“Into the Space of Being a Sociologist”:

Student, Community Partner, and Faculty Experiences of Community-Engaged Learning

By

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We acknowledge and respect the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək̓ʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences of undergraduate students, community partners, and faculty in one Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) course. Building on the work of previous CEL scholarship, data was collected across the eight-month course using mixed methods (including surveys, focus groups, interviews, content analysis, and observations) in order to answer the research questions: *What are the primary benefits and challenges to students, community partners, and instructor in one undergraduate community-engaged learning course? In what ways do their experiences (benefits and challenges) intersect?* The findings demonstrate that while stakeholders experience differing benefits and challenges due to their context-specific perspectives, they also share key benefits and challenges which underscore the transformative potential of CEL.

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Dedication

This research is for the community-engaged learning believers. I would not have been able to complete this research without the participation of the students, community partners, and the instructor, who opened their minds and hearts to allow me to understand their experiences. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Chapter I: Introduction

I felt the pull of Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) mid-way through my undergraduate degree. As a sociology major, I had spent three years studying social problems but spent no time practically addressing them (at least within the bounds of my university life) and it felt like I was just treading water until I graduated and could *actually* contribute to society in a way that felt more concrete to me. While enrolling for my fourth year, I eagerly registered for an Applied Sociology seminar that promised to pair students with community organizations, fostering collaboration under the banner of "community-engaged learning." At the time, I did not know what this would entail, but I was keen to work with the community and gain some experience outside the university context. This course reshaped my academic trajectory: the CEL experience ignited a newfound passion, fundamentally reshaping my perception of sociology's potential.

After reflecting on my personal growth spurred by the course, I went on to center my undergraduate honors thesis on a subsequent CEL experience during my final year. This additional experience not only reinforced my enthusiasm for CEL but also solidified my conviction in its transformative potential. I wondered if my beliefs about CEL were reflective of other students' experiences, or if what I experienced was a product of my specific circumstances or my own motivations. As I also foster an interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning, I decided to pursue CEL as the topic of my graduate research. At the same time as beginning my Master's degree, I began working in the University of Victoria's Community-Engaged Learning Office and immersed myself in CEL pedagogy.

The two CEL experiences I had during my undergrad, despite being in different courses and with different community partners, shared many similarities. They both followed a consistent life cycle: commencing with a blend of excitement to contribute to my community and

apprehension toward the unfamiliar territory ahead; encountering challenges as the experience and project intensified; and ultimately concluding with a sense of accomplishment, capability, and relief upon the completion of the CEL project. During my time working in UVic's CEL Office, I observed other students also experience that same life cycle, regardless of discipline, course, instructor, community partner, or type of project they worked on. This prompted me to question whether this cycle is inherent to CEL and, if so, how students navigate it, and how other key CEL stakeholders—such as community partners and instructors—support them. I also began to question what community partners and instructors experience and how their experiences and perspectives diverge from those of students. These ideas form the foundation of this thesis.

I explain my path to this research as an acknowledgment of my own position on CEL and the biases I bring to this project. At the same time, my own CEL experiences have taught me that CEL cannot be perfect all the time: there are parts that will not go as planned, and—like anything in education and life more generally—there is room for improvement and areas of opportunity. I believe in CEL and know it has had far-reaching effects on my personal and professional life, but I am only one person with perspectives that are limited by my own experiences and social context. However, I am *not* the only sociology student wanting to address the complex social problems our world is experiencing. With CEL being a viable way to do so within the structure of a university course, I want to explore the perspectives on CEL from those individuals who engage in it most closely. I hope my bias towards CEL is not read as sugar-coating, but rather underscores that I, like the students I researched, have been 'in the trenches' and understand both the highs and the lows experienced during community work.

Now that I have explained my own journey in CEL, I will outline what CEL is and its connection to sociology and higher education.

Community-Engaged Learning in Higher Education

The many social and environmental problems facing contemporary societies and our global world today—such as racial inequality, climate change, public health crises, economic precarity, and gender-based violence, among many others— require researchers and universities to address these issues and contribute to the public good (Gordon da Cruz, 2018). One way in which this is being achieved is through fostering civic engagement in students and teaching about social justice through community-based teaching, research, and learning (Morton et al., 2012). In particular, CEL is becoming an increasingly popular pedagogy for helping students gain hands-on experience applying their disciplinary skills to help confront social problems. CEL is defined as "a curricular or co-curricular model whereby students' academic learning is enhanced by institutionally coordinated experiences in the broader community" (Otto & Dunens, 2021, p. 39).

Given the subject matter of sociology (which is often focused on social problems and injustice), sociology students are well-positioned to use the knowledge gained during their degree to make an impact on social problems through CEL (Morton et al., 2012). Alfred McClung Lee rightly asks in his 1976 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association, "Sociology for whom?", perhaps pre-empting Michael Burawoy's eventual campaign "for public sociology" in 2005 (p. 4). The need for sociology students to get a sense of what 'doing' sociology[1] looks and feels like can potentially be fulfilled by an approach such as CEL, wherein students can come face-to-face with the social problems they read about during their academic studies. By doing so, students can take their learning outside of the classroom—beyond the realm of professional sociology and into the realm of public sociology—and 'do'

[1] It is thought that the idea of 'doing' sociology comes from the field of public sociology. While it is unclear where the phrase originated, some consider Herbert Gans the progenitor of this phrase due to his 1988 American Sociological Association Presidential Address: "Sociology in America" (Gans, 1989).

sociology. Indeed, engaging with communities provides a unique learning opportunity for sociology students that should not be overlooked. CEL also has the potential to make a tangible difference for local organizations (which are commonly under-resourced), who can access university-trained students at little-to-no cost to the organization itself. CEL and work-integrated learning are also being emphasised by those who recognize that students need hands-on experience to be competitive in the job market after graduation (Andrews & Ramji, 2020; Ciabattari, 2018).

Given these benefits, CEL and similar approaches feature in institutional priorities and demonstrate the importance of experiential learning in the eyes of many universities (Gordon da Cruz, 2018; University of Victoria, 2018). For example, the University of Victoria (UVic) included CEL and experiential learning in their 2018-2023 strategic priorities: "Strategy 3.1: Extend UVic's expertise and leadership in experiential learning so that *every student* has the opportunity to engage in, and be recognized for, research, work-integrated, community-engaged or other forms of experiential learning" (University of Victoria, 2018, p. 5; emphasis added). However, this is a large goal. For the University of Victoria, offering experiential learning to 'every [undergraduate and graduate] student' means creating opportunities for approximately 22,000 students (University of Victoria, 2021).[2] Given the scale of this goal, it is likely challenging for institutions to know what is experienced in each experiential learning opportunity. Similarly, for those opportunities that are community-engaged, institutions may benefit from understanding what community partners experience when working with students.

[2] UVic's current strategic plan ("2023 Forward") has scaled back this goal. Experiential learning is still referenced but is captured under the priority of creating a "Culture of Change and Transformation." The relevant goal is "Supporting collaborative approaches to innovation in our research, knowledge mobilization, experiential learning programs and operations" (University of Victoria, 2023).

Sociology students' CEL experiences have been studied to document the benefits and learning outcomes of CEL for students (for example, see Berard & Ravelli, 2020; Clever & Miller, 2019; McKinney & Snedker, 2017; Shostak et al., 2019). However, few studies have explored the CEL experience for all three primary stakeholders (students, faculty, and community partners) simultaneously. Given the institutional push for CEL and other types of experiential learning, more research is needed on the CEL experience across all stakeholders. Therefore, I seek to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the primary benefits and challenges to students, community partners, and instructor in one undergraduate community-engaged learning course?
2. In what ways do their experiences (benefits and challenges) intersect?

By studying the perspectives of students, community partners, and faculty throughout their shared CEL experience, I aim to add evidence to the benefits and challenges of CEL for all stakeholders and identify where improvements could be made in the CEL process. Exploring the intersections of stakeholder experiences may demonstrate where current challenges may be remedied and if the intentions behind CEL are being achieved.

Sociological Significance

While CEL is relevant to all disciplines, CEL particularly matters to sociology for several reasons. If sociology is about the relationship between the individual and the social, then education plays a vital intermediary role in creating engaged citizens who care about bettering the world they live in. As the name implies with its tripartite focus on community, engagement, and learning, CEL is an impactful way of connecting students with their education and community. Connected students grow up into connected adults who care about the well-being of their communities.

Additionally, sociologists should care about CEL in undergraduate education for several reasons: for one, because CEL is a method of helping students practice being sociologists in the field, thereby increasing their confidence and ability to be sociologists outside of the university once they graduate. Second, CEL is a viable way of introducing students to and involving them in public sociology in an intentional and practical way (students are, after all, sociology's "first and captive public," as Michael Burawoy (2005, p. 7) reminds us). CEL enables students to be ambassadors to the world beyond the university and reignites the passion for sociology that draws many students to the discipline in the first place (Burawoy, 2005). Third, studying CEL may provide a better understanding of how students learn sociology and the impact of this pedagogy on their disciplinary identity development.

This research, however, is not just about students. By including community partners and faculty in this study, I aim to demonstrate the interconnectedness of CEL experiences and how the student learning that occurs is shaped. Community partners and faculty may have great influence over students, but it is also likely that students influence the community partners and faculty in a variety of ways. For community partners, hosting CEL students enables the organization to grow and evolve as sociology students bring new ideas and perspectives on social problems. For faculty, teaching with CEL enables instructors to straddle the worlds of professional and public sociology and focus more on a mentorship role than that of the 'sage on the stage' (Burawoy, 2005).

