. Some wished they had taken on fewer, or more, students. However, such challenges were frequently successfully addressed through collaborative problem-solving.

Organizations enjoy working with students, and want to ensure projects fit with student interests. Most interviewees were impressed by students' commitment, and capacity to produce high-quality work; often, interviewees described how students worked hard and stayed late. The majority of interviewees believed students were well-prepared for community work—in large part due to leaders' efforts. Some organizations met students in advance to undertake specific training and all provided students with on-site orientation to community issues and contexts.

A few organizational representatives described challenges that resulted from overestimating students' skill level, or points when some students seemed bored or disinterested. However the most common concern about work with students was insufficient knowledge of students' perspectives; interviewees wanted advance knowledge of student learning goals, and post-project feedback as to whether these goals were met:

> *"I would like to know what the coursework they're taking is about. Then, I could tie in what they're doing with the project. I'd like to know who the students are, what courses they're taking, and why they want to be involved in the community through their course."*
> —Organization Interviewee

Organizational representatives were extremely positive about the role played by project leaders. In general, leaders were described as valuable point-people: well-organized, flexible, committed, and thorough:

> *"The project leader was amazing. Absolutely amazing."* —Organization Interviewee

Several respondents appreciated leaders' frequent communication, planning, ability to translate organizational ideas into project goals, and post-project feedback. But, about a quarter struggled to respond to too-frequent communication, citing the hectic pace of non-profit work. Other minor difficulties—such as lack of clarity or an overambitious project plan—were associated with leader inexperience.

Organizations value contact with course instructors. Some organizational representatives had very little contact with UBC course instructors, while others worked directly with instructors throughout the planning and implementation of projects. While half of all organizational representatives (especially those who worked directly with instructors) were satisfied with the amount of contact they had with instructors, the others wanted to work more closely with instructors; in particular, interviewees wanted to understand instructors' goals during planning, and to obtain post-project feedback as to whether instructors' expectations were met. Instructor visits to project sites were especially appreciated by organizational representatives, as indicated by the following comment:

> *"The course instructor came out to the project... This was great. It's a lot to ask her to come out, but from both the organization's and the students' point of view, this was significant. It says that she's invested; the project isn't just to 'make work' for the students, but that it's important. For the instructor to give time on her reading break... I know this is not always possible, but it is a big plus."*

Despite varied understandings of *structured reflection*, organizations value discussion and analysis with students. Almost all organizational representatives described engaging students in discussion and analysis of social and ecological issues and frequently checked-in with groups to give feedback and answer questions. These activities all facilitate students' critical thinking about their CSL experiences. Thus, even though most organizational representatives did not see themselves as having participated in formal *structured reflection activities* with students, it is clear that community contacts have much to offer to this aspect of CSL.

Several organizational representatives noted they did not want to intrude with respect to students' personal self-reflection. However, nearly all wanted more opportunity to engage with students in critical analysis, and reflective learning, for example:

> *"I enjoyed hearing the students' thoughts; they had very interesting thoughts. I hope they went away with new ways of looking at things. It was great to work with students of this age group. It was helpful for us to know what they think about these issues, and to share in their conversations."* —Organization Interviewee

Scheduling projects to occur over three days during Reading Week had positive and negative aspects. Most organizational representatives felt that a three-day project had suited the type of work students undertook. However, other scheduling may have been helpful in avoiding conflicts with particular events, or in offering more potential for student involvement in design, planning, and relationship-development.

Projects took extra time, but organizations believed that CSL was "worth it". Estimates of additional time ranged from zero to 100 hours spent during project planning and implementation. However, all respondents stated the extra time was "worth it", because projects were productive, were meaningful for the community or because they resulted in learning for UBC students:

> *"The project allowed us to do at least twice what we could afford and two to three times what we were previously able to do." ..."It was great; we enjoyed the project. We are most interested in what was the value for the students."* —Organization Interviewee

All interviewees expressed interest in being involved in a CSL project again, providing suitable projects could be designed. To this end, most saw value in idea-sharing between host organizations. A quarter of organizational representatives wanted broader or more ongoing involvement with UBC instructors and students. One interviewee stated:

> *"We'd do it every semester if we could."*

UBC Instructor Perspectives

UBC Instructors described how CSL had resulted in various learning outcomes for students. Interviewees stated that, through CSL, their students had gained increased awareness of important social and ecological issues, experiential knowledge of course content, 'hands-on' or technical skills, and other life skills such as motivation, teamwork, responsibility, and cross-cultural learning. For instance:

> *"Students repeatedly state they want to do work that is concrete and relevant—to do something helpful, that is clearly needed and valued, and is something they can add to their portfolio or CV. In this case, the CSL project provided this."*   —Instructor interviewee

In addition, several instructors believed that CSL projects had helped to cultivate peer-to-peer support, and had led to increased confidence for some students.

