

Assessment of Engaged Learning at Loyola University Chicago (LUC) – 2021-2022 Findings

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LUC Data Brief authored jointly by

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Purpose: This data brief describes the extent to which Engaged Learning courses taught during 2021-2022 were organized and impacted student learning in relationship to Loyola standards. It summarizes findings from an assessment of a stratified random sample of writing assignments collected from students in the Engaged Learning courses. It also summarizes an assessment of a sample of syllabi from Engaged Learning courses. Both assessment studies use rubrics applied by a trained group of university faculty and staff. Based on the findings, the brief suggests next steps for how to continue and improve support of Engaged Learning courses and future assessment of what students learn in these courses.

Background of Engaged Learning at Loyola

The [Engaged Learning University Requirement](#) at Loyola University Chicago is a three-credit curricular requirement alongside the core curriculum which all undergraduate students complete prior to graduation. Engaged Learning courses are developed by faculty and academic units to provide Loyola students with robust experiential learning opportunities, including (1) a structured learning experience integrated into a course that engages students in learning outside the classroom, such as in a community agency, professional organization, or in a research setting; (2) critical reflection on that experience through various assignments in class; and (3) synthesis of the experience through a final project or [learning portfolio](#). Courses are approved as Engaged Learning in one of five (5) designations: service-learning, academic internships, undergraduate research, fieldwork, and public performance. The faculty and staff at the Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship (CELTS) coordinate the Engaged Learning courses and the assessment of its student learning outcomes.

This requirement was first adopted by the University in fall 2012 and was first assessed in the 2015-2016 academic year. The next assessment cycle was planned for 2018 –2019, but due to leadership changes, the adoption of a new portfolio platform (Digication), and the global pandemic, we continued to adjust the assessment cycle timeline until 2021-2022. During the 2021-2022 academic year, the Engaged Learning courses were moving to more in-person experiences, both in class and in the community/professional organizations. The context of the ongoing pandemic, coupled with institutional leadership changes, certainly impacted Engaged Learning, but moving toward the tenth year of the University Requirement has embedded Engaged Learning throughout the curriculum.

The student learning outcomes for Engaged Learning have been consistent since its inception in 2012, and are clearly articulated as:

Engaged Learning Outcomes: Building on participation in an engaged learning course (defined as a structured project or experience of service-learning, an academic internship, professional fieldwork, undergraduate research, or a public artistic performance), a Loyola student will be able to:

1. synthesize out-of-classroom and in-classroom learning through reflection
2. relate the experience of engaged learning to intellectual, personal, professional, and/or civic development
3. connect the engaged learning experience to the mission of Loyola University Chicago to 'expand knowledge in the service of humanity through learning, justice, and faith.'

The goal of the Engaged Learning assessment initiative is to provide evidence on the extent to which learning outcomes are achieved. Findings contribute to the development of improved strategies and approaches for faculty development and for student learning and development at Loyola University Chicago.

Assessment Method

During the assessment cycle of 2021-2022, the reflection questions, review rubric, and assessment process were the same as those utilized in the 2015-2016 assessment cycle. Just as in 2015-2016, the 2021-2022 assessment of the Engaged Learning University Requirement involved a three-pronged approach that included faculty and students: 1) Faculty submitted their course syllabus each semester; 2) Students/faculty entered their Engaged Learning placement/experience data into LOCUS; 3) Students responded to a standardized reflection prompt at the end of the semester in their Engaged Learning course(s). The reflection prompt and review rubric were created, utilized, and developed in the 2-year assessment pilot (2013-2015), and utilized in the 2015-2016 assessment cycle, based on the Engaged Learning outcomes referenced above. A new aspect of the 2021-2022 assessment cycle was a rubric to evaluate the Engaged Learning syllabi according to the clear communication of the Engaged Learning outcomes. A total of 1,648 student reflections and 100 course syllabi were submitted in the 2021-2022 assessment cycle. The 2015-2016 cycle included 3297 student reflection. The drop in the sheer numbers of documents collected is believed to be due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on student behavior and on the adoption of the new portfolio platform.

A review committee of 33 faculty/staff, from across disciplines and familiar with Engaged Learning, normed and calibrated the rubric in a detailed orientation session. Upon completion of the session, the faculty/staff committee reviewed a stratified random sample of 400 student reflections and a random sample of 100 faculty syllabi. Reviewers were randomly assigned in the Digication assessment system, and each reflection or syllabus was reviewed and rated by two (2) reviewers independently. If scores did not align, a third reviewer reconciled the scores.