In my mind, CEL holds undeniable importance to sociology. This is supported by the many instructors teaching students sociology using a CEL pedagogy (Berard & Ravelli, 2019; Hoschild et al., 2014; Huisman, 2010; Lehpalmer & Menchik, 2023; Mobley, 2007, to name a few). By considering the intersecting perspectives of students, community partners, and faculty,

this research will shine an even brighter light on why universities and sociologists should be paying attention to it for the sake of stakeholders and the wider community.

About the CEL course

To answer the research questions, I studied the experiences of students, community partners, and the instructor in one CEL course offered in the Sociology department at the University of Victoria (UVic). In the 2021-2022 academic year, Sociology 439A/B (Community-Engaged Sociology I & II) was offered as a two-semester course for the first time, having run three times previously as a one-semester course. This presents a unique opportunity to study the experiences of the students, community partners, and course instructor in the first ever two-semester delivery of the course. The two-semester model is not only unique to the Sociology department at UVic (as well as being the only explicitly CEL-based course in the department at the time of writing) but is also unique amongst all undergraduate CEL courses at UVic that are not Honours or self-directed studies projects. At the start of the course in September, this offering of Sociology 439 A/B had 15 students enrolled and 15 community partners. The students and instructor met once a week for three-hour seminars from September to December 2021 (Sociology 439A) and again from January to April 2022 (Sociology 439B). I attended every seminar to observe the cohort, alongside other data collection methods including surveys, focus groups, interviews, and content analysis of students' reflective journals. More detail about this course and my research methods can be found in the Methodology.

Thesis Outline

In this introduction, I have aimed to outline the context of this research. In the following Literature Review (Chapter Two), I will give an overview of community-engaged learning and

briefly explain its history in the academy, as well as its connection to sociology. I review what scholars have previously found regarding the benefits and challenges of CEL for students, community partners, and faculty and discuss gaps in the literature that this research aims to address. In Chapter Three, I explain my mixed-methods research methodology and data analysis. Chapters Four and Five outline the findings of this research across the three stakeholder groups (students, community partners, and instructor), presented chronologically from the beginning of the course in September 2021 to its conclusion in May 2022. A discussion of these findings follows in Chapter Six, including the benefits and challenges of CEL for students, community partners, and the instructor; the life cycle of CEL; and key outcomes and takeaways for students, community partners, and the instructor. My thesis concludes with Chapter Seven, where I answer my research questions and describe the limitations of this study, future research topics, and closing thoughts.

Chapter II: Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the literature about community-engaged learning (CEL) and the documented benefits and challenges for students, community partners, and faculty. I begin with an overview of CEL and the core values of the pedagogy, as well as common criticisms of this approach to teaching and learning. After briefly reviewing the origins of CEL, I discuss the connections between CEL and sociology. I then turn my attention to benefits and challenges of CEL for students, community partners, and faculty. Finally, I discuss gaps in the research.

Community-Engaged Learning: An Overview

Community-engaged learning (CEL) is an experiential learning pedagogy that combines academic learning, community participation, and facilitated reflection. It typically involves a partnership or collaboration between a community group and an academic institution that intends to benefit all participants, including the community group, its clients, students, faculty, and the institution (Otto & Dunens, 2021; Tremblay et al., 2020). CEL includes types of experiential learning (and what many refer to as Work-Integrated Learning, or WIL) such as field placements/experiences, applied research, and community service learning. Key components of CEL are connecting the community project or service with academic content learned in class and facilitated reflection for the students (Hochschild et al., 2014). There is no consensus on the definition of CEL because it can vary widely between educators and post-secondary institutions (Davis et al., 2019; Mitchell, 2008).

CEL is also sometimes known as service learning or community-based learning. Service-learning places the focus on students providing service to a community partner in order to both facilitate the students' learning and satisfy a community need (Soska et al., 2010; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). Carlisle et al. (2017) describe community-based learning as "a teaching

practice that integrates problem-based service-learning, volunteerism, experiential learning, and curriculum for academic credit" (p. 105). Service learning and community-based learning share key commonalities with CEL, such as the incorporation of facilitated reflection and strategic design so as to achieve specific learning objectives (Hochschild et al., 2014; Shostak et al., 2019; Soyer et al., 2023).

Although 'service-learning' is still the most prevalent label for this approach to teaching and learning, the sometimes-negative connotation of 'service' is leading some scholars to prefer terms such as CEL or community-based learning (Johnston, 2020; Mitchell, 2008). However, Mitchell's (2008) concept of critical service-learning is a branch of service-learning that resists the negative connotation by focusing heavily on a social justice orientation, social responsibility, anti-oppression, and going beyond service towards envisioning wider societal change. Acknowledging these many terms to describe similar concepts, I will focus on CEL in this thesis.

Regardless of how it is labeled or defined, CEL is perhaps best understood as a spectrum of engagement rather than a singular typology; at one end of the spectrum, low engagement and simple reciprocity and at the other end of the spectrum features high engagement and complex reciprocity (Nagel, 2019). No place on the spectrum is inherently better or worse than another, but considering CEL activities on a spectrum may help to temper expectations of what can be achieved in a CEL experience. CEL may take many forms that range from simple knowledge exchange to the co-creation of ideas and resources (Nagel, 2019); some examples include students completing a project for a community partner on or off-site, students volunteering/working directly with clients at the community partner's site, or students consulting with a community partner to provide support (such as research) for a program or service.

CEL opportunities are designed to align with course and/or program learning objectives and can include a wide variety of community partners (Jakubowski & McIntosh, 2018). 'Community' in CEL is widely defined and can be an informal or formal organization that includes non-profits, businesses, industry, First Nation communities, and governmental agencies, among others (Nagel, 2019). However, Huisman (2010) questions the assumption that 'community' in CEL must always refer to an organized group and argues that individual community members are valid community partners. As CEL necessitates give-and-take with all stakeholders (i.e., students, the community partners, faculty, and the institution), reciprocity and mutual benefit are essential to CEL.

Despite the reliance on community partners as stakeholders in CEL, the definition of community is somewhat debated. Renwick et al. (2020) argue that community is hard to define, because boundaries can be drawn around communities in many diverse ways and that they are not politically or sociologically fixed. They go on to explain that 'community' is often thought of in a simplistic and static way,

> …paying little to no attention to the complex interrelationships between ourselves and any of the one or more communities in which we simultaneously exist. This is a reciprocal relationship since we, as individuals, are as much a product of our collective communities as the communities are a product of our collective membership (Renwick et al., 2020, p. 1234).

Greenberg et al. (2020) note that students in CEL are often thought of as separate from their communities, but in reality, participate in their local communities in ways both linked and unlinked to their role as student. There is a mutual informing between students and the communities they work in that often goes unacknowledged.

The ambiguity (and often lack of critical thought) around defining community leads to many definitions of CEL failing to emphasize the significant impact the community makes on

the partnership, despite community partners being key stakeholders in CEL (Davis et al., 2019). Indeed, community partners have tremendous potential to facilitate students' learning and motivate personal growth in students. Stanlick and Sell (2016) argue that parties involved in CEL should strive for *transformative reciprocity*, "a deep, thick collaboration that holds the possibility for all stakeholders to be transformed by the partnership" (p. 80). Transformational, reciprocal partnership is the pinnacle marker of a successful CEL relationship between all stakeholders involved: students, faculty, community partner(s), and the institution.

The concept of "transformation" is frequently invoked in CEL scholarship. Saltmarsh et al. (2015) describe that transformative community engagement moves beyond transactional exchanges between students, faculty, and community partners to create new, transformative possibilities within the partnership. CEL's transformative potential (Eby, 1998) is predicated on students moving beyond their comfort zone and have new experiences outside of the classroom, potentially ones in which students must confront their own biases and change their way of being in the world (Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). Jakubowski and McIntosh (2018) share that when a CEL experience does not align with what the student expects, and they interrogate the experience through critical reflection, the outcome can be transformational. Huisman (2010) similarly reports that students from her CEL course, in which students partner with immigrant women to document and share their experiences, found the course "transformational" (p. 113) and that it had long-term impacts on the students. Soyer et al. attribute this potential for transformational experiences to the CEL context, where "community-engaged teaching agendas push against codified, prepackaged teaching" in order to create the circumstances for radical learning (2023, p. 158). Lake et al. (2021) argue that CEL is an influential pedagogical approach because it encourages deep learning due to the application of course content to real-world experiences and

explored through reflection (Nelson Laird et al., 2008). Unsurprisingly, deep learning tends to make educational experiences more meaningful to students, who often report CEL improving their engagement with course content and increasing the breadth, depth, and complexity of their knowledge (Lake et al., 2021; Soyer et al., 2023). In summary, CEL is regarded as a high impact educational practice that, when well-designed and executed, can lead to transformative learning for students (Kuh, 2008; Snedker et al., 2023). Having now explained what CEL is, I will outline a brief history of the pedagogy in post-secondary education.

Origins of CEL

CEL has a long history in higher education, with its roots in experiential learning, co-operative education, and service-learning paving the way for the pedagogy described above. Co-operative education—a work-integrated learning model wherein students alternate academic terms with paid work terms in jobs relevant to their discipline—can be traced back over a century to 1903 at the University of Cincinnati (Shukla & Shukla, 2014). This model introduced the concept of integrating experiences outside of the post-secondary environment with academic programs so students could get a taste of what it meant to be working in the discipline they studied and be more employable upon graduation. Shortly after, in the early 20th century, John Dewey was developing the foundational theory behind what would later become known as service-learning (Shukla & Shukla, 2014). Dewey's theory was based on the argument that "learning is enhanced through personal experience, that intellectual development should include social development, and that there is value in providing actions that will benefit others" (Davis et al., 2019, p. 146; Dewey, 1973). Dewey's intellectual contributions to experiential learning remain relevant today and many attribute CEL's core tenets to his work (Soyer et al., 2023). The phrase "service-learning" dates back to 1966 and has been increasingly used as an experiential learning pedagogy

in higher education since the mid-20th century, particularly in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Shukla & Shukla, 2014; Warren, 2012). As academia has shifted from the concept of 'service' to 'community engagement,' the term 'service-learning' has seen less use in favour of 'community-engaged learning' (Johnston, 2020).

