

Risk and Reward in Community Engaged Learning | Text Transcript | The Hub for Teaching & Learning Excellence

This is a text transcript for the recorded event “Risk and Reward in Community Engaged Learning” presented by the Hub for Teaching & Learning Excellence and the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute (CESI) in the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences (CSAHS). The event was recorded on March 4, 2019.

Transcript:

Byron Sheldrick:

So I think we'll try to get started everyone. We'll get started in a second, no worries. So thank you everyone, I think we're going to try to get started. If you haven't had an opportunity to get some food there's food just in the other room, please help yourself and come back.

My name's Bryon Sheldrick. And I'm the Associate Dean Academic for the College of Social and Applied Human Sciences and I want to welcome you all to this session that is co-sponsored by the Hub for Teaching and Learning Excellence of the College and the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute and it's looking at questions of risk and reward in community-engaged learning.

Before we get into that, I'd like to acknowledge that the University of Guelph resides on the ancestral lands of the Attawandaron people and the treaty lands and territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit and that we recognise the significance of The Dish with One Spoon covenant to this land and offer our respect to our Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Métis neighbours as we strive to strengthen our relationships with them.

And today, this gathering place is home to many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, and acknowledging them reminds us of our important connections to this land where we learn and work.

So with having said that, I'd like to just, I'm not going to say much today and that's unusual for those who know me, but that's largely because I also have been suffering the last couple of weeks with an inner ear problem and vertigo.

So I'm about at my limit for standing in one place before I kind of topple to the floor. So I'm going to go back to my chair where I'm nice and stable and I'm going to turn it over to Lindsey Thomson from the Community Engagement Scholarship Institute who will introduce the session and our panelists and the outline.

Also, a little bit about this amazing room which is our new interdisciplinary hub space. So I'll turn it over to Lindsey. Thank you.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thanks Byron. Hi everybody, I see a lot of familiar faces in the room who I know and some who I don't, so I'll welcome everyone.

My name is Lindsey Thomson and as Byron mentioned, I work here on campus at the Community Engaged Scholarship Institute.

So I'm the manager of Community Engaged Learning and I happen to sit as CESI's representative on CSAHS Teaching and Learning Excellence Hub's Advisory Committee. So lots of long names in there but got them all out.

So I'm very happy to be here today with all of you, we have a great mix of U of G faculty members, community partners, staff, students in here so I'm very pleased with that.

And our panel also reflects a great range of folks involved in a lot of the community-engaged learning partnerships that myself and my colleague Melissa, right over there, support through CESI across campus among other folks here who support great partnerships in the room as well who work across campus, so as Byron mentioned, I'm very lucky to have this space here today.

So, this is the first time I've seen it this morning. This is CSAHS new Interdisciplinary Hub space, so it's really great to now have space that's specifically meant to be somewhere where folks can collaborate across disciplines.

So myself, Melissa and other staff members here on campus work with a bunch of different community partners that span different fields and different courses that are within CSAHS departments and beyond, but this is a space where we can really all come together and I'm guessing that a lot of the work of folks in this room and a lot of disciplines that they're associated with come from a range across CSAHS and beyond.

So I hope that this panel is one of the first events that helps folks come together and have those important conversations across some of the silos that we find ourselves in here at the university.

So beyond this, I want this panel today to be an interactive panel. So I'm definitely going to, in a couple of minutes, stop talking and get out of the way so that panelists can start introducing themselves and a bit of the work they've been involved in.

Today, I'm going to start by having our panelists each take a few minutes to introduce themselves and their position from which they come to community-engaged teaching and learning from.

And if you're curious what we mean by community-engaged teaching and learning, in front of you on your tables, you have just a brief outline of who our panelists are.

They will introduce themselves in a minute and you also have an outline of one definition of community-engaged learning and one definition of community-focused learning.

And you'll hear about what these mean to various people and how folks approach these. As we go through the session, if you have questions about the definitions, please feel free to put up your hand and ask us up here, ask our panelists.

And I hope we just have a really good discussion today and without further adieu, I think I will start by having each panelist introduce themselves and then after everyone introduces themselves, and like I said, situates themselves within CEL partnerships, we'll kind of throw it out to you all to ask questions and we'll get a good discussion going from there if that sounds good.

Okay, great. So Adam, do you mind if I start with asking you to introduce yourself and just tell us about your experience in CEL and yeah?

Adam Bonnycastle:

So my name is Adam Bonnycastle, I'm the Geomatic staff member in the Department of Geography, Environment, and Geomatics, so basically supporting teaching and research with all things spatial whether that's geographic information systems or remote sensing.

And I also work as a sessional instructor for our undergrad GIS courses on a fairly regular basis. And now one of those courses is our fourth year capstone project that if Wanhong Yang is not teaching it, I'm the one typically doing that and it is basically a series of student-conceived GIS projects.

And over the past few years, we've been sort of moving towards at least providing two or three opportunities per year where it's a more formal partnership between student groups and a specific community engaged project.