Data from the reviewers was collected within the Digication system and then exported in CSV format to a dataset for statistical analysis purposes. For analysis of the student reflection data, for each student on each of the Engaged Learning Outcomes, the two (or in just 12 cases, three) reviewers' ratings were averaged to yield a single score for each of the three outcomes. Overall, the raters showed strong consistency in their assessment of students' reflective work. Two raters assessed each submitted reflection initially. If their scores on 2 of the 3 criteria were aligned (within one of each other), then the ratings were averaged. However, if their scores on 2 of the 3 criteria were not aligned (2 points different from each other), a third rater was called in to assess this work. All three of the raters' scores were then averaged for each criteria. For 388/400 (97%) of the students, both evaluators assigned aligned scores on 2 or 3 of the criteria.

Table 1 shows the number and percentage of students who submitted reflections during the 2021-2022 assessment cycle. They are disaggregated by course designation. The number of reflections in the stratified random sample is then shown.

Table 1: Fall 2022 student reflections on Engaged Learning by course designation

Designation	# Students who submitted reflections	% Students submitting reflections across all designations	# Students sampled for coding
Academic Internship	319	20%	80
Fieldwork	110	6%	25
Public Performance	105	6%	25
Service Learning	698	42%	170
Undergraduate Research	416	25%	100
Total	1648	100%	400

The same reviewer scoring process used for student reflections was used for coding the course syllabi from the Engaged Learning courses. A random sample of 100 course syllabi were sampled and coded by the 33 reviewers using a rubric parallel to that used for the student reflections based on the 3 engaged learning outcomes. Overall, the raters showed strong consistency in their assessment of the engaged learning course syllabi. Two raters assessed each submitted syllabi initially. If their scores on 2 of the 3 criteria were aligned (within one of each other), then the ratings were averaged. However, if their scores on 2 of the 3 criteria were not aligned (2 points different from each other), a third rater was called in and assessed this work. All three of the raters' scores were then averaged for each criterion. For 90/100 (90%) of the course syllabi, both evaluators assigned aligned scores on 2 or 3 of the criteria. The fall 2022 assessment of syllabi was the first and baseline collection of these findings. Data for analysis was available for 95 cases. Data was not collected on the designation of the courses sampled in the syllabi assessment.

CELTs designed the assessment and managed the collaborative process of its implementation. OIE worked to support CELT's through analysis of the ratings data and description of the findings.

Findings: Student Reflection Alignment to Engaged Learning Outcomes

Through their reflection paper written for Engaged Learning courses taken during 2021-2022, to what extent do students show they are able to meet learning outcomes which focus on synthesis across in and out of classroom experiences, relating to their engagement in a development fashion, and connecting the experiences in the course with Loyola's mission?

As shown in Table 2, many students provided evidence in their writing that they met or exceeded expectations for the three criteria: 87.4% for Relating Experience to Development; 77.9% for Synthesis through Reflection; 70.6% for Connecting Engaged Learning to Mission. Even on the criterion where they showed the least success, "Connecting Engaged Learning to Mission", the mean rating by the reviewers was 2.03 whereas a 2 rating is 'partially meets expectations.' However, there is room for discussion on how to better serve the roughly 20% of students who are not or only partially showing that they have achieved the expected learning outcomes.

Table 2: Fall 2022 overall results – Student Reflection Criteria Performance Level (Average across raters)

Criteria	Distribution of ratings Number of students; Percentage of students within criteria			Mean	Median
	Does Not Meet/ Partially Meets Expectations (1.00 - 1.99)	Meets Expectations (2.00-2.99)	Exceeds Expectations (3.00)		
Synthesis Through Reflection	88 22%	232 58%	76 19%	2.17	2.5
Relating Experience to Development	50 13%	164 41%	82 21%	2.28	2.5
Connecting Engaged Learning to Mission	117 29%	224 56%	55 14%	2.03	2.0
Overall	255 21%	620 52%	213 18%	2.16	

Ratings scale: 1=Does not meet expectations/ Partially meets expectations; 2=Meets expectations; 3=Exceeds expectations

When comparing students from the different types of designated Engaged Learning courses, the student groups showed the same basic pattern of achievement with the largest success in writing about their course experiences developmentally and the least success in expressing how the course was connected to Loyola’s mission. Table 3 shows these patterns. There were differences across designation and criteria, but determining the meaning of these differences will require additional discussion among Loyola’s Engaged Learning stakeholders. For example, what does it tell us that students in undergraduate research courses were least likely and those in public performance were most likely to express how their work within the Engaged Learning courses connected to Loyola’s mission? Those in public performance were also more successful in synthesizing in and out of classroom work in their reflective writing than were students in other types of courses. Are there facets of the public performance experience that could be successfully mirrored in other types of courses to deepen student engaged learning?