Core Values of CEL

CEL can look different across courses, programs, and institutions. However, some core values of CEL that are identified frequently in the literature are reciprocity, reflection, and reflexivity (Dostilio et al., 2012). The literature on engaged scholarship also underscores the importance of social justice and citizenship, indicating that CEL participants should not just focus on how to engage, but also *why* to engage (Beaulieu et al., 2018). Militello et al. (2017) argue that community engagement must also begin with the fundamental understanding that students are working *with* community, not working *in* community. This subtle shift reflects the core CEL value of reciprocity rather than a transactional approach to community work. Students and community partners who show up authentically and engage on the basis of reciprocity are primed for the two-way learning between the institutional and community contexts that is imperative for CEL (Renwick et al., 2020).

Reciprocity can simply be defined as students contributing to and learning from the community while the community benefits and contributes to the student's learning (Pederson et al., 2015). However, it is important to specifically discuss the concept and impact of reciprocity with students, as Dostilio et al. (2012) argue the concept often goes unexamined and is referenced so frequently that there is risk of the "concept being applied as dogma, in which case the vibrancy and robustness associated with it are diluted" (p. 18). Jameson, Clayton, and Jaeger (2011) suggest a distinction between thin and thick reciprocity, wherein thin reciprocity is about

mutually-beneficial transactions and thick reciprocity is about mutual transformation. Thick reciprocity "emphasizes shared voice and power and insists upon collaborative knowledge construction and joint ownership or work processes and products and thereby aligns well with democratic approaches to civic engagement that encourage all partners to grow and to challenge and support one another's growth" (Jameson et al., 2011, p. 264). Thick reciprocity requires intentional, committed partnership and recognition that an investment of time and effort will benefit all stakeholders.

The second core value of CEL is reflection. Reflection serves as a necessary component of CEL (and experiential learning more generally) because it helps students make connections between what they are learning in the classroom and what they are experiencing in the community (Tinkler et al., 2014). Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory includes a four-stage cycle where the learner reflects on their experiences as a necessary step in connecting the experience with abstract concepts. Scholars as early as John Dewey (1933) have contended that reflection is a vital aspect for learning and the development of civic identity—another core tenet of CEL. Reflection ties together the 'service' and the 'learning'; Eyler (2002) reminds us that reflection is integral to achieving learning outcomes in CEL courses and tying abstract concepts learned in the classroom with concrete experiences from their community placements. However, students are unlikely to engage in formal reflection throughout a CEL experience unless the instructor facilitates it (Eyler, 2002). Reflective journals are often assigned in courses to encourage critical reflection (Mitchell, 2008) and have served as a common way in which instructors can apprehend and analyze CEL outcomes for students (for examples of scholars who analyze student reflective journals for CEL research, see Berard & Ravelli, 2020; Dunn & Konrad, 2019; Gururaj et al., 2023; Hochschild et al., 2014; Kane, 2012; Shostak et al., 2019;

Snedker et al., 2023). Reflection activities need not always be written, however; there are many alternative individual and group activities that promote reflection without requiring journaling.

Although reflection has many benefits to students (and the instructors who can learn much about their students through their reflections), Eby (1998) and Boler (1999) caution against allowing students to slip into using reflective journals as a place for confessions or to engage in solipsistic naval-gazing. Reflection in the context of CEL should include critical analysis of social issues, linking between theory, community structure, and experiences outside of the classroom (Eby, 1998; Ricke, 2021). Mitchell (2008) argues that "engaging in critical reflection requires questioning assumptions and values, and paying attention to the impacts and implications of our community work" (p. 61). It is in this criticality that student learning can flourish.

The third core value of CEL is reflexivity, which is

> …a process of seeing and a process of being. To be reflexive means we are fully conscious of the lenses through which we view the world. We understand both our situationality and our positionality, our circumstances and our locations…The essence of reflexivity is to understand how our worldview is both shaped and constrained by our own subjectivity (Kaufman, 2013, p. 71).

Reflexivity is separate from reflection: if reflection is something students *do* during their CEL experience (i.e., an activity to engage in throughout the experience), then reflexivity is a way to *be* (i.e., a constant method of operating and lens through which one filters incoming knowledge and experiences). The literature on reflexivity in CEL focuses on students. Students—most of whom are young adults and are therefore still in the process of understanding their own identity—sometimes struggle with understanding how their own identity shapes their perspectives and experiences in the world (Rasch et al., 2022). In community contexts where students engage in a variety of (potentially) new experiences and work with new people from

diverse walks of life, developing reflexivity becomes central to acting with empathy and cultural sensitivity. But as Kaufman (2013) notes, reflexivity is not an innate skill: it is both something to be taught and a perspective to impart, and requires cultivation and encouragement. Instructors who actively encourage discussions about reflexivity with their students find it to be a good way to build rapport, as it requires a discussion of positionality (Rasch et al., 2022). Some students may resist practicing reflexivity, as it can unearth questions of privilege and identity that require courage to address (Kaufman, 2013). However, students, instructors, and community partners can all benefit by approaching CEL through a reflexive lens. Reflexivity also helps participants to think critically about CEL, which can inform pedagogical improvements. Some common criticism of CEL are outlined in the following section.

Criticisms of CEL

Despite the good intentions of CEL for students, community partners, and faculty, critics point out the ways in which CEL is not a perfect pedagogy. Particularly when framed as service-learning, it is criticized for its emphasis on charity and volunteering, rather than citizenship and advocacy (Mobley, 2007; Verges Bosch et al., 2021). Eby's (1998) provocative article *Why Service-Learning is Bad* argues that service-learning demands a learning orientation, inherently placing limits on the service's effectiveness in the community and the ability to address community needs at a structural level. "Service" may become (unintentionally) a patronizing concept unless facilitated with great care (Mitchell, 2008). Pompa (2002, p. 69) describes,

> If I 'do for' you, 'serve' you, 'give to' you—that creates a connection in which I have the resources, the abilities, the power, and you are on the receiving end. It can be—while benign in intent—ironically disempowering to the receiver, granting further power to the giver. Without meaning to, this process replicates the 'have-have not' paradigm that underlies many social problems.

When community needs are identified, they are often misframed as a deficiency that the student must fill, often mistakenly attributed to exist within the individual rather than system (Eby, 1998).

Many are rightfully concerned that CEL can reinforce unequal power dynamics between students and community partners and/or their clients (Garoutte, 2018). CEL can occur in any academic program or discipline, meaning that not all students have the sociological training or perspective to understand the dynamics of social problems and how societal structures can reinforce systems of privilege (Garoutte, 2018). CEL has been criticized for placing privileged students—who often lack understanding about their own privilege—in communities where individuals are visible minorities, unhoused, low-income, or impoverished, thereby reinforcing existing power hierarchies (Mitchell, 2008). This is an aspect of CEL that is difficult to escape, but can be mitigated by addressing power dynamics, biases, positionality, and unearned privilege through class discussions, reflection, and readings (Mitchell, 2008).

CEL critics also point out that opportunities are confined by the academic calendar. Students and faculty operate on a semester basis, which may not necessarily align with the needs of the community, and often must abruptly end a project or service commitment at the end of the semester (Garoutte, 2018; Verges Bosch et al., 2021). This short-term commitment can be problematic for communities, who spend time and resources helping train the student (Verges Bosch et al., 2021). Research shows that the average CEL or service-learning experience is 15-25 hours (Stoecker et al., 2010). Given the (typically) short time frame in which students enter and exit the community, some critics of service-learning have likened it to “McService,” “Happy Meal” community service, or as John Eby (1998, p. 2) calls it, “service bites” or “quick-fix” service (Fletcher & Piemonte, 2017; Verges Bosch et al., 2021)

CEL also tends to be initiated by the institution, causing student and institutional needs to come first and community needs to come after (Eby, 1998; Mitchell, 2008). CEL projects are often designed for the benefit of the student and do not always address the most pressing needs of the community, despite costing time and money for the community partner to train and supervise the student(s) (Mitchell, 2008; Stoecker et al., 2010; Rocha Beardall, 2023). Although CEL experiences often benefit students more than communities, some students are unreliable, unmotivated, uncommitted, unprofessional, and lack a solid work ethic (Hochschild et al., 2014). These realities make the placement of student needs ahead of community needs difficult to stomach.

CEL in Sociology

In many ways, sociology and community-engaged learning are a natural fit (Verges Bosch et al., 2021). CEL is meant, in part, to help address social issues in the community; many students report choosing sociology as their major because they want to contribute to society and help people (Senter et al., 2015; Yogan, 2015). Undergraduate students often enroll in sociology programs because they desire to understand and learn how to address complex social problems (Snedker et al., 2023). Sociology courses are also acknowledged to be important vehicles for teaching students about civic engagement and social advocacy (Mobley, 2007). Indeed, sociology has a long history of service to the community; sociologist Jane Addams' Hull House (a settlement house opened in Chicago in 1889 to serve newly-landed immigrants) is a well-known example of sociology's longstanding commitment to the community (Treviño, 2012).

However, despite sociology's community contributions, sociology as a discipline is often guilty of focusing more on social problems than solutions and students report that it can be depressing (Treviño, 2012; Yogan, 2020). Johnson (2005) argues that teaching about social

problems is a necessary part of the sociology curriculum, but that it is done through a lens that produces cynicism, powerlessness, and alienation in students, rather than framing it through a lens of empowerment for social change. Students therefore often leave sociology classes frustrated and ill equipped to address the social problems they study, feeling helpless and anxious (Savage, 2022). Unfortunately, students who suffer from this "sociological depression" risk losing their passion to promote social change and are more likely to change disciplines and take classes that bring them joy, hope, and a sense of purpose (Yogan, 2015, p. 2).