So a couple of examples of that would be, we've worked with the City of Guelph in determining the ultimate bike routes throughout the urban area as well as community gardens where we can potentially go within the city and so on.

So I think I come at this largely from an applied point of view and some of the lessons we've learned in partnering student groups with community partners.

And that's the sorts of things that I can speak to. What I'm hoping to get out of this is more knowledge about the foundational aspects of community learning and so on.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thanks, Adam.

And I forgot to mention this before but on the second page of your handout you have a brief summary of some of the partnerships that the folks up here have been involved in.

So there are some details here and feel free to ask more about them as we go through the session. Tom, I'm going to turn it over to you next.

Tom Armitage:

Sure. My name is Tom Armitage and I'm the Social Enterprise Development Coordinator of the SEED community food project here in Guelph.

And the SEED is a project of the Guelph Community Health Centre where we're trying to increase physical, financial access to healthy food among food insecure people in Guelph.

And we're going about that in several different ways, one of which is through the social enterprise format of delivering programmes.

So the idea is that if you're food insecure is likely an income based issue, so how can we decrease the cost of food for people overall and how can we get food, healthier food into communities where there's poor physical access.

So then my partnerships with CESI overall over the last four years or so, we've done about 20 projects together.

They've ranged from needs assessments, so identifying whether intervention is actually needed in a community and what sort of intervention a community would like, to evaluations so if we're looking to not prove that we're doing something well but improve what we're doing, then we can partner with the University on that to get that third party arms length away from the responses that are given within a survey.

And we've worked with undergraduate classes, graduate classes, we've worked in all sorts of different departments, whether that's Masters in Applied Nutrition courses all the way to the John F. Woods Centre, formerly CBase, on business components of what we do.

So I'm happy to answer any questions related to the community side of the discussion here today and looking forward to it.

Lindsey Thomson:

Tom, do you want to say a bit about the partnerships that you're currently involved with now?

Tom Armitage:

Sure.

Lindsey Thomson:

Either with Laura's course or otherwise.

Tom Armitage:

Yes definitely. So, we're currently working with Laura's class, Masters of Applied Nutrition course, evaluating our community food market social enterprise.

And we're evaluating it in a such a way that we, the programme we'd offer sells produce on a sliding scale, so we want to know whether or not people who are purchasing the low cost produce are moving from a state of either severe food insecurity to marginal food insecurity or from marginal to, or from moderate to marginal.

And are we increasing physical and financial access to healthy food through this programme.

So it's been a great process to go through, we've worked with them in the past on evaluating a different project so we have the full confidence that we're going to have a great outcome as a result. Working with Kate Parizeau in the back there as well in the Arrell Food Institute on our kitchen based projects.

I'll elaborate on that in the question period, it's a bit of a thing to get into.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thank you. Laura.

Laura Forbes:

Hi, my name is Laura Forbes and I'm a professor in the Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition. And I have been, I'm involved with community-engaged learning.

I have been engaged through two different courses that I teach.

Right now I'm teaching a course that is in our Masters of Applied Nutrition programme. So this is a one year course-based masters, so their major research project of this course-based Masters is a community-engaged project.

So they spend an entire year working with some kind of a community project and one of our groups is working with the SEED this year.

We have numerous groups, some of our community projects come through CESI and some of them don't and I would say that I'm probably getting to be a relatively experienced person in this area, I did 10 community partnership projects last year and we've got seven going this year.

So, if you would like to know what it's like to be a professor who is teaching a community-engaged learning course, I can speak to that.

I can also speak to the student experience and some of the challenges and benefits that I've seen from my students. What else would I like to say? That is the main thing. Is there anything else?

Lindsey Thomson:

That sounds good to me for now, yeah.

Laura Forbes:

Great.

Lindsey Thomson:

We can go onto Stephanie.

Stephanie Howells:

Hi everybody, thanks for coming out.

My name's Steph Howells and I'm a professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology and I teach three undergraduate classes per term.

The one that I've been using a variation of community-engaged scholarship with is a second year undergraduate class out of the crime and criminal justice programme. It's a criminological theory course and so you might think, "How do you use this class with theory?"

Well, I have adapted Professor Morton, where is she? Mavis Morton's wonderful assignment to be used in a theory class where we, instead of using what's called traditionally community-engaged learning, it's community-focused learning.

So our students are actually told to not talk to anyone and so that goes against what a lot of I think what everybody else is doing. And I can talk more later, I also have copies of the assignment up here if you're interested.

Students are told to research community organizations, local, international. Things that are related to crime and criminal justice.

Understand the organization, their mandate, their focus. And then create a project that benefits that organization.

So it might be to raise awareness for an organization that is looking for more clients or more resources.

It might be to run a clothing drive, it might be to create some posters for them or even a research project so that the organization can have a literature review that they can use on their website.

So I have a slew of examples because we have about, around 300 students in the class every term which is why we can't do something that is more engaged. I just can't manage that.