Instructors valued early planning that ensured CSL projects were a good fit with their course. Many respondents valued CSL as a chance for students to apply course content in the 'real world', and believed project leaders were instrumental in ensuring that the project design was a good fit with course objectives. One interviewee stated that:

> *"The project was a perfect bridging of theory and application"*

Many respondents were satisfied with project planning, and believed an in-class 'pitch' by non-profit representatives, UBC-CLI staff, and project leaders helped to spark student interest in projects. Several respondents called for improved balance between adequate instructor involvement and an overly cumbersome planning process. Other planning-related challenges included difficulty predicting student interest (resulting in either over-filling or cancellation of projects). A few respondents suggested the need for improved integration of CSL into departmental curriculum planning. For example, one interviewee commented:

> *"I am worried that some students are getting many opportunities to do CSL throughout their undergraduate careers and some are not getting any opportunities at all…it might be helpful if the UBC-CLI could have contact people in each faculty and a mini-strategic plan about how to integrate CSL in this faculty."*

Incorporating CSL into coursework presented numerous challenges for Instructors. In most courses, participation in CSL projects was optional. Therefore, in order to provide students with balanced educational options, most instructors not only offered several CSL projects with related assignments, but also designed alternative options so that students could choose between a CSL project and another equivalent exercise (for instance, an essay, literature review, exam, or technical exercise). One interviewee described how this worked in her class:

> *"The other option students had was to do a creative project... This was different from CSL but both were different than learning from a book. There were good students in both options, and amazing projects on both sides."*

This variety of options undoubtedly benefited students. However for instructors, offering multiple CSL and non-CSL options often resulted in time-consuming and complex course administration and student evaluation. Some instructors seemed to have little difficulty designing these various CSL and non-CSL options (for instance, some instructors described innovative "learning portfolio" or group presentation assignments). However, others found this challenging. Instructors also described difficulty in determining how much value to allot to CSL, or how to grade consistently between CSL and non-CSL assignments.

For all interviewees, incorporating CSL took additional time—with estimates ranging from five to 40 extra hours spent liaising with leaders, visiting projects, and designing or evaluating CSL assignments. However, all interviewees stated the extra time they spent was worthwhile because experiential learning was integral to the course, or because UBC-CLI projects provided extra benefits to students (e.g. a project leader who could provide additional support).

> *"It is a great program. It's good for students and for me, so I'm happy to be involved and have continued involvement. Because of this, I'm managing the time commitment to make it work."*   —Instructor interviewee

Contact with community organizations during project planning and implementation was thought valuable but was often limited by time constraints. Many instructors appreciated the opportunity to interact with organizations and wanted to be available during projects to assist with problem-solving if needed. However, many also described time pressures or other commitments which prevented them from extensive contact with community organizations, and visits to project sites.

Instructors saw value in a stronger role for community organizations in students' critical and reflective learning. Instructors were asked whether they could envision organizations becoming more involved in the critical reflection component of CSL. In response, most indicated that (respecting the time constraints of organizations) there would be great value in students preparing reflective presentations or reports for organizations, or in engaging in reflective discussions with organizational representatives.

Scheduling projects over three days during Reading Week was seen to have both benefits and disadvantages. Like organizational representatives, Instructors believed that three-day projects worked well for certain activities. As well, this timing was thought to foster group cohesion. However, almost all instructors surmised that Reading Week timing was the primary reason that some students opted not to participate in CSL. Several suggested the need for other timing options to better suit certain projects or to accommodate students who had other Reading Week commitments. One interviewee indicated that:

> *"Some students were disappointed there was no option to do the CSL component on weekends instead. A couple would have participated if they had the option to do, for example, three Saturdays in a row. This would have worked from my perspective so long as they could have had everything done in time."*

In addition, Reading Week timing was thought not ideal for projects that required student engagement in planning and design, or knowledge of course content that hadn't yet been covered. Finally, some instructors wanted the option to do CSL in fall or summer terms.