CEL offers an opportunity to counter sociological depression and involve students in addressing social problems (Savage, 2022). The CEL pedagogy is consistent with the efforts towards reframing social problems as opportunities for social change and helps students see the positive side of the discipline (Savage, 2022; Snedker et al., 2023; Yogan, 2020). Indeed, although social problems themselves have no easy solutions, a solution to the "doom and gloom" of sociology is fostering civic empowerment and engagement in students—something CEL is perfectly positioned to do (Johnson, 2005, p. 44). This is supported by Snedker et al. (2023), who find that active learning strategies (like CEL) lead students to report more positive attitudes towards the discipline of sociology. Beyond the learning benefits for students, developing a positive sociology that explores social problems through the lens of social progress is good for the discipline as students are more likely to be retained within the major (Yogan, 2015).

As previously argued, sociology benefits from the integration of CEL, but CEL also benefits from sociology. Students who approach CEL with sociological skills and knowledge have the theoretical background to understand and analyze the social problems they witness in the community (Huisman, 2010). Hochschild et al. (2014) argue that sociology is ideally positioned to provide beneficial training to CEL students, as students without a sociological

background may not have the knowledge to understand the structural or systemic explanations behind the issues their community partners' clients face. Students without this knowledge may revert to harmful stereotypes when interpreting experiences with clients (Hochschild et al., 2014). Sociology becomes a useful tool for CEL just as much as CEL is a tool for teaching sociology.

While facing social problems may challenge students, for sociologists-in-training, this is an expected and arguably necessary part of the undergraduate curriculum. Participating in CEL gives students the opportunity to witness—and potentially contribute to addressing—those social problems that have only ever been discussed as abstract concepts in a classroom. Seeing these social problems face-to-face helps students understand what C.W. Mills (1959) means when he differentiates between personal troubles and public issues; for example, a student working at a food bank for their CEL placement may be able to better put into context the social factors that lead to food insecurity than they could prior to that experience if they themselves had never experienced hunger or poverty. Many scholars argue that CEL is a fitting choice for instructors seeking fresh ways to bring the sociological imagination[3] to life (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Eby, 1998; Garoutte, 2018; Huisman, 2010; Mobley, 2007; Rocha Beardall, 2023). After all, the sociological imagination can be an ambiguous concept for sociology students to grasp and is perhaps best learned through a combination of academic knowledge and experience (Lehpamer & Menchik, 2023; Palmer, 2023).

CEL also exposes students to a glimpse of public sociology—an area generally not focused on within universities and sociology programs which tend to favour professional

[3] Mills (1959) coined the term *sociological imagination* which means that, when learned, one can see the connections between the individual (personal biography) and the social (history). To possess the sociological imagination means that individuals can understand how their own circumstances fit within the wider social/community context that they find themselves in.

sociology (Burawoy, 2005). Public sociologists contend that sociological knowledge should be shared beyond the boundaries of the academy and that sociologists have a duty to share sociological knowledge with the relevant publics (Kilty & Crepault, 2016). Ever since Michael Burawoy championed public sociology in his 2004 Presidential Address to the American Sociological Association, this sub-sect of sociology has seen a revival with growing interest in how to engage students in public sociology. CEL and other forms of engaged scholarship are well-positioned to introduce students to public sociology and teach them about applying their sociological skills and knowledge outside of the academy (Blouin & Perry, 2009).

Benefits of CEL for Students

The combination of academic learning, community engagement/service, and facilitated reflection has proven to be beneficial for student learning. Many scholars have researched outcomes of CEL for students and found that CEL is associated with improved academic development, motivation to complete coursework and engage with class materials, improved learning outcomes, and deepened disciplinary knowledge (Carlisle et al., 2017; Huisman, 2010; Soyer et al., 2023; Tarantino, 2017; Verges Bosch et al., 2021). “Hard skills” are also developed during CEL, including project management, research methods, applying theory to practice, analytical thinking, oral communication, time management, and problem solving (Arantes do Amaral, 2019; Lake et al., 2021; Mayer et al., 2019; Otto & Dunens, 2021). Further, CEL has been linked to increasing students’ personal awareness and understanding of social problems (Tarantino, 2017; Van Auken, 2013). Participation in CEL projects has inspired some students to go on to do undergraduate honours or graduate projects related to their CEL experiences (Huisman, 2010). Rocha Beardall (2023) argues that building CEL into the sociological curriculum allows students—who may not have the time or resources to commit unpaid time to community work—

to gain valuable experience that contributes to a competitive application for graduate school and jobs while also receiving academic credit towards their degrees. Mayer et al. (2019) report that CEL solidifies students' identities as social scientists as a result of applying and practicing classroom-learned skills.

In addition to learning tangible skills, many students report experiencing personal growth as a result of their participation in CEL. For example, Carlisle et al. (2017) note that their students expressed improved interpersonal skills, leadership skills, confidence, self-awareness, and life skills after their CEL experience. Participating in community-engaged learning experiences may develop students' critical thinking and group organization skills (Arantes do Amaral, 2018; Garoutte, 2018; Tarantino, 2017; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). CEL has also been shown to help students develop cultural humility and cross-cultural knowledge (Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). Pederson et al. (2015) argue that CEL challenges students to examine their own personal values and belief systems in relation to the external world, which can produce anxiety and discomfort, but ultimately benefits the students by requiring them to think reflexively. Indeed, students have acknowledged being confronted with their own privilege during their placement or project and that their CEL experience helped them to better understand their own positionality (Berard & Ravelli, 2020).

Beyond these benefits, CEL provides a great deal to students that are more difficult to measure, but are nonetheless important outcomes. Students have reported that participating in CEL brought them joy—something often overlooked as an impactful part of an educational experience (Arantes do Amaral, 2019). In addition, Arantes do Amaral (2018) notes that students felt empowered by having the opportunity to serve the community and create meaningful change. Students often develop confidence in themselves and their abilities to make a difference in their

community and become advocates for social change (Dunn & Konrad, 2019; Gururaj et al., 2023; Mobley, 2007). Students also share that CEL has helped them to develop self-reliance, perseverance, tenacity, curiosity, ethical and moral reasoning, empathy, self-efficacy, and other soft skills like interpersonal communication and teamwork (Arantes do Amaral, 2018; Bringle & Wall, 2020; Gonsalves et al., 2019; Ibrahim et al., 2016; Lake et al., 2021).

While CEL is typically pursued for the connections with community outside of the academy, a benefit of CEL that students acknowledge is the community built within the classroom (Berard & Ravelli, 2020; Ibrahim et al., 2016). The shared experience of participating in a non-traditional university project, along with the classroom discussions and reflections and collaborative work efforts to solve problems that occurred, helped students bond with one another (Berard & Ravelli, 2020). Gururaj et al. (2023) echo this, noting that the students in their study reported the informal class discussions were what they enjoyed the most about the CEL course because they could learn from their peers and reflect together. Students reported relying on one another to overcome the barriers they experienced with their CEL projects (Gururaj et al., 2023).

Civic engagement is another widely-acknowledged benefit of CEL for students. Battistoni and Mitchell (2018) surveyed alumni who had participated in CEL programs and found that 97% of respondents were registered to vote and 82% had volunteered in the last year (compared with 25% of the general population). Additionally, 57% of respondents reported that their participation in CEL during their post-secondary education had strongly influenced their choice of career and many reported seeing civic action as a way of life, which many attributed to lessons learned during their undergraduate CEL programs (Battistoni & Mitchell, 2018). Bringle and Wall (2020) argue that civic learning is an intentional part of CEL, and that the objective of

CEL is to "develop democratically based civic attitudes, civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic intentions in students so they can be engaged and effective citizens who contribute to the public good during their lives and careers" (p. 1). Intentionally addressing civic engagement during CEL experiences works, as many studies report civic engagement and civic responsibility improving in students because of CEL participation (Carlisle et al., 2017; Garoutte, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2016; Lake et al., 2021; Vance-Chalcraft & Jelks, 2023; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020; Warren, 2012). However, it is likely that students who voluntarily enrol in CEL courses may be more inclined towards civic engagement than the general student population.

Career exploration is undoubtedly another benefit for students participating in CEL. Sociology students report having difficulty in determining a career path post-graduation, as unlike something like social work or education, the discipline does not have a prescribed employment route to follow (Senter, 2020). Employers rarely advertise entry-level jobs looking for sociologists, but rather list key skills and competencies they need their employee to possess (Senter & Spalter-Roth, 2020). CEL is perfectly positioned to help students develop desirable skills, as well as introduce students to working in a professional capacity and help them assess what type of career they are interested in (George-Paschal et al., 2019; Otto & Dunens, 2021).

All these benefits—the tangibles and the intangibles, the hard skills and the soft skills—are integral to student development. Boler (1999) summarizes this culmination as the process of "becoming"; that is, developing and learning "who we feel ourselves to be, how we see ourselves and want to see ourselves" (p. 178). Part of "becoming" is being flexible and entertaining "a willingness to reconsider and undergo possible transformation of our self-identity in relation to others and to history" (Boler, 1999, p. 178). This reflexive and reflective examination of one's self-identity aligns well with the aims and values of CEL (Mitchell, 2008).