So this allows them to have an experience with community, understand the community and apply the criminological theories to these organizations that are dealing with crime and criminal justice.

I'm hoping today to figure out, truthfully for myself, other examples that I can give to students about organizations that they might be able to research for their partnerships, but also to think about community-focused learning in different ways which I always get out of these sessions and whatever you want to learn from me, I'll do my best and I may defer to Mavis in the back.

Lindsey Thomson:

Great, thank you Stephanie. Jade?

Jade Ferguson:

Hi, I'm Jade Ferguson. And I'm faculty in School of English and Theatre Studies. I'm not sure why I'm on this panel, 'cause I'm no expert and I think my entry into community-engaged learning is really a matter of stumbling into different people at opportune times.

So one thing I should say is that Theatre Studies, theatre has had a much longer history of doing community-engaged projects, English not so.

We have a book, why else would we, we don't need anything else just the book. And so in English there really isn't much of a model of how to do community-engaged Learning.

Ajay has been doing it for many years, we see him as a unicorn. And he's primarily done it in a small class of 10 to 15 students, sometimes even less with grad classes and so it's not something that we typically do.

I think I fell into it partly due to other relationships that I was having that culminated in a bunch of Black cultural events that were happening. So initially I was assigned a course that's called, Cultural Location Identity and Minoritized Literature in Canada and Beyond.

It's a 2000 level class that typically had around 50 to 60 students, and I had already taught a class before about a redress and reconciliation and I was going to teach it that way and then Gryphons Reads was like, "We have David Trandy coming, can he come to your class?" I was like, "Oh, this doesn't really fit, fine."

And so David came and then I had relationships with the cultural diversity office and they were bringing The Afronauts to campus and Camille Turner and then I had a relationship with the Art Gallery in Guelph and they were having critical mass and all of a sudden, they all wanted to be part of my class.

And all of a sudden I was teaching a class that I didn't think I'd be teaching. And that's one of the issues that I'd like to talk about.

So all of a sudden, I was teaching a Black Canadian literature and culture class to a group of white students. And partnering with the Guelph Black Heritage Society.

And so, this was a class that I wouldn't typically teach here. A partnership that I stumbled into thankfully. But all of it was very new and having a lot of risks and surprisingly a lot of rewards too.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thank you very much, Jade. Denise?

Denise Francis:

Good afternoon, My name is Denise Francis and I'm the President and Treasurer of the Guelph Black Heritage Society.

We're a fairly new organization that was formed in 2011.

Our main purpose is that we're the owners of a building that was built in 1880 by the members of the Black community who came to Canada as slaves and when they found, looking for a place to settle, Guelph was actually one of the communities they settled in.

So our building is, we call it the Heritage Hall now, but it was formerly a British Methodist Episcopalian Church, a BME church and it's our mission to restore the building back to its former glory and also to share Black culture with the people from Guelph, Wellington and beyond.

One of the reasons, we're new to the partnership with CESI, and one of the reasons why we wanted to partner was that there's really an absence of resources about the Black community and people don't realize that our community has been around since the 1880's.

I grew up in Guelph and I wasn't really aware of this until I became a student here at the University of Guelph myself in the 90's.

So we're looking for resources, people actually come to us and say, "What do you have about the Black community?" and we really don't have anything.

We worked with Jade's class earlier this year and the students did a number of projects and many are posted on the blog site which has had about 3000 engagements on our website which is absolutely amazing because before, we'd only get about maybe 100 or 200 people clicking in and looking at the projects. So it's increased our profile.

Many of our past projects or events which skewed towards an older demographic and by working with the University, we're having a people of younger ages becoming aware of our organization and participating in our projects.

So, that's it.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thank you very much, Denise.

Okay so we heard a little bit about where our panelists are coming to community-engaged learning from, some folks are a little bit newer to working in these type of partnerships, some folks have been through at least a few different partnership cycles.

So as I mentioned before in the beginning, I'd like the bulk of this session to be more interactive and to give chance for the audience to ask questions of our panelists.

I'd like to throw it out to the floor now and we can take your questions if you want me to kick it off with a question of my own I can do that.

But I'd like to put it out to you first. So does anyone have a question for our panel around community-engaged learning? Yes?

Wanhong Yang:

I'm just Wanhong Yang from Geography, Environment, and Geomatics.

Lindsey Thomson:

Sorry, I'll come back with the microphone first.

Wanhong Yang:

Oh sorry.

Lindsey Thomson:

Here you go.

Wanhong Yang:

So actually, it's really fascinating to see all these community engagement but I'd like to ask a question in a little different angle is that, when we engage in communities and of course, in this coordinated way, I think it's better.

What I'm saying is that sometimes if we just poke around and some organization may be exhausted by resources and in doing that so, why I'm saying that is because in my own experience, and I did have that kind of situation, students contact the same organization just go around and doing that.