Two-thirds of Instructors described how they easily incorporated CSL-related structured reflection activities, while others described various challenges relating to reflection. Several instructors described themselves as experienced in designing reflective course assignments. These interviewees required students to engage in critical reflection about their CSL experiences through journaling, discussions, or other activities. Other instructors required students to critically analyze course content, but not necessarily in relation to CSL. Several interviewees observed reflection-related "resistance", or discomfort, on the part of students. Many instructors requested sharing of CSL and reflection-related assignment ideas, evaluation schemes and other resources—particularly between experienced and less experienced CSL course instructors.

Achieving a good fit between projects and student interests and skills is important, but involves challenges. When asked why some students opted not to participate in CSL, instructors speculated that non-CSL course options were a better fit with some students' interests and skills. For instance, some students opted to participate in non-CSL learning options because they already had sufficient community-based experience, or because the alternative assignments (e.g., lab work or literature review) helped them to develop valuable skills. Several instructors noted that design of CSL projects and activities had to be adjusted according to factors such as students' academic level (e.g., whether first or fourth year), prior exposure to contested social or environmental issues, and level of comfort with critical analysis or self-reflection.

Project Leader Perspectives

A unique aspect of UBC's CSL programs is its Community Leadership Training Program, through which UBC staff, graduate students, and staff from local partners[2] attend a series of interactive workshops to develop their planning and leadership skills. Program participants then apply these skills by leading CSL projects undertaken during Reading Week. The following themes emerged during interviews with 10 project leaders.

CSL projects were personally and professionally rewarding for leaders. Many leaders identified Reading Week projects as a highlight of their Leadership Training Program. Interviewees described how training and project leadership had helped clarify their strengths and interests, and develop new skills. Several expressed interest in continued involvement—such as through mentorship of future leaders, for instance:.

> *"I definitely gained skills in project planning, and in leading a group; this was a new experience for me. The project was successful, so it added to my level of confidence in terms of thinking about or wanting to take on a project again."*
> —Project Leader Interviewee

Leaders were satisfied with project planning roles and processes. At the start of their training program, many leaders described feeling unclear or nervous about their upcoming role. However, by the time their project began, most felt prepared—often because UBC-CLI support had led to renewed confidence in their existing leadership skills. Interviewees believed early planning was key; several would have liked to have their projects assigned earlier to allow for more planning with organizations and instructors.

Although some interviewees described course instructors as only minimally involved in project planning, all described positive, supportive interactions with instructors and organizations throughout project planning and implementation. The few instructor-leader communication challenges identified were attributed to instructors' time pressures. Instructor visits to projects sites were thought valuable in helping Instructors to better understand students' project experiences. In addition, most interviewees identified the need for improved project follow-up and de-briefing among all stakeholders (instructors, organizations and students, and leaders).

Project Leaders valued the opportunity to work with students, but some found the leader role challenging. Many interviewees described their project team as "amazing", "keen", "easy to work with", and the "highlight" of their training program. However, some leaders struggled with navigating the leader role—for instance, being unsure of whether to act as a *peer* or an *authority figure*. Leaders sometimes wrestled with how much to challenge students, and how much direction to provide. One interviewee described learning from this challenge:

> *"I learned I need to hold back and let others learn, let them go through growing pains, let them learn. Being a leader is not just delegating, or laying out a plan; it is about supporting a group and letting them be leaders and build confidence in themselves. I have incorporated that in my current work."*

Other challenges seemed to stem from inconsistency between student expectations and project work. A few leaders indicated that some students wanted more ownership in determining project activities, more interaction with community members, or anticipated clearer links between their project and coursework. Other students seemed to have undefined expectations, or mistook their involvement in CSL to be a required instead of *optional* component of their course. Thus, several leaders suggested that, in advance of projects, students could work with instructors to articulate clear learning goals in light of their skill and experience. This type of exercise was thought to help establish common expectations about project activities and ownership.