Challenges of CEL for Students

While CEL is beneficial for most students, it does come with challenges, the most notable being the time requirements; logistics; communication and relationship-building with the community partner and faculty; the responsibility of CEL; and the unfamiliarity with CEL. Students commonly report frustration that CEL requires a bigger time commitment than a traditional course (Arantes do Amaral, 2019; Berard & Ravelli, 2020; Pederson et al., 2015; Ricke, 2021). This is especially acute when students are unaware of the CEL aspect of the course prior to enrolling (Pederson et al., 2015). Ricke (2021) reports that students resented the intense time commitment of their CEL activities, especially when it no tangible outcome was produced at the end. CEL projects require time, effort, and commitment for success, but the extra time required (or even perception of extra time required) frequently comes up as a challenge for students (Arantes do Amaral, 2019).

Part of the (sometimes only perceived) extra time commitment required in CEL may be attributed to the logistics required. Students share that the planning and physical barriers of CEL include needing to commute to their community partner and trying to schedule CEL commitments around other priorities, such as work and family obligations (Ibrahim et al., 2016). The aspect of needing to be physically on-site for some CEL placements may also present accessibility challenges for some students, as well as the potential financial constraints of needing to travel to the community partner and/or requiring childcare (Rocha Beardall, 2023; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020).

Communication and relationship-building are necessary parts of CEL. However, they are also aspects that students find challenging, sometimes with their instructor but mostly with their community partners. Blouin and Perry (2009) argue that a lack of communication between

students, faculty, and community partners is a key obstacle to successful CEL. In Rocha Beardall's (2023) study of student outcomes in CEL, 60% of students viewed communication issues with the community partner as an obstacle in their project, including issues such as community partners declining or ignoring student requests. Students felt that the communication challenges led to a lack of control over their project, which they worried could affect their course grade despite it being out of their control (Rocha Beardall, 2023). Indeed, authentic relationships with strong communication are challenging to establish when a limited amount of time is spent together (Johnston, 2020); as most CEL experiences are short-term and students spend minimal time with their community partner, it is not surprising that communication becomes a challenge (Bringle et al., 2009).

Relationships between students and faculty can also be challenging to manage. Lake et al. (2021) found that students wanted more oversight and guidance from their instructor, and for the instructor to stay in closer communication throughout the project development and implementation. As most students are still learning how to communicate professionally and be assertive in terms of asking for what they need from their community partner and instructor, these challenges require proactive management by all CEL stakeholders.

As CEL often requires additional time, effort, and intentional communication and relationship-building, students report that it can be an overwhelming endeavour (Snedker et al., 2023). Prior to beginning a CEL project or experience, students report feeling worried about their ability to carry out the project and anxious about the time requirement and logistics (Rocha Beardall, 2023). This is linked with imposter syndrome (i.e., the fear that one does not have the skills or knowledge to complete a task or project they are assumed to be able to do, even if they do have the capability to complete it successfully, or else that they do not deserve to have

achieved their success), which Tarantino (2017) and Berard and Ravelli (2020) identify as a pervasive challenge for students in CEL. Although students may study social problems for years (and particularly sociology students), CEL may be the first time they are required to confront them head-on. While this can produce transformational learning, engaging with social problems can also be profoundly uncomfortable and difficult (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Tarantino, 2017). Upon completing the project, students in a study by Shostak et al. (2019) worried about whether they had done enough for the community they work with, and were concerned they had not given enough back to their community partner. Similarly, students report having high expectations and put pressure on themselves to contribute meaningfully to their community partner (Berard & Ravelli, 2020).

Lastly, the combination of the added responsibility and the lack of familiarity with this style of teaching and learning can make CEL a less familiar experience for students (Ricke, 2021). Ricke (2021) surveyed undergraduate students on their perceptions of CEL and found that students label it as unfamiliar, untraditional, unconventional, supplemental, and optional, indicating that they are less confident in what they are signing up for during course enrolment and that they do not view CEL as important to their education (Ricke, 2021). CEL still remains a lesser-known pedagogical approach that students do not understand (Rocha Beardall, 2023). Even if students understand what CEL is and what is involved, it poses a risk because it is not the safe option of the traditional course where one is graded on exams and research papers. CEL can produce unforeseen circumstances that may drastically alter a student's project; this unpredictability can be challenging for students who prefer stability (Tarantino, 2017).

Benefits of CEL for Community Partners

The community partner perspective on CEL is less documented than that of students and comparatively little research exists on what community partners report as benefits of participation (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Carlisle et al., 2017; Jakubowski & McIntosh, 2018). However, community partners do generally report that the benefits of CEL outweigh the costs of participation (Blouin & Perry, 2009).

Jakubowski and McIntosh (2018) find that common benefits of CEL reported by community partners are: new energy and fresh approaches to problem-solving; assistance to broaden the delivery of existing services or implement new ones; enhanced capacity to conduct and apply research; access to institutional resources like faculty expertise and libraries; and opportunities to participate in the teaching and learning process. Student projects can bring economic benefits to the community partners, such as contributions to grant applications (Arantes do Amaral, 2019; Rocha Beardall, 2023). Student support can help limited financial resources stretch further at community agencies when students contribute products and services to the community partner (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Arantes do Amaral, 2018). For example, students are able to produce deliverables like research, reports, and social media campaigns for their community partners (Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). Community partners note that research provided by students is valuable to supporting outreach, advocacy, and policy initiatives (Greenberg et al., 2020).

Sometimes the benefit to communities is less about what they produce, and more about the presence they add: students add youthful energy to community work. Community partners report feeling motivated by working with young, idealistic students (Arantes do Amaral, 2019; George-Paschal et al. 2019). Enthusiastic and creative students inspire staff and can lead to

improved organizational operations and renewed commitment to the agency mission (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Successful partnerships between students and community partners also bring the benefit of creating advocates for the organization in the community as students share the mission with others (George-Paschal et al., 2019; Greenberg et al., 2020). Gazley et al. (2012) surveyed American non-profit managers about the impacts of hosting community service-learning students and report the benefit of increased agency visibility in the community, as well as organizational improvement suggestions from students.

The time and resources community partners spend training students sometimes becomes useful beyond the CEL experience if they become paid employees after their CEL experience is complete. Greenberg et al. (2020) note that the training provided to students develops a potential future workforce for the community partner, which is especially useful to non-profit organizations who experience a high employee turnover rate. When community partners are able to hire CEL students as employees following their partnership, it is valuable because the student and community partner are already familiar with one another and the relationship has already been trialled (Gazley et al., 2012).

Challenges of CEL for Community Partners

Like the benefits of CEL for community partners, there is comparatively little documented regarding the challenges community partners experience (Carlisle et al., 2017). Blouin and Perry (2009) find that common issues for community partners are unreliability and lack of motivation, preparation, and commitment from students, as well as frustration with short-term commitments, scheduling hassles, and the time required for training. Community partners also report frustration about the slow pace of university bureaucracy (Greenberg et al., 2020). In addition, CEL requires significant planning from the community partner to understand the disciplinary context and

specific course/project requirements imposed by the institution (Davis et al., 2019). Community partners also report needing to protect vulnerable clients from being (unintentionally) harmed by students, as students sometimes enter the community unprepared to confront the realities of social issues like homelessness, mental illness, substance use, etc., and can perpetuate harmful stereotypes (Blouin & Perry, 2009).

Communication and aligning expectations are also challenging. Research on community partner perspectives on CEL reveals that many community partners do not understand the definition and goals of CEL and thus are insufficiently prepared to support students in achieving learning objectives (Davis et al., 2019). Most community partners understand they play a significant role in student learning but are challenged by the lack of clarity in expectations from the institution and faculty member (Davis et al., 2019). Community partners report desiring more planning time with the faculty member to ensure expectations are aligned and work for both parties (Davis et al., 2019). This is closely tied with communication challenges, which are felt by community partners, students, and faculty alike (Morton et al., 2019). Mitchell (2008) and Dumlao (2020) explain that community partners seek commitment to relationship-building and building trustworthy communication, which can be enhanced over long-term partnerships if all parties pursue an authentic relationship. Even in relationships with a solid foundation and effective communication, community partners' first priority must be their organizational mission and their own clients; therefore, their responsiveness may vary in line with organizational priorities, budgets, and staffing (Gururaj et al., 2023).

Benefits of CEL for Faculty

Similarly, there is comparatively little written about the benefits of CEL for faculty who use this pedagogy (perhaps because faculty are not a common subject in CEL research, which focuses

primarily on student and community outcomes, and also likely because CEL is not chosen by faculty as a teaching method for the benefits it will bring to them). George-Paschal et al. (2019) report that faculty appreciate that CEL "keeps things fresh and new" in course design (p. 52) and that it is a useful strategy for teaching students skills like problem-solving and teamwork. CEL also helps faculty experience a renewed sense of purpose and contribute to community causes that they care about, too (George-Paschal et al., 2019). Like students, faculty also appreciate CEL for its opportunity to work outside the boundaries of the academy and apply one's disciplinary knowledge beyond the post-secondary context (George-Paschal et al., 2019). Many scholars who teach using CEL acknowledge that it takes much time and effort, but is highly personally and professionally rewarding (Shostak et al., 2019; Snedker et al., 2023; Tinkler et al., 2014).

Challenges of CEL for Faculty

The primary challenge for faculty who use a CEL pedagogy is the time and effort required to establish the CEL opportunity. A substantial time investment is required to lay the groundwork, often requiring work many months (or even years) ahead of when the CEL experience will begin (Eyler, 2002; Garoutte, 2018; Morton et al., 2019). CEL may be difficult to initiate if no prior relationships exist between the faculty member or institution and the community partner (Vance-Chalcraft & Jelks, 2023). Once partnerships are established, instructors must design the CEL project/experience to achieve both student learning outcomes and ensure it is reciprocally beneficial for the students and community partners. Relationships need to be established with potential community partners and then maintained with care, which Arantes do Amaral (2018) reports takes time and effort beyond that of a traditional course. Time is also required for orienting community partners to the course and ensuring relationships between students and

community partners are effective (Arantes do Amaral, 2018). As time is limited, faculty report that it is difficult to attend to *all* needs of *all* students and community partners at *all* times (Arantes do Amaral, 2018). Other logistics also present a challenge for faculty, including the limits imposed by the academic calendar and the unpredictability of CEL (Marullo et al., 2009).