And then the organization email me saying, "Wanhong, you should stop that." I said, "Nope, students go for it that way." Anyway, so I just give a different angle to see what is your opinion on that. Thanks.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thank you. Does anyone want to take the first time to respond to that?

Tom Armitage:

I can respond.

Lindsey Thomson:

Yeah.

Tom Armitage:

So like you said, it's great to have an intermediary between the University and community partners.

And they do it like the Research Shop for instance and Lindsey through her role do a great job in mediating that concern where people are just coming to you directly and maybe there's 10 people who write you and say, "Hey, can I work on this, I love what you're doing."

And usually we just try to steer them into volunteer roles if we have them available, but they, like the Research Shop and CESI in general usually put out calls to say whether or not your organization is looking to do a project this term or for this period of time.

And usually we do but there are times where we don't. And it's just like, if you don't, then you don't. No big deal, right?

And then there's other times where we have projects that we say, "We'd love to have this, get this going, do you have the resources to be able to do it?" And usually the answer is either yes now, or yes we will in the next little while.

So it's great to have that dialogue between specific people between at the university to get it going that way.

Wanhong Yang:

Thank you.

Tom Armitage:

Yeah.

Lindsey Thomson:

Yes.

Stephanie Howells:

I think this one of the pros of community-focused learning is that students may all flock towards one particular organization but the organization wouldn't know given this assignment and because students need to understand the organization, I think the ones that are more well known are maybe easier for students to find out about but harder for them to create a project about because something like Crimes Stoppers doesn't need you to raise awareness right?

So students will then turn towards an organization that is lesser known, that could still have a great impact and they'll focus on them instead. So, yeah, there's pros to actually not talking to people.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thank you.

Is there anybody else who has a question for the panel at this time? Okay. I can ask one then. So let me see here.

We have quite the diversity of partnerships, the diversity of levels of intensive engagement I would say, so some students aren't going out and connecting directly with community partners and some are.

In my role, because I touch so many different partnerships in different way, I'm always trying to be conscious of how do we ensure that we're critically engaging with community and not unconsciously or consciously perpetuating inequities that might exist between the University and community, the community representatives in organizations and folks they serve.

So I guess it's kind of a big question but I wanna ask the panel, how can we ensure that we're not perpetuating inequities or at least are consciously striving not to through our partnerships and CEL, in

terms of our processes, our knowledge that we're generating, our goals, and the products or deliverables that we're going for?

Does anyone feel like they want to jump in and start on that one or?

Laura Forbes:

It's a hard one.

Lindsey Thomson:

It's a hard one, it's a big one I know. So for me, what I tried my best to do in my role is really start from community needs.

So I think like Jade was saying, you kind of got pulled into a partnership randomly by a bunch of different folks but you know, coming to you for various needs, and that's kind of my experience at CESI and in my role in trying to facilitate these types of partnerships.

So there's folks coming from the community side, there's folks coming from faculty member side and we kind of just try and make two really unconnected things sometimes that are going like this, kind of match up and if they don't, that's fine.

I try to start from grounding something in real community needs and then being really conscious about times when I think, "Oh yes, I think this can work, "I think these folks will get along, "they have common goals and priorities." And then also being really honest when the timing isn't right.

So for example, processes that probably don't work as well for the community folks that we work with.

So, increasingly we're just talking about students going out more and more to community, really wanting to engage but not necessarily knowing how and community partners, or certain partners being approached multiple students over and over again, and more and more I have students approaching me with questions about, "Oh, I have this course, or I have this thesis that I'd really love to connect to a community partner and their needs for."

And I'm often, I'm like okay, I can try and work with this, but I also don't always have an answer and I find that, like I said, the timing of things and kind of, really just making sure that as much as possible in our intermediary roles, that we are connected to existing community needs and can really be those liaisons and communicators across university and community lines to help everyone understand kind of the parameters that we're all working in, which can differ quite a bit sometimes is where I start.

So I don't know if that resonated with anyone on the panel or in our audience here. If anyone has anything to add to what I just said.

Denise Francis:

I can say many people don't realize that the Guelph Black Heritage Society is a totally volunteer organization.

For example, me being here means that I've taken half a vacation day.

And so, when the students who are engaged in Jade's project, I had quite a few contact us, and I felt badly, but there's only so many of us, but we have to balance our time, our jobs, our personal lives and other things that we want to do.

So that's a big consideration for us embarking on these partnerships.

Lindsey Thomson:

Absolutely, and a lot of the organizations we work with are heavily run by volunteers so that's an excellent point.

And I think more and more on the equity side of things, I think myself and I know others at the University are always thinking about how to best resource these partnerships and that doesn't just mean faculty members, staff, and students, that means folks on the community side and I'm very conscious of the fact that expansions to experiential learning often come with funds from the government and others to universities, but that doesn't flow to communities that we work with.

So that's another point that I've really noticed in my role over the years. Yeah. Does anyone else have anything to add to that.