Leaders saw a valuable role for organizations and community members as co-educators. Many leaders identified interaction with community members as a highlight for students and as integral to learning:

> *"With respect to complex social issues - it is possible to see the statistics but it's different to get a sense of the issue on a more personal*

level. Interacting with individuals facing these issues - this makes connections, and brought my group to a different level of awareness."
– Project Leader Interviewee

While only half of respondents stated that organizational and community contacts had been present during reflective activities, almost all believed it would be valuable for community groups to play a greater role in students' reflective learning activities—for instance, through identifying discussion topics or through structured time to communicate their perspective and expertise to students. Several leaders suggested that scheduling projects over three days may have caused students to focus on more tangible or technical work, instead of enabling development of deeper relationships with community members.

Integration of structured reflection in projects was both rewarding and challenging. Many Leaders reported that reflection went well, and even "happened naturally" for students. Leaders witnessed students discussing critical issues, and connecting project learning to academic coursework. One interviewee commented that:

> *"During the third day—evaluating and thinking about things in group discussion—the students realized how much theory they had applied, that they were getting use out of their education. This was very valuable. They were applying the concepts they'd learned and seeing how they came into play in practice even though they hadn't realized it at the time. Without reflection, they wouldn't have made this connection"*

Several interviewees indicated that reflection improved over the course of the project, and resulted in mutual learning and peer-to-peer support. But, some students were too tired or busy to participate, or saw reflection as "childish". Leaders used several strategies to address these challenges:

- Variety: using both written and verbal activities.
- Staging: starting with individual reflection, then sharing in pairs, prior to full-group discussion.
- Planning: scheduling reflection at suitable times to set expectations and allow for preparation.

The most common tip offered by leaders was not to force reflection by asking students to reflect too often or for too long. Sometimes it was better to let topics emerge naturally, or wait until the next day.

Leaders perceived a range of positive project outcomes for both students and non-profit organizations. The majority of leader interviewees believed projects had resulted in students becoming more knowledgeable of—and more personally engaged in—important social and environmental issues. Leaders also frequently noted that student work was valued by non-profits. Respondents observed students supporting classmates, and gaining confidence and independence:

> *"On Day One, my team was scattered, not sure what to do. They were asking for permission and guidance on everything. But by Day Three, they were rockin' and rollin', doing their thing! Students started taking care of one another's questions; they gained a lot of confidence working on the project and with each other. They gained a lot of faith in their abilities."*
– Project Leader Interviewee

Summary of Key Themes

Community organizations, instructors, students, and project leaders each bring distinct perspectives to an analysis of UBC-CLI projects. But together, their feedback reflects common successes and challenges associated with implementing high-quality CSL. Based on these, a number of common themes emerged:

In general, CSL projects were valued by all stakeholders. The mutual benefits of CSL are evidenced, in part, by the sustained and growing involvement of all stakeholder groups. In particular, student learning emerged as a key objective - not only for instructors, leaders and students, but also for organizations. In addition, all groups valued a clear connection between classroom and project-based learning.

The UBC-CLI could play a key role in strengthening communication between stakeholders. All stakeholder groups recommended improved communication processes during project planning and implementation, and after project completion. At the same time, all groups describe hectic schedules and time pressures—suggesting the need to somehow achieve more clear and comprehensive communication in *less* time. This apparent contradiction indicates obvious challenges; however, respondents offered valuable suggestions:

- Sharing of project ideas, summaries, and plans between community organizations (online or in-person)
- Sharing of sample CSL assignments, projects and methods of evaluation between instructors (online or in-person)
- Online sharing of course descriptions and syllabi between all groups
- Organization visits to classrooms to present about community issues, and 'pitch' project ideas
- Leader-instructor-student cooperation in articulating student activities and learning goals
- Ensuring instructors are notified of significant difficulties that arise while students are on-site.
- Coordination of feedback amongst all stakeholders and the UBC-CLI, eg. through reporting, debriefing meetings, or presentations

The UBC-CLI could provide additional support and resources. To complement mutual learning and resource-sharing through improved stakeholder communication, stakeholders suggested the UBC-CLI could provide further educational and project-related resources. In particular, many requested clearer planning process guidelines—including suggested roles, timelines, and sample meeting agendas and plans.

There is need to clarify and refine structured reflection. A key element of CSL, reflection can powerfully impact learning. However stakeholders had differing understandings of reflection—e.g., as critical thinking, emotional sharing, discussing group dynamics, or academic analysis. Cultivating a common understanding of reflection may help establish a clear, valued role for each stakeholder in this process.