While many instructors do not engage with the community purely for professional benefit, institutional recognition and support of CEL can also be challenging, particularly to instructors who are seeking tenure or who are early in their career. While some post-secondary institutions recognize CEL as a form of engaged scholarship (fitting into the 'teaching' or 'service' components of a faculty member's responsibilities), it is not a consistently considered element of faculty reviews for tenure and promotion (Hochschild et al., 2014; McKinney, 2018). Many scholars write about the challenges that come with comparing community-engaged activities with traditional evaluation criteria (such as research) for tenure and promotion (Barreno et al., 2013; Foster, 2012; Moore & Ward, 2010; Russell-Stamp, 2015; Sobrero & Jayaratne, 2014; Tremblay, 2017). For example, Shephard et al. (2018) interviewed colleagues about the evaluation of community-engaged scholarship and conclude that its inclusion in faculty reviews (whether community-engaged teaching or research) is highly variable, with little consistency from institution to institution and no consensus on the value of community engagement. Changfoot et al. (2020) present an autoethnography about how community-engaged scholarship is accounted for in tenure and promotion processes, describing how community engagement was not considered at all 20 years ago, and is slowly becoming more influential in faculty reviews. Saltmarsh et al. (2015) and Snedker et al. (2023) advocate for tenure and promotion guidelines to be updated to recognize the benefits of CEL to students, communities, and institutions, as well as

the time, effort, and dedication it requires, in order to motivate instructors to pursue this type of teaching.

Shared Benefits and Challenges: The Life Cycle in Sociology and CEL

As students, community partners, and faculty report similar benefits and challenges regardless of differing CEL circumstances, applying a life cycle lens may help explain the shared experiences. These shared benefits and challenges across different contexts align with my own CEL experiences and observations of other students participating in CEL (as described in the Introduction). Viewing the subject through a life cycle lens assumes that individuals experience common patterns which are affected by common factors (Tamir, 2022). Examining individuals through a life cycle helps researchers in understanding "the factors that affect each stage [and] in turn inform a comprehensive picture of a complex reality" (Tamir, 2022, p. 341). As CEL necessarily involves diverse stakeholders, a comprehensive picture is needed to understand the nuances of each and what the intersecting experiences mean for CEL as a whole.

To my knowledge, a life cycle lens has not been used to explore CEL. However, the concept of a life cycle is not unknown to social researchers. In sociology, the life cycle lens has been applied in criminology (Gibbs Van Brunschot & Humphrey, 2022); health research (Clarke et al., 2011); sociology of sports (Hasaan et al., 2021; Tamir, 2022); and education in the context of labour market outcomes (Tobback et al., 2024). It is possible that employing the life cycle concept may be useful for understanding the shared experience of a CEL course across all stakeholders. As I research students, community partners, and faculty across an entire CEL experience, I hope to analyze the common factors that demonstrate the life cycle of CEL and the intersections between stakeholder experiences that create the complex reality of this style of teaching and learning.

Research Gaps

As demonstrated, much of the existing research focuses on understanding the student experience; there is little research that investigates the perspectives of other CEL stakeholders. Without community participation, CEL could not occur—and yet, seemingly few studies focus solely on community partner perspectives of CEL in the North American context (George-Paschal et al., 2019). Similarly, although research exists on the challenges for faculty who use a CEL pedagogy in their teaching, very little scholarship exists about the benefits for faculty.

Another area where research is limited is exploring the dynamics between the multiple CEL stakeholders. Bucher (2012) discusses his qualitative analysis of student and community partner course evaluations. Smith Budhai and Lewis Grant (2018) present a case study on the relationships formed between students and their community partners during a service-learning project. Morton et al. (2019) include the voices of graduate students, faculty, and a community partner in their reflections on community-engaged scholarship. George-Paschal et al. (2019) investigate the "overlapping experiences" and "juxtaposing perspectives" (p. 43) of students, faculty, and community partners coming from multiple community service learning courses and programs. Greenberg et al. (2020) assess a shared CEL experience across students, community partners, and faculty.

While these examples offer a glimpse into the differing stakeholder perspectives on CEL, more research is needed on the perspectives of all three CEL stakeholders that have shared the same CEL experience (or CEL life cycle). By doing so, there is potential to better understand where the gaps are in relationship-building, communication, shared responsibility, and other facets of the CEL experience. Studying the perspectives of students, community partners, and faculty across a shared experience may add evidence to the benefits of CEL for all stakeholders,

and may illuminate where improvements could be made in the CEL process. It should also be noted that most studies cited above take place in the US context; more research on CEL is needed in the Canadian context. Furthermore, as far as I am aware, no research exists that explores the CEL experience from beginning to end for all three stakeholder groups—a gap in the literature this research intends to fill.

Chapter III: Methodology and Methods

In order to understand the CEL experienced in Sociology 439, I conducted several in-depth qualitative methods to gather data from all three stakeholder groups throughout the course and explore their perspectives. In this chapter, I first provide an overview of my research questions and details of Sociology 439. I then discuss the target population and recruitment methods, the rationale behind each data collection method, the methods themselves, and collecting the data. I then turn my attention to a brief explanation of reflexivity before concluding the chapter with my data analysis approach and techniques.

Research Questions

1. What are the primary benefits and challenges to students, community partners, and instructor in one undergraduate community-engaged learning course?
2. In what ways do their experiences (benefits and challenges) intersect?

To answer these questions, I used a multi-method approach. Multi-method research is defined as research which "involves combining data-gathering and analyzing from two or more methodological traditions" (Seawright, 2016, p. 2) and typically involves solely multiple qualitative methods or solely multiple quantitative methods (as opposed to mixed methods, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods within the same project; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Collecting data using more than one method helps to develop a richer research context and enhances knowledge creation outcomes (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

While multi-method research can involve both qualitative and quantitative elements, I chose to focus on qualitative data to support the exploratory nature of this project, and to ensure that the nuance, emotion, and complexity of CEL experiences was captured. I favour qualitative methodologies for this research as they are better suited for generating knowledge grounded in

human experience, which is the core of this research project (Nowell et al., 2017). Quantitative research, though used in a minor way in this research, is not suitable as an overarching approach for this project for several reasons: first, quantitative research tends to follow a deductive approach that tests hypotheses and theories, neither of which are relevant for an exploratory project such as mine (Babbie et al., 2020). Second, quantitative research often uses close-ended questions which restrict the types of information participants can share (Edgerton et al., 2020). These two reasons when combined prescribe a narrow set of expectations within which research outcomes can be achieved, which does not fit the goal of my project (i.e., to inductively explore personal experiences of multiple individuals with no preconceived theory to test). Therefore, qualitative methods are a better fit for my research. Using a qualitative approach may also achieve a deeper level of analysis due to the ability to describe participants' experiences in rich detail (Ozuem et al., 2022). With a small sample size, the outcomes of this research are not intended to be generalizable to all students, community partners, or instructors participating in CEL. Instead, the chosen qualitative methods are intended to illustrate participants' individual experiences via thick description (Geertz, 1973). Thick description in qualitative research is essential for improving the transferability of findings because it helps readers assess the applicability of the study to other contexts (Younas et al., 2023).

The Course: Sociology 439

Prior to this delivery, Sociology 439 ran as a single-semester course; students would develop and execute their whole project over one semester. However, beginning with this iteration, Sociology 439 was delivered in two separate, but linked, courses (A and B) over two semesters: 439A ran from September to December of 2021, and 439B ran from January to April of 2022. This change was intended to allow students more time to interact with their community partners, build trust

and rapport, and have more time to complete a high-quality deliverable for their community partner.

Just as in a traditional course, parts A and B each earned a single course credit but students must complete 439A before taking 439B. The class (made up of 15 fourth-year Sociology majors) met for a three-hour seminar once a week, resulting in a total of 22 meetings (accounting for Reading Breaks and statutory holidays). The course is best suited to a face-to-face format to help facilitate community-building in the classroom, and 20 of the 22 meetings were held in-person at the University of Victoria campus. The first two sessions of the January 2022 semester were forced to be held online due to provincial and university health restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The instructor of the course is a Teaching Professor in the Sociology department, and my supervisor, Dr. Bruce Ravelli.

The course included several assignments for evaluation, the most relevant to this research being five written reflections (which follow various prompts), a sociological artefact assignment and presentation, a project proposal, and a final project for the student's community partner (known as the "deliverable"). These assignments are described in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Table 1: 439A (September – December 2021) Assignments

Assignment Name	**Description**	**Purpose**
Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2) Certificate of Completion	Completion of an online module about research ethics when completing research with human participants. This was not marked but was required to pass the course.	To ensure students have baseline training on research ethics.
3 Written Reflections	Written reflective journals based on various prompts from the instructor for each reflection.	To have students critically reflect on the CEL experience, their relationship with their community partner, the student's own

		positionality, their undergraduate journey, and sociology as a discipline.
Community Partner Site Visit Report	A written description of the results of the student's community partner site visit, including the student's first impressions of their community partner and any concerns they may have (written and submitted following their first meeting with their community partner).	To encourage the student to reflect on and inform the instructor of how the site visit went.
Article Lead	1.5-page summary, analysis, and reflection on an article on the syllabus, and then leading the discussion about the article in class. Two article leads were required in the semester.	To describe and critically engage with one reading in order to lead the article discussion during the seminar.
Article Discussant	Half-page written summary and two key questions that the student could ask during the article discussion in the seminar. 10 article discussants were required in the semester.	To describe and critically engage with one reading to ensure preparation for participation in the article discussion during the seminar.
Research Paper	10-14 page academic paper that students researched and wrote. Students also were required to complete a peer-review of another student's paper. The research paper topic did not necessarily need to be shared with the community partner, but should be connected in some way.	To research and engage with a social issue relevant to their community partner organization to facilitate the student's understanding of the organization they were working with, the organization's context, and their clientele.
Project Proposal	A written outline and explanation of the project ("deliverable") that the student will undertake with and for their community partner, as well as the timeline/key dates of their project. Students presented their project proposals in the final class of the semester.	To inform the instructor and their peers of their planned project, and to encourage students to solidify their project plan ahead of beginning the project in January.