Adam Bonnycastle:

Just related, I think one of the things that we found particularly with the fourth year project course, is being able to use a resource like CESI to help guide the relationship between the students and the community partners both in terms of keeping the students on the same track as the partners in terms of what the final deliverables are, 'cause the first time we did this, a community partner came to myself as I was instructing the course that semester and said, "Are there groups that would like to, or a group who would like to study this topic?"

And there was and then that group went and did it. At the end, I think it was useful work, but it wasn't really aligned with that partner's goals and what they were intending to get out of it.

So working with CESI for instance has been great on helping keep the students aligned with what their partner's goals are without over-needling from the partner in terms of weekly meetings or anything like that.

Lindsey Thomson:

Yeah, thank you. Thank you Adam.

Tom Armitage:

As a community partner, there's that other side of that token too where you want to make sure that you're not taking advantage of the community itself meaning that there's a mutual benefit in participation in surveys, needs assessments and that kind of thing.

So one example would be, we opened up a market in the east end of Guelph last year but prior to doing that, we didn't want to assume that that intervention was needed despite newspaper articles and people advocating for a grocery store in that area of town.

We wanted to talk to people who might actually benefit from a market in that location.

So when we're doing a needs assessment and speaking with community members, we also want to be aware of the fact that we're suggesting a solution, but we don't want to do that unless we're confident we can actually follow through with that solution.

And if we weren't confident, then maybe it is a situation where we're asking them some questions and giving nothing back.

So if we are confident we can do it, then we'll ask the questions. If it's something that the community decides that they would like, we'd go ahead with that intervention.

Lindsey Thomson:

Mm hmm. That makes sense.

Tom Armitage:

So something to think about anytime you're doing community based research I think.

Lindsey Thomson:

Yeah, yeah, that's a really good point.

And do you find the research projects you've done, have those helped you get some insight as to whether the interventions that you're running are effective or working in the ways you hoped they would?

Has that helped you kind of shift your work in any way?

Tom Armitage:

It has.

We did an evaluation of one of our programmes in 2016 through the Masters of Applied Nutrition course and found that it was really heavily valued by the community that participates in that programme.

To the point where people wished it happened more often, and it's a box based programme where people could buy produce at \$15 dollars or \$20 dollars but it was only once a month.

So then people saw that they were saving 24-48% of the cost of produce but it wasn't lasting them very long since it's a week's worth of produce, so what do you do with those other three weeks? So they wanted it to happen once every two weeks or once a week basically.

So then through that, we did an assessment of that programme itself and whether or not we could propel that forward to have it more often.

But it turned out that we couldn't do it with that structure so we developed a market based model instead and then did a needs assessment based on that.

Lindsey Thomson:

Okay, great. Great.

Tom Armitage:

So it's been incredibly valuable for sure.

Lindsey Thomson:

Great, thank you. Thanks.

Laura Forbes:

One thing that's coming to my head while we've been talking is that that valuing community members when you're doing something like an evaluation.

Valuing their time, valuing their expertise and their experience as a community member is really important.

So examples would be, if we're asking people who are SEED community members to do surveys for us, they should be getting something out of that immediately as well as long term.

The study about student food insecurity as well and we're really lucky that we're able to pay people to be focus group members for example.

Because if you've got somebody with food insecurity and you want an hour and a half of their time that they could be working and making money to help them combat food insecurities, then not paying them is not valuing something that is already a really important resource for these people.

So keeping in mind, the value of those community members and treating them appropriately I think is really important.

Lindsey Thomson:

Mm hmm, thank you. Yeah.

Laura Forbes:

And funds are important and not always easy to come by.

Lindsey Thomson:

Yeah, yeah.

Laura Forbes:

We're lucky this round.

Lindsey Thomson:

Yes, and that's where I was going to go next just briefly mentioning so, CESI has a CEL course support fund that we put, it's up to \$500 dollars that can be accessed per academic year, so that goes towards help supporting these kinds of courses and the other thing is that the Teaching and Learning Excellence Hub now has a new fund, not just for community-engaged learning courses obviously, but to support teaching and learning within the college, so that's another fund that we can put towards these kinds of partnerships, so if anyone has questions about those, there's folks in the room that can answer that along with me so, I think I saw a hand over here.

Alex? Yeah. Oh yeah, sorry. That's my job yes.

Alex:

My name's Alex, I'm the manager of the Climate Change office of the City.

We've had a number of pieces of work that have been done by students in collaboration with CESI.

One of them was, I hesitate to call it community engaged scholarship in the sense of geographically a community, it was a community of practice. So people involved in energy management at the municipal scale across Ontario.

So it was in my view, a tremendous success where we had students out surveying members of this community practise and learning what they thought of how the group worked, how the interactions worked. Whether they were getting value out of it and that sort of thing.

One of the challenges that I've had, and I would be interested in your feedback on this, we don't necessarily operate on the same calendar as the university, so there seems to be a couple of sweet spot times in the year where starting a project works really well.