Table 3: Fall 2022 Results by Designation Group – Student Reflection Criteria Performance Level (Average across raters)

Designation	Average ratings			
	Synthesis Through Reflection	Relating Experience to Development	Connecting Engaged Learning to Mission	Overall
Academic Internship	2.20	2.36	2.03	2.20
Fieldwork	2.20	2.44	1.98	2.21
Public Performance	2.34	2.53	2.24	2.37
Service Learning	2.11	2.20	2.09	2.13
Undergraduate Research	2.22	2.25	1.90	2.12
Total	2.17	2.28	2.03	2.20

Ratings scale: 1=Does not meet expectations/ Partially meets expectations; 2=Meets expectations; 3=Exceeds expectations

The overall average of student performance has risen over time to be 2.2 for the fall 2021 and spring 2022 collected reflection papers. For example, for student written reflections collected in the fall semester 2014, the average score on the engaged learning rating was 1.6. Fall 2015, the average was 1.9 and the spring 2016 semester ratings average was 2.1. This pattern of increased performance within the student reflection papers was also seen across each of the criteria. For example, in spring semester 2016, ratings of how students wrote about the connection of engaged learning to mission found 38% did not or only partially met expectations and 61% met or exceeded expectations. In 2021-2022, 29% of the students did not or partially meet expectations and 70% met or exceeded expectations.

After the 2015-2016 Engaged Learning Assessment results, to support faculty teaching Engaged Learning courses and students enrolled in Engaged Learning courses, the Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship (CELTs) increased faculty development programming and online resources. Specifically, CELTs increased faculty outreach efforts, developed pedagogical resources to support critical reflection and experiential learning, and implemented numerous faculty development programs, including the Faculty Certificate in Experiential Learning workshop series, faculty learning communities, faculty fellowship programs, and communities of practice. Not only did these programs assist faculty teaching Engaged Learning courses, but also served as a recruitment for newer faculty to teach Engaged Learning courses. As a result, some improvement emerged from building faculty capacity around pedagogical strategies for experiential learning. For students, CELTs created online resources and enhanced communications around Engaged Learning opportunities.

Findings: Syllabi Alignment to Engaged Learning Outcomes

Though previous assessments of Loyola’s Engaged Learning have collected and studied course syllabi, fall 2022 is the first time using a rubric and trained reviewers to code the syllabi systematically. Table 4 below shares the baseline descriptions of how well the syllabi articulated and explained the ways in which the course would shape students’ experience through engaged learning strategies. On average, the course syllabi met expectations for alignment to engaged learning expectations. However, there is room for improvement with about one-half of the syllabi not meeting or only partially meeting expectations.

Table 4: Fall 2022 overall results – Syllabi Alignment Level (Average across raters)

Criteria	Distribution of ratings			Mean
	Does Not Meet/ Partially Meets Expectations (1.00 - 1.99)	Meets Expectations (2.00-2.99)	Exceeds Expectations (3.00)	
Learning outcomes clearly articulate how the learning relates to Engaged Learning	49 52%	30 32%	16 17%	1.88
Engaged Learning experience is clearly explained in the syllabus	45 47%	30 32%	20 21%	2.01
Engaged Learning experience is connected to formative and summative reflection assignments	43 45%	34 36%	18 19%	1.92

Ratings scale: 1=Does not meet expectations/ Partially meets expectations; 2=Meets expectations; 3=Exceeds expectations

Summary and Next Steps

In sum, the large majority of students in Engaged Learning courses wrote reflections that illustrated that they learned to expected levels how to express the ways the course (1) helped them synthesize across in- and out-of-classroom experiences, (2) relate to their engagement in a development fashion, and (3) connect the experiences in the course with Loyola's mission. This student learning was evident even though assessment results also showed that only about half of Engaged Learning courses met expectations on how they should optimally focus their syllabi on priority Engaged Learning practices. Further, the quality of student learning shown had improved between 2015-2016 and 2021-2022.

The Office of Institutional Effectiveness is committed to continuing to work with CELTS and others in Academic Affairs to design and use assessment to inform decisions on how to best support student learning. OIE welcomes discussion on future assessment that can continue to illuminate the impact of the Engaged Learning courses on student learning. OIE also suggests further investigation on how to work with CELTS and others to assess the processes shaping the selection of Engaged Learning courses, the support given to faculty teaching these courses, and the types of assignments and pedagogy within the courses that are most influential on positive student experiences.

The Center for Engaged Learning, Teaching, and Scholarship (CELTS) is committed to enhancing the Engaged Learning University Requirement to support the teaching and learning of Loyola faculty, promote the transformative education of Loyola students, and address the most pressing priorities of our communities. In an effort to foster continuous improvement of Engaged Learning, the following steps will be a priority for CELTS:

- Continue implementing faculty development opportunities that support engaged learning courses
- Explicitly articulate connections to the University Mission in Engaged Learning courses so students both identify the Jesuit mission and connect experiences to the Jesuit mission
- Foster faculty development on Ignatian critical reflection as a framework for meaning-making
- Further develop resources and pedagogical strategies on critical reflection for faculty to support student skill development
- Increase the number of Engaged Learning faculty serving on the faculty review committee
- Further analysis of data based on Engaged Learning designation, class year, discipline, and other categories.