Table 2: 439B (January – April 2022) Assignments

Assignment Name	**Description**	**Purpose**
2 Written reflections	Written reflective journals based on various prompts from the instructor for each reflection.	To have students critically reflect on the CEL experience, their relationship with their community partner, the student's own positionality, their undergraduate journey, and sociology as a discipline.
Student engagement artefacts	A written description/analysis and presentation to the class on a chosen artefact; artefacts did not need to be of personal	To have students interrogate an artefact through a sociological lens.

	significance, just an item that they found sociologically intriguing (for example, a photograph, an object, a video, etc.).	
Project grading rubric	Students proposed their own grading rubric that reflected the different areas of effort the student's project required and what portion of their grade should be allocated to each area. The final rubric (as agreed on by the student and instructor) was used by the instructor to assess the student's final project.	To have students consider what activities they were doing with/for their community partner, how much time/effort was being put towards said activities, and where the value was; additionally, to help the student and instructor become aligned on what the student's marks would be given for.
Project presentation	An oral presentation (accompanied by PowerPoint slides, if the student wished) to the class about the process and outcomes of the student's project.	To have students share their final project with their peers and the instructor, and for students to practice speaking about their work/CEL experience.
Project (final deliverable)	A written description of the work the student completed for their community partner, including any deliverable(s) the student created for the community partner and any accompanying documentation for the instructor that explains the project.	To compile the results of the student's CEL project.

Ethical considerations

I applied for and received ethics approval from UVic's Human Research Ethics Board in July 2021 (reference number: 21-0149; see Appendix A).

In order to maintain anonymity and confidentiality, students have been given pseudonyms and any identifying features or comments have been stripped from the data. Students who agreed to participate in the research were given Informed Consent forms to review and sign (see Appendix B). These forms outlined how their anonymity and confidentiality would be protected, how their grades would not be affected, and any known risks for participating. The primary risk was whether their grades or their relationship to the instructor could be affected by anything they shared with me during the course of the research; if a student was critical of the course, they were reassured that the instructor would not know whose remark it was, and none of the data would be shared with the instructor until after the course was complete and students'

final grades were submitted. By keeping the data anonymous and protecting the timeline of when the data would be shared with the instructor, there could be no chance of retribution that could affect students or their grades. All but one student in the course agreed to participate in my research.

The anonymity and confidentiality of community partners is also able to be maintained with pseudonyms and careful handling of data that reveals any identifying about the organization and by extension, the individual community partner. However, rather than asking community partners to sign an Informed Consent document, each online survey they completed included a preamble which covered the ethical considerations (see Appendix C). This preamble included provisions for maintaining their anonymity and confidentiality, and that submitting their completed survey indicated their consent to participate in the research. There were no known risks to the community partner participants.

In contrast to the students and community partners, by nature of only having one CEL Sociology course offered at UVic, with only one professor who teaches it, I am not able to protect the anonymity of the instructor. This was addressed in the instructor's Informed Consent document (see Appendix D). While the chances of this occurring were small, there was a risk to the instructor in opening his classroom to a researcher: given the lack of anonymity, there is potential for reputational damage if anything went wrong during the course. Both the instructor and I were aware of this potential, and if anything harmful or out of the ordinary occurred during the course delivery, I would have sought support from the Chair of the Sociology department and/or Dr. Katelin Albert (as a member of my graduate committee).

Participants

Target Population

This research includes three distinct target populations. The first is composed of students enrolled in the 2021-22 delivery of Sociology 439. Though the registration capacity for the course was 18 students, the September (439A) term began with 15 registrants and, due to some attrition, ended with 14. The January (439B) term began with the same 14 students, and again due to attrition, ended with 11 students completing the course.

The second group is made up of the community partners the students and instructor work with throughout the course. Each student was matched one-to-one with a community partner; therefore, the course began with 15 community partners in September and was reduced to 11 by the end of the course in April. Community partners were paid employees of local non-profit organizations, such as executive directors or volunteer coordinators. The 15 organizations represented by the community partners covered a broad spectrum of social justice focuses, including advocacy groups for the environment, animal rights, housing/homelessness, children, seniors, and Indigenous rights, as well as an organization dedicated to increasing volunteerism, a women's shelter, and an immigration centre. Many of the community partners have been working with the instructor since the course was first delivered in 2018 and therefore are familiar with how the course functions and what is expected from students. In this delivery, three community partners were new connections that the instructor had not worked with before.

The last target population is the instructor of the course. As discussed previously, there is only one instructor for Sociology 439. Taught by a Teaching Professor in the Sociology department, this instructor created the course and has delivered it three times as a single-semester

course, and (at the point of the recruitment) was preparing to deliver it as a two-semester course for the first time in the 2021-22 academic year.

Recruitment methods

To recruit the students, after applying for and receiving ethics approval, I asked for permission from the course instructor, as he was the gatekeeper of both the course and enrolled students. After receiving permission, I requested assistance from the Sociology department's Assistant to the Chair, Zoe Lu, in contacting the enrolled students. University privacy policies prevent me from contacting the students directly as I have no access to their personal information, including email addresses; however, administrators such as Zoe can contact students on my behalf. I prepared a message for Zoe to use as a starting point which introduced myself, outlined my research project, and invited students to participate (see Appendix E). Zoe then emailed my message—along with the Informed Consent document—to the students enrolled in Sociology 439A one week prior to the first day of the September semester. This initial message from me (via Zoe) explained that being enrolled in the class did not mean that students were required to participate in my research, and included provisions for how I would exclude students who did not want to participate, especially from components of the research like classroom observations. Additionally, I made it clear to students that I was a researcher, not a teaching assistant, and would have no part in marking any of their assignments; their choice to participate (or not) in my research would not impact their course grades, and the instructor would not see any of my collected data until all final grades were submitted at the end of Sociology 439B.

To recruit the community partners, the instructor shared a list of their email addresses with me. As these emails were the professional (rather than personal) contact information for each community partner and were publicly available, there were no ethical concerns with sharing

this information so that I could contact the partners directly (although institutional ethical approval was also obtained for this). Like I had done with the students, I wrote the community partners an email that introduced myself and outlined my research project (see Appendix F). As mentioned previously, the community partners were not required to sign an Informed Consent document because the only method of data collection for this population were anonymous online surveys. Instead, each survey included a preamble that explained the research and that proceeding with the survey acted as their consent to participate (see Appendix C).

The course instructor was recruited to participate in the study by email invitation as a formality; as my graduate supervisor, he was already aware of my research and had agreed to take part.

Rationale for Data Collection Methods

Data come from multiple data collection and knowledge generation techniques: surveys, interviews, focus groups, classroom observations, and content analysis of students' reflection assignments. Surveys were used for collecting a "snapshot in time" data from the students and community partners at different points throughout the course, and were chosen because they could gather a large amount of information in a way that was efficient for the participants and the researcher (Jansen, 2010). Surveys were also a form of data collection that could be accommodated at times where in-person access to students was limited or impossible (prior to the course, over the winter holiday, and after the course concluded). Of these techniques, the surveys were the sole tool that included a quantitative component, which was used primarily to gather student demographic data.

Semi-structured interviews were used for collecting data from the course instructor, partially because there was only one instructor (and thus conducting interviews was a reasonable

time commitment) but more importantly because of the detailed dialogue between the participant and the researchers that the interview format can spark (Doringer, 2021; Roulston, 2018).

Focus groups with the students were used to approach the research topic in a different way, one in which I (as the facilitator) could direct the conversation but still allow for a degree of spontaneity as the students discussed emergent ideas between them (Nyumba et al., 2018; Sim & Waterfield, 2019).

Ellwood's (1933) assertion that "the best sociological laboratory is always the social life around us, the natural human community" (p. 51) remains true: observing others is a useful way to understand social phenomena. Therefore, observations of the students during weekly seminars were included as an integral component of data collection as it allowed me to witness the community building in the classroom and provided a sense of the general atmosphere of the group of students throughout the highs and lows of the course. Observing the classroom also helped me understand the role of the instructor and if his modeling of community engagement and reflection influenced the students (Savage, 2022).

Lastly, I included qualitative content analysis as a knowledge generation method initially because of ease of access: the students were required to write several reflection assignments throughout the course, so it would need no extra effort from them to participate in the research by submitting these reflections to me. However, an additional reason to include reflections as a source of knowledge is that their content would also potentially reveal how the students were connecting their academic learning and the experiences they were having with their community partners (Eyler, 2001; Mitchell, 2008; Savage, 2022; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

Data Collection Methods

Students

Each stakeholder group required different data collection methods due to my level of access and the time commitment involved. For the students, I used four methods: surveys, content analysis of reflection assignments, classroom observations and focus groups. By using multiple data sources to generate knowledge, I could better understand student perspectives (Denzin, 2010). Surveys required little from the students: although they were to be completed on students' own time, they were short (less than 10 concise questions each) free of jargon, and designed to be completed in 15 minutes or less (Story & Tait, 2019). Surveys were unique amongst the four data collection methods used for students because they were submitted anonymously online; students were free to write their honest feelings about the course and CEL experience. Additionally, surveys gave students who were not vocal in class opportunities to share their thoughts (Spekle & Widener, 2018). Surveys also proved to be a way to directly compare student feedback; unlike reflections, comments in the classroom, or focus groups where students were not necessarily answering the same questions or addressing the same topics, the uniformity of the surveys allowed me to put students' responses side-by-side and see different perspectives on the same questions (Jansen, 2010). Lastly, surveys offered an easy way to collect basic demographic details about students, such as what year of study they were in (Story & Tait, 2019).