More so the undergrad level, I think that there's a little bit more flexibility when you're starting to deal with graduate students, but I'm just curious to know how you or your partners have coped with that timing issue of, you get four months per course and then you're kind of moving onto the next one.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thanks. Does anyone wanna take a first stab at that?

Laura Forbes:

I can. I am lucky in that my course spans an entire year, so we have a little bit more flexibility with my course than with other courses in terms of how much time we've got.

I did teach another programme evaluation course which was two semesters rather than three semesters and that is tighter.

So the kinds of things that, as a faculty member, I have to be able to do is, I have to be able to connect with somebody like CESI who can make sure that the needs of the community partner and the timing suits my timing.

There's also a possibility to do things like pre-planning of projects and we did an example of that this year where we had somebody working for us in the summer to prep a project so that it would be ready to go right away in September, which our students wouldn't be able to do themselves.

Other things include being flexible. Include being willing to pick up the phone and say, "Hey, Research Ethics, can you speed this along for me because I've got students who really need to get this done now?" And just other kinds of out of the box brainstorming.

So that happens within the course, it happens with our CESI partners, it can happen with our community partners too but kind of thinking outside the box about how things can get done and trying to slot things in any way that we can. Those are my best suggestions.

Lindsey Thomson:

Great, thank you Laura. Anyone else?

Adam Bonnycastle:

I think in our case, we've got a sort of, it's a pro and a con but we're one semester, not the whole year.

But we know it's always the winter semester and so the other sort of nice thing is, in our case, we're not so much working with individual community members, but rather representatives of that community. Whether it's the SEED or the city with the bike infrastructure and so on.

And so that sort of allows us to do a little bit of pre-planning in the sense of saying, "Okay, well we've got this particular topic and we can do a little bit of thinking about it to get the students some ideas before hand."

And develop that understanding with the community group that if this is gonna happen, it's gonna be in that winter semester.

And if it's not gonna happen that winter semester, well then maybe there's an opportunity the next winter, which isn't ideal because it's a year away, but at the same time, it's a very defined set of, here's what we're capable of and it will be happening during these times and let's think about what can happen within that scope.

And then the last thing I would say is from our student's projects point of view, they're often first pass projects that allow the community partner to think more about the data that they are involved with as opposed to coming up with a definite solution to the problem.

So we've had two, taking the city's example for a moment, we've had two groups look at alternative bike routes throughout the city to avoid large arterial roads.

I've noticed after that, assigned bike lanes, or not bike lanes, but assigned bike routes through residential neighbourhoods.

I don't think for a moment that our students came up with the final solution, but I think that what they were able to come up for the city at least influenced thinking and gave them more information to make a final decision on it.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thanks Adam. Is there anyone else that wanted to add anything?

Tom Armitage:

I can add to that.

Lindsey Thomson:

Yeah.

Tom Armitage:

So I think of projects in three different ways.

There's three different categories of projects, one is like a semester based project that in my experience at least has been more like an undergraduate level. And it's fixed in time, January to April, September to December that kind of thing.

And then the year long courses which have typically been more grad student based where they integrate your community project into the greater body of work that they're working on for that year or two years.

But then there's also the Research Shop. I don't know if you're familiar with that, but essentially, they have project interns and project managers who work on projects, community based projects that span outside of that, or can span outside of it.

Where if you have a year long project that, maybe you don't have a course that you're working with, but there are project interns and managers who can work on it, they're not fixed to any particular schedule outside of the fact that they're grad students and may leave at some point, but maybe somebody else can come back in.

So they could be as something as quick as a one month project or something that you want to get going, it could be as long as a two year thing. I don't know what the longest one we've had at the Research Shop is but, it's not fixed within the year.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thanks, Tom. I think I saw a hand back here, yes.

Questioner #1:

Good afternoon everybody. I just have a question for the university professors or for the persons working at the university.

I'm working on a group project for Quantitative Techniques. It's a class that I'm doing this semester and it's looking at bulletins for trains in rural communities.

I wanna be able to use my research findings to help because a planner in a specific rural community indicated that my findings would be appreciated, but my project is limited and limiting and I don't want to attempt to give recommendations outside the scope of my project. So what do you recommend that I do?

Stephanie Howells:

That sounds awesome.

I think you should talk to your professor if you haven't already because they will likely have recommendations for you. But I think the way that you said it makes the most sense right?

I tell my students, 'cause some of them are saying like, "I don't wanna just do this thing and never go forward with it, I wanna actually have a contribution."

And so I help the student vet what they're doing before we pass it along to a potential, not a community partner but the person they were focused on.

I've helped them kind of craft emails to share it and say, "Do what you want with this, know that this was for a course project."

So kind of know all of the background information. And if you're opening yourself up that they can then contact you for further information, I think that would be wonderful.

But go through your professor first 'cause they should have that and then of course, you can contact CESI 'cause I'm sure they can help you navigate that as well. I'm volunteering you, Lindsey.