There is potential to strengthen the role of community organizations as co-educators. Organizations and community members already play an important role in student learning. Respondent comments indicate a willingness to expand and enhance this role, so students can further benefit from community knowledge:

> *"This is exactly the kind of initiative we want to be involved in... If we have the goal of a sustainable society… we have to hit people at the moments they're making choices... We'd love to do more things like this... We'd like to play a part in the transformation of people."*
> —Organization Interviewee

Leadership training and the Project Leader role is a critical element of project success. Organizations, Instructors, and students referred to leaders as the "lynch pin", "common thread" or "key player":

> *"The project leaders were amazing. There weren't any gaps. They stayed in communication; the projects were well-planned and they incorporated my feedback."*
> —Organization Interviewee

This successful leadership model should be continued and enhanced, for instance through mentorship networks that engage previous leaders.

Diversity in experiences, capacity, and interests highlights the need for flexibility. All participant groups identified "flexibility" as a key asset of the UBC-CLI. Diversity among organizations, instructors, students, and projects will continue to require different models of planning, support, and timing, as well as the ability to match appropriate models to each situation.

Responding to Stakeholder Feedback

Based on the feedback provided by community organizations, instructors, students, and project leaders, the UBC-CLI is working with partners to implement changes in order to meet the challenge of improving the practice of CSL at UBC while ensuring demands on stakeholders' time are manageable. Some of these changes have been concrete and immediate, while others will take shape over a longer period of time.

New this year

Community Animator position: The UBC-CLI has created a new staff position who is working with community organizations and schools to support them in engaging effectively with UBC as co-educators in CSL. In response to requests for improved communication and resources, Community Animator Zoe Welch is creating opportunities for community organizations to share ideas and develop strategies, and is working to strengthen the role of community expertise in student learning and structured reflection.

Practitioner networking: In conjunction with UBC's unit for Teaching and Academic Growth, the UBC-CLI has begun to co-host monthly discussion groups for CSL practitioners (including instructors, Teaching Assistants, and CSL coordinators). These sessions are strengthening practitioner networks and resource-sharing, and are leading to other forms of dialogue and collaboration, for instance, interdisciplinary research on CSL.

Support of instructor-community relationships: The UBC-CLI is attempting to facilitate opportunities for community organizations and instructors to work together directly to ensure stronger links between course objectives and CSL projects. This year, several instructors arranged to meet with community partners, and to share course outlines in order to improve communication and planning.

Web-based resources: The UBC-CLI is developing a new, interactive website for use by all stakeholders. The site will feature resources such as: sample project plans and student reports, questions for reflective journals and group discussions, bibliographies of relevant literature, and decision-making guidelines. It will also allow for on-line dialogue between instructors organizations, students and leaders.