Reflection assignments, focus groups, and classroom observations were used to minimize the time and effort they would require from students. Due to my connection with Sociology 439 via my supervisor, I was permitted to sit in the classroom and observe the seminars every week. These observations occurred during classes when students were already there, therefore requiring no additional time from students. Similarly, the instructor allowed me to conduct two focus

groups during class time, making it easier for students to participate. The content analysis method was included because students were required to write and submit five reflections over the two semesters as part of the course design and evaluation. Because students were writing these for the course (not for my research), they were a simple addition to my data. Students only had to make the additional effort of printing an extra copy to leave with me, or to email it to me.

All three methods provided rich, detailed data; however, each method revealed a different angle on a single students' experience. The classroom observations however, provided me with a weekly window into how all the students were progressing through the CEL experience. During class I listened to students candidly discussing the challenges and triumphs of their CEL projects over the year. In the classroom, I could also observe how students interacted with each other and the instructor, how the collective mood shifted throughout the term, and the emotions that bubbled up as students progressed and understood more about what it means to leave the comfort of the university and work in the community. My classroom observations were largely passive, as I tried to refrain (not always successfully, I will admit) from engaging with the students during the lecture, instead merely observing and seeing how discussions unfolded organically.

Focus groups provided an opportunity for me to ask students questions and dig into those areas I thought were worth further exploration (Kinalski et al., 2017; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). As anticipated, these discussions with the students—without the instructor present—were useful point-in-time check-ins that documented where students were at in their learning journeys. Focus groups as a method can also produce interesting dialogue between participants, and certainly did so for this research. I attribute this largely to the community and camaraderie the students developed amongst themselves, helping them to be comfortable with speaking during the focus

groups and building off one another's comments and reflections (Kinalski et al., 2017; Nyumba et al., 2018).

If classroom observations and focus groups were meant in part to capture discussion and dialogue, then content analysis of students' reflections provided the perfect counterpoint. Students were encouraged to write reflections primarily for themselves, with the knowledge that it would only be the instructor (and possibly me, if the student chose) reading them. Some reflections required the students to relate a sociological concept to their experience in the course and/or with their community partner. Reflections demonstrated both the students' academic capabilities and how well the course experience was helping them develop their sociological knowledge, as well as conveying some of their challenges and triumphs in a more considered, organized way than ad-hoc comments made in class. While reflections were originally included in my data collection methods as an add-on because students would be writing them anyway, some of the most honest and reflective data in this research came from those reflections.

Community partners

The 15 community partners students worked with in this course included not-for-profit organizations focusing on homelessness, animal rights, climate activism, children's rights, Indigenous advocacy, and seniors' services. Organizations are not specified by name to protect the anonymity of community partners and students.

I chose to collect data from community partners via surveys for several reasons, the primary reason being the minimal time commitment required. The majority of the course's community partners were working in the non-profit sector and I wanted to respect their time. Using a method such as interviews or focus groups with the community partners would have required time to coordinate and time to participate; however, using online surveys that could be

done anywhere in 15 minutes or less (and still gather the qualitative detail I wanted) was a reasonable compromise between efficiency and research value. As I wanted to capture feedback from the community partners at the beginning, middle, and end of the CEL experience, it also would have been onerous to coordinate interviews with each participant at each point in time.

Surveys also allowed me to easily compare responses between community partners and demonstrated the diversity of perspectives among respondents (Jansen, 2010). While this is generally a benefit of this method of data collection, it also can create challenging data to interpret because the researcher always must "assume that even identical, plain words, identically and plainly delivered [by the researcher] can still mean quite different things to different people" (Pawson, 1989, p. 292), thus resulting in different types of responses. Differing interpretations of survey questions is always a potential challenge in survey research, but I tried to mitigate this by using concise questions written in plain language (Mauceri, 2016). Additionally, these community partner surveys, like the student surveys, were filled out anonymously, encouraging the community partners to share their honest feedback (Story & Tait, 2019).

Instructor

Data was collected from the instructor via three semi-structured interviews. Conducted at the beginning, middle, and end of the course, these interviews were an opportunity to understand how the instructor felt the course was progressing. Because I had ample access to the sole course instructor it was easy to schedule and carry out three interviews over the course of eight months. Interviews were preferable to an alternative method, such as a survey, as the instructor and I could discuss—with a certain amount of honesty and frankness—individuals, the collective cohort, and the holistic experience in greater detail (Doringer, 2021). Interviews also enabled a dialogue between us, rather than one-sided information sharing, which I believe resulted in richer

data because I was able to follow up on questions and comments for additional clarification if necessary (Roulston, 2018).

Data Collection

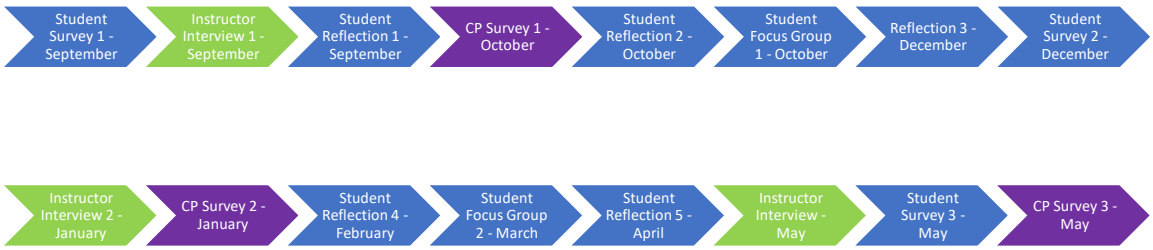

Figure 1: Data collection timeline for September-December, 2021, and January-May, 2022. Student data collection methods are depicted in blue, instructor methods in green, and community partner (CP) in purple. Observations in the classroom (not depicted) were ongoing on a weekly basis from September 2021-April 2022.

Students

Data was collected from students in four ways: surveys, focus groups, content analysis of reflection assignments, and classroom observations. The first method of data collection from the students was surveys. Three online surveys were distributed to the students by email (via Zoe Lu) and were hosted on the TooFast platform. TooFast was used for all surveys in this research because of its high information privacy standards: all survey data are stored on servers in Toronto, Canada, and the site does not track IP addresses of users, therefore eliminating any risk of tracking which participant said what (TooFast, 2023). Survey #1 was distributed to students one week before the beginning of the September 2021 (439A) semester and asked students several short demographic questions and long-form questions, such as what they were excited for in the course, what they were nervous about, why they enrolled, and if they had any history of

working with community groups. The purpose of surveying the students prior to the course was to understand the context from which students were entering the course to draw "before" and "after" comparisons between the pre-course and post-course survey answers (Spekle & Widener, 2018). Twelve students responded to this first survey. Survey #2 was distributed after 439A finished in December 2021 and had six respondents. This survey asked ten open-ended questions, including what went well in 439A, what could be improved, how prepared students felt for the second half of the course, and how well the course was meeting their expectations. Survey #3 was distributed in May 2022 after 439B had concluded and asked students to reflect on the 439 experience as a whole; six students participated. All survey questions were designed to be simple, easy to read, and easily understood with no jargon or colloquialisms (Story & Tait, 2019). All student surveys can be seen in Appendix G.

The second method of data collection for the student population was focus groups. I held two focus groups: the first occurred during 439A on October 26, 2021, and the second occurred during 439B on March 8, 2022. Focus groups were intended to facilitate a more structured discussion about the CEL experience that enabled dialogue between students (Nyumba et al., 2018). Both focus groups were held during class time in the last hour of the seminar, so that students who did not want to participate could leave before the focus group began and not miss any of that week's seminar. I audio-recorded the focus groups on my iPhone and each lasted for approximately 60 minutes. Nyumba et al. (2018) assert that focus groups should have at least six participants for sufficient diversity of perspectives: the first focus group had nine participants, and the second had seven. All focus group questions can be found in Appendix H.

The third method for collecting data from students was qualitative content analysis, wherein I studied reflections written by the students (Cho & Lee, 2014). Students were

required—as part of the course—to write and submit five reflections to the instructor over the two semesters: three were required in 439A and two were required in 439B. Students did not have to share their reflections with me, but were offered this as another option to contribute to my research if they wished. To share a copy of their reflection with me, students could print an extra copy (without their name on it, if they wanted to be anonymous) and bring it to class on the day the reflection was due, where I set out an extra collection tray that students could leave their reflection in. Alternatively, if students were not concerned about maintaining their anonymity, they were given the option of emailing me a digital copy of their reflection. Students were encouraged to submit as many or few of the five reflections as they wished; submitting one did not mean they had to submit all five. I received 15 reflections in 439A and seven in 439B. These reflections were examined to identify codes and themes (Cho & Lee, 2014; Vaismoradi et al., 2013).

The final method of student data collection was class observations. Every Tuesday, I sat in class to watch and listen to the seminar. I recorded attendance every week, took notes, and documented any challenges, triumphs, and questions that came up. I also tried to capture students' perceptions of assigned readings as they related to the CEL process; for example, when the class read Michael Burawoy's (2004) *Public Sociologies*, I noted that students appreciated the concept Burawoy ponders of "knowledge for whom and what" and how that related to students' previous experiences with sociology courses (more on this in the following chapter). I did not attribute names to my notes to protect students' anonymity, nor did