Lindsey Thomson:

That's my job. Thank you. Thank you for that. Does anyone else have any thoughts on the question?

Laura Forbes:

I have two thoughts that are very, very similar. Which are that trying to really figure out what wording is gonna work to make sure the community partner understands exactly what you're saying I think will be important.

So I'm assuming that the community partner is a lay person and they may not understand what your research really, truly means, so being able to translate for them about exactly what it does mean and what it doesn't mean is very important.

The other things is that students can also get really excited about things that other people are interested in and can end up getting a little bit in over their head in order to try and meet expectations.

So be aware that that can happen and it's likely not worth your while to do that in a course and get, maybe off-track, maybe overloaded, so try and keep that in mind.

And again, your professor could help you to make sure you're not going overboard, they can help you to find those words as well. Yup.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thank you Laura. Yes, Francesco?

Francesco Leri:

Hi, Laura just mentioned very briefly about the Research and Ethics Boards and we get really involved in all these things and I just wanted to know if there was a general, your opinions.

Is it working? Is it not working? How is it perceived? The perceptions around that. Yeah.

Laura Thomson:

Okay.

Francesco Leri:

In this context.

Laura Forbes:

In this context. Is an ever changing beast is what I have figured out over the last few years. But our Ethics Board historically has been fantastic.

Coming here from a different institution, I have not been at a university whose Ethics Board works as quickly as ours. So coming from that mindset, our Ethics Board is amazing.

There have been challenges over the past few years, there's been a lot of change going on in our Ethics Board and so there have been times when Ethics has slowed things down for some of our projects, but my experience with the folks over at the Ethics Board is that if you call them up, they are really willing to

help, they are willing to do things for students that they might not do for, you know, me just because it's my project.

So that has been my experience. So yes, is Ethics a lot of work for these projects? Does it take time? Yes.

But I think our Ethics Board does a good a job as they can, which according to my previous experiences, is really good compared to what I see at other institutions.

Liz Jackson:

I have a follow up to that question about the internal stakeholders experiences of ethics and I'm very interested in hearing from people who are working based in community.

What are your experiences and perspectives on the timelines that Ethics involves?

But I'm also even more curious to hear from you what you wish we knew and did when we're working with you and your clients and members in terms of actual ethics not legal butt-covering.

So if you had things we wish we knew or would think about when we're planning our project I'm all ears.

Tom Armitage:

So my experience with Ethics is very similar to what Laura described. I see it as an absolute necessity and I don't see it as, you know, something that's just a pain in the butt that you have to go through.

I think it offers a lot of value particularly when you're thinking through a project too. It forces you to think through things that you should be thinking about when you're asking people questions.

So I see tremendous value in that and I imagine that the students that we've worked with in the past see a lot of value in that as well.

And it's just something that you get a sense of what the timelines are from how long things generally take, and you just build that into your project planning.

So you think it's gonna take a couple of months to get something back, let's just make sure we get it in by mid-December and should get it back mid-January that kind of thing. It hasn't been a big deal for us in that respect.

In terms of what to think about, it's hard to say because I've worked in, and I'm not just kissing butts here, but I've worked with some great people, great students, great profs, some great project managers that kind of thing who just think through things very well.

Because they're either very experienced or very passionate about the project and want to do well, so they think through things and how to ask questions. Manners in which questions are asked that kind of thing.

Mavis Morton:

And I would just say on the ethics question I would agree that we have great people, always willing to quickly try to address an urgent question or need, and I think we need a very different process.

And I think there's things that we need to think through that is different about doing community engaged scholarship that isn't, sort of, possible or available with the kind of traditional structure and processes that we currently have.

And so, we're excited about working on that which so are the folks at the Research Ethics Board.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thanks, Mavis and Janet, you had a question?

Janet:

This is for Jade and Denise.

Jade, you mentioned in your introduction that the way that the course sort of evolved was tricky and surprising and with anticipated challenges and some surprising rewards, specifically as it evolved for particularly a white student audience as well as Denise sharing that as a grassroots, volunteer-driven organization, the challenges that that creates also and being able to participate equitably in this type of learning which can often, even with our best intentions, weigh more heavily on the outputs for students than the organization itself.

I'm just wondering from that perspective for both of you, of struggling with that, what have you learned through this process that we can work better as in terms of an institution and supporters of community-engaged learning for ensuring students are really well prepared and that organizations that have less resources are supported in the way that they need to be able to not have to take a vacation day to come to a panel and be really able to see how this work can impact their organizations as well.

Jade Ferguson:

Do you want to start?

Denise Francis:

For me, the Black Heritage Society is a passion project so I'm more than willing to devote my time to come here to events like this.

I came to Jade's class to see the final projects and I took time, I can flex my time, I met with Melissa during work hours and so on.

I'm a long standing employee at my employer's so I have my six weeks of holidays so I'm able to flex my time and do things like that.

One of the things that's good is that some of the projects that were produced like the blog, the Afronautic Research Lab, we presented it at the Heritage Hall on the weekend, so some of our members who don't have the flexibility like I do were able to participate at other times.