Increased Flexibility: The UBC-CLI is working with stakeholders to develop different project models that best suit the needs of students, instructors and organizations. In some cases, students are taking on more ownership of project planning—including leading their own projects. In other cases, this has led to flexible timing wherein projects are scheduled (outside of Reading Week, if desired) to best suit those involved.
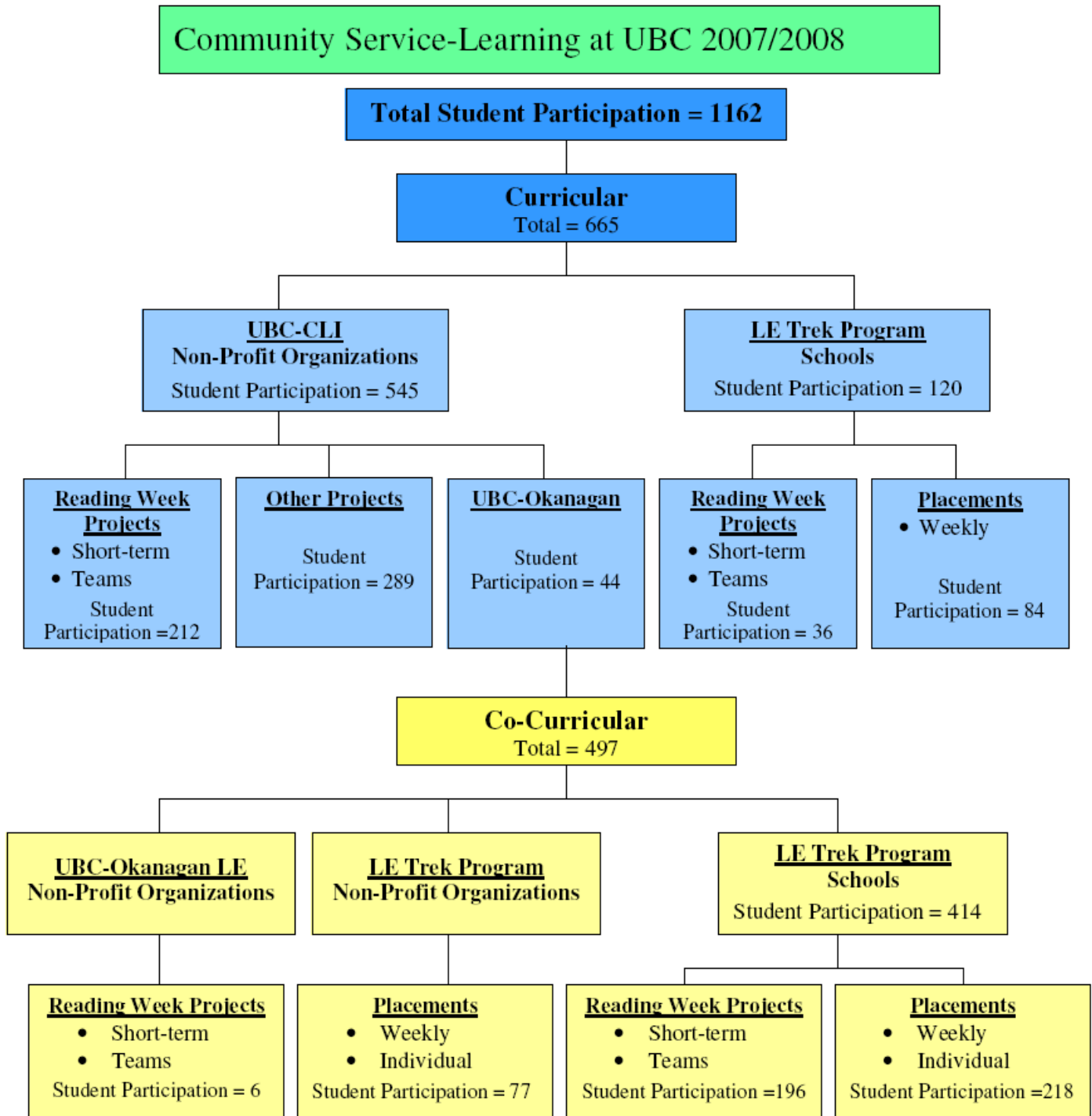
Longer-term changes

'Deeper' partnership: While many stakeholders appreciated the planning role of UBC-CLI staff, some instructors and community organizations wished to be more directly involved in initiating CSL projects, perhaps on an ongoing (e.g., each term or each year) basis. Where appropriate, the UBC-CLI is developing more comprehensive joint planning processes to allow for ongoing strategic partnerships with community organizations. To enhance existing partnerships, staff from community organizations have been invited to participate in the UBC-CLI Leadership Training program.

Decentralized administration at UBC: To enable improved and customized integration of course-based CSL at UBC, some UBC-CLI staff are now working directly in specific faculties to support instructors and administrators in tailoring CSL opportunities to their curriculum and their students.

Strategic Planning: With the success of our CSL programs and UBC's focus on enhancing undergraduate learning, UBC has made the growth of CSL a priority. Based on ongoing input from stakeholders, the Learning Exchange is currently developing a strategic plan to determine how to significantly increase student and faculty participation in CSL, while continuing to generate positive outcomes for students, community partners, and the university. The plan is expected to be complete by the end of May 2009.