The blog it's posted online so everybody can see the projects, so those are some excellent outputs that we had.

We have a couple of retirees who are able to help during some day time things, but I will say that it is a challenge for us working folks who don't have the time that I do to participate, but there's many other ways that they are able to see the projects and learn from what was happening.

Jade Ferguson:

In terms of the class for the most part, in terms of what we're working on in terms of content was race, racism, racial discrimination and so when we had people coming in talking, so the class is called Minoritized Voices, so it was important for me that we paid our minoritized voices who spoke to predominantly white students so there were 45 students, five students were students of colour.

One of the things that was important for me was making sure that those who came into the class to share their experience, and share their knowledge were properly compensated to give them the Canada Council rate for coming into class and spending an hour and an hour and a half with us.

And at the same time, it was complicated. It was complicated in terms of, so I'll give one particular incident in terms of thinking about how race and racial dynamics were playing.

So we're fortunate to have two people come into the course. One was a young Black woman, another one was a white middle-aged man.

Denise Francis:

Retiring.

Jade Ferguson:

Yeah. And each of us were talking about our relation to Blackness and Black culture, Black cultural production and wealth and beyond. We each had our own time limit, it was my course but I opened it up.

So I perhaps spoke for 10 minutes and then the young Black woman spoke for perhaps 15 minutes and then for the next 40 minutes, the elder, the older white man spoke about Blackness and Black people. He said all kinds of interesting things, some things that were, were troubling.

And for me, one of the risks of having a community partner come in and speak to the class, we all of a sudden had a dynamic in which I really didn't want that dynamic to be replicated by students who thought that presenting all your knowledge that you've read about Black people was really important it should be shared over the two Black women who were standing in the corner looking at each other aghast.

So there's various kinds of ethical and political risks that were happening and various kinds of modelling that were happening as we were engaging each other in collaboration to and knowledge and expertise and so forth.

Lindsey Thomson:

And to go back to Janet's question, on the side of whether it's CESI, staff like myself as intermediaries or yourself as a faculty member that had to kind of, respond to the moment or just deal with that situation.

How did you move forward to address it and is there ways we could've better supported that?

Jade Ferguson:

I think it's actually It was actually a very good experience for students because you could see students were getting uncomfortable.

Seeing what happens when book knowledge gets prioritized over experiential knowledge and things like that.

So it's actually an important moment for them to see how, in the classroom, seeing how voices become minoritized in that very process.

Denise Francis:

And as an organization, that's actually something we've struggled with.

One of the sort of, as an outsider's funniest thing is that we had two white men describing cultural procreation to a group of Black people and were trying to explain to them what was wrong with your conversation.

Just like Jade described, they shut us out while they argued among themselves. So for us, it was a learning experience because we didn't realize it was such a, again we felt uncomfortable, but we didn't know what to stop, how to stop it, it was almost like a train wreck almost.

So we found it was like a learning experience for us, as to who we want to be out there presenting our organization, so we've learned from that.

Lindsey Thomson:

So obviously, these dynamics exist everywhere and they manifest in certain ways when they're brought into CEL partnerships, and I think for myself, when I think about my social location, I don't always have the answers for that, but I definitely want to be there in ways that are needed and CESI as an institute I believe, feels the same way.

So more and more we're moving towards creating community-engaged scholarship that really brings that social justice lens to our work and that means that we're reaching out and seeing what the appetite is to a broader set of organizations than we have worked with in the past.

But obviously, there's a lot of messiness there and I really feel privileged to be a part of these conversations and hear your thoughts on it and everyone else's.

So I know we're coming to the end of our time together, I wanted to just put it back to the panelists to see if there's any final comments and I don't know if we have time for more questions but I feel like we got a really good discussion going here today and I'm kind of sad we have to cut it off now, but are there any other final comments from any of our panelists? To take us to the end of this session?

Denise Francis:

I would just like to say thank you for the partnerships that we've had. I can see the tangible results.

I'm a numbers person so when I look at the increase in attendance, the decrease in the demographics at our events, the increase in social media followers and hits for our website and social media, I can see those are tangible results from the partnership that we have with CESI and we're very grateful for that.

Lindsey Thomson:

Thank you, we're so glad to hear that. Thank you. Anyone else have any final comments to lead us in? No?

Laura Forbes:

I have one other comment that kind of builds off what was just being said, which is that when things don't go as you expect, and maybe go wrong is sometimes when some of the best student learning happens and that is one of the powerful things about community engaged learning.

That was a really powerful example of that.

Lindsey Thomson:

Okay. I think, unless anyone has any other final comments, I will wrap it up there. Thank you so much to each of our panelists. We really, really appreciate your time and your input here today.

I hope that we can have events similar to this and different than this to bring us all together to keep the conversation going.

So thank you to the Teaching and Learning Excellence Hub group for your supports and thank you all for attending here today.

[End of transcript]