Appendix 1: 2007-08 Student Participation in CSL through the Learning Exchange and UBC-Community Learning Initiative

Community Service-Learning at UBC 2007/2008

Total Student Participation = 1162

Curricular
Total = 665

UBC-CLI
Non-Profit Organizations
Student Participation = 545

LE Trek Program
Schools
Student Participation = 120

Reading Week Projects
- Short-term
- Teams
Student Participation =212

Other Projects
Student Participation = 289

UBC-Okanagan
Student Participation = 44

Reading Week Projects
- Short-term
- Teams
Student Participation = 36

Placements
- Weekly
Student Participation = 84

Co-Curricular
Total = 497

UBC-Okanagan LE
Non-Profit Organizations

LE Trek Program
Non-Profit Organizations

LE Trek Program
Schools
Student Participation = 414

Reading Week Projects
- Short-term
- Teams
Student Participation = 6

Placements
- Weekly
- Individual
Student Participation = 77

Reading Week Projects
- Short-term
- Teams
Student Participation =196

Placements
- Weekly
- Individual
Student Participation =218

Appendix 2: UBC-CLI Projects 2007-2008

Projects held during Reading Week 2008:

Organization	Course and Project	Description
Coast Mental Health	Interdisciplinary Health & Human Services 200: Social and Recreational Activities	Two groups of students led residents at one of Coast's supported housing facilities in various social and recreational activities including playing games, sharing a meal, and making crafts.
	Food Nutrition & Health 473: Food and Nutrition Workshops	Building on the work of last year's students, this year's team developed mini-workshops and community kitchen sessions for the residents of Coast's residential houses.
	Food Nutrition & Health 473: Nutrition Resource Development	Along with the staff and clients of Coast Mental Health, students created pamphlets, brochures, and nutrition resources that included costs of nutritious foods and cooking recipes. These resources will be used by Coast to promote healthy food and nutrition choices.
YWCA Munroe House	Civil Engineering 201/202: Demolition and Building Project	A group of students helped make the social room at Munroe house more useable by demolishing the bar and counters and building shelving and storage units.
	Geography 472: Resource Mapping Project	This group of students took an inventory of various places that are relevant to women who live at Munroe House such as the food bank, income assistance office, and schools and created a map of their locations. They also built on work done by Sociology students last year by making maps of various housing options in Vancouver.
Terra Nova Schoolyard Society	Food Nutrition & Health 473: Children's Food Security Project	UBC students created a Food Security Kit that will help Grade 5, 6 and 7 students prepare a presentation to Richmond City Council about food security.
	Civil Engineering 201/202: Exploring Alternative Energy Sources	This group of students helped re-build the "Living Seat", a rain catcher made from solar panels that uses alternative energy sources to run a simple school science project as a showcase for sustainable farming.
	Coordinated Arts Program 111: Sight Impaired Storybook Project	Students helped to design a short story of the Terra Nova project from a child's perspective to be read by children to sight-impaired people.
Musqueam First Nations Band	First Nations Studies Program 200: Creek Revitalization Project	A team of UBC students assisted the Musqueam Band with their on-going revitalization of Musqueam Creek, the last wild salmon-spawning creek in Vancouver. Students helped clear invasive plants and clean up the surrounding trail.
Agora	Food Nutrition & Health 473: Educational Material Development & Healthy Local Produce Research	By examining Agora's inventory and identifying alternatives to nutritionally/regionally weak ingredients, students got hands-on experience working in a local food market and gained a better understanding of food system issues. They also developed educational materials displaying information pertaining to nutrition in the community.
Evergreen	Geography 472: Invasive Plant Mapping Project	Students surveyed invasive plants at Mahon Park in North Vancouver using a portable GIS unit. Based on data collected, they created maps that will be used by future Evergreen volunteers as a planning tool for effective restoration activities.

Stream of Dreams Murals Society	Co-coordinated Arts Program, ENGL111: Creating Watershed Educational Props	A team of students helped the Society construct creative and engaging educational props to be used to educate children in elementary school about the life and function of watersheds, rivers and streams. They also reviewed the Society's website and suggested improvements.
Vancouver Native Health Society	Food Nutrition & Health 250: Children's Nutrition Project	Students helped VNHS develop nutrition education materials for children to teach them about fruits and vegetables and choosing healthy options. The students compiled several recipes for children that make eating vegetables and fruits fun, including a nutritional analysis of each.
UBC Farm	Biology 345: Cob Shed Building Project	Students worked at the UBC Farm to help complete their cob shed, which is made from a mixture of sand, clay, and straw.
YWCA Crabtree Corner	Food Nutrition & Health 250: Children's Nutrition Workshop	A team of students prepared a workshop on children's nutrition for the Single Mom's parenting group at YWCA, which included a needs assessment, dietary suggestions and creating healthy snacks.
	Civil Engineering 201/202: Resource Unit Building Project	To help organize Crabtree Corner's pamphlets and newsletters, this team of students built storage units that would hold and display these resources.
Science World at TELUS World of Science	Civil Engineering 201/202: Outdoor Science Experience	Civil engineering students acted as adhoc "designers" and "creative advisors" to provide input for Science World's plans to create a new sustainability-themed exhibit.
Habitat for Humanity	Civil Engineering 201/202: Building the Future	Two groups of students spent one day helping at Habitat for Humanity's Restore, and two days helping in the construction of Habitat's houses where they gained construction skills and learned about housing issues.
YWCA Rooftop Garden	Civil Engineering 201/202: Cold-Frame Building Project	A team of students designed and built cold-frames (mini-greenhouses) that will allow the YWCA to plant vegetables earlier in the season and provide more fresh produce to women and children in the Downtown Eastside.
	Civil Engineering 201/202: Trellis Building Project	Another team of Civil Engineering students researched structural designs and appropriate layouts, then constructed a trellis system for vines (such as raspberries).
Pacific Streamkeepers Federation	Civil Engineering 201/202: Various projects	Four teams of students completed various projects including designing and building new fish feeders, designing and building model fish ladders and using them to educate elementary school children about aquatic habitats, and conducting water quality testing on McKay Creek.
Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden	Civil Engineering 201/202: Building a Ming Dynasty Fence	UBC students worked with the Garden's architect to research, design, and build a traditional Ming Dynasty fence that can now be seen at the Garden.
KidsSafe Project /Macdonald School	Civil Engineering 201/202: Compost Bin Building Project	Students designed and built a compost bin, then held fun, interactive workshops with the elementary school students to teach them about composting and its value.

Examples of Projects done outside of Reading Week:

Organization	Course and Project	Description
Various Vancouver Community Gardens	Agricultural Sciences 350: Nutrition Project	One group of students designed posters depicting the nutritional value of vegetables and fruits grown in Vancouver Community Gardens and looked for their major nutrients using online sources and the MyDietAnalysis software. They designed a food production log for staff and did research on how much food is being produced by the average community garden plot.
Portland Hotel Society Lifeskills Center	Agricultural Sciences 350: Food Resources Project	Students did research on free food options from the City of Vancouver and Vancouver Coastal Health as well as designed brochures and maps for food resources and locations close to the center.
Richmond Fruit Tree Sharing Project	Agricultural Sciences 350: Social Enterprise Project	This group of students did a research project on creating a social enterprise to generate income for the RFTSP. They focused on increasing the production of teas through research on the costs of seeds and packaging material and also on prospective sale outlets by interviewing small business owners on their interest of helping the RFTSP sell their products on consignment.
Bella Coola Valley Sustainable Agriculture Society	Agricultural Sciences 350: Bella Coola Project	A group of students traveled to Bella Coola and spent a weekend helping to winterize gardens that were managed for therapeutic and educational purposes. They also helped to prepare and share a meal that used local foods. The community used the reports students produced to help plan a forum on meat processing in the community and will be holding another forum in late September to follow up on policy issues around food safety in rural communities like Bella Coola and linkages to healthy eating.
UBC Learning Exchange; Dr. Peter Centre; Kettle Friendship Society; YWCA Crabtree Corner; Canadian Mental Health Association, three East Vancouver schools.	Creative Writing 439/539	Students facilitated writing workshops on a variety of topics including poetry, fiction, life-writing and blogging. These workshops involved a variety of groups, including, people with HIV/AIDS, residents of the Downtown Eastside, and elementary school children.
Brock House Society	Coordinated Arts Program 121/122	33 students met in groups with seniors, providing companionship while initiating a cross-generational conversation about civil and sustainable societies. Based on these conversations, students created posters that explored recent historical changes from the seniors' perspectives, focusing on themes including environmental perceptions, local food ways, and communication. Seniors attended an event at which students presented their posters, and also put the posters on display at Brock House. One senior said, "the students were so interested in what I had to say!" The conversations provided students with a chance to reflect on how themes from the course, "Civil and Sustainable Societies," have been lived and experienced by people over the past 65-80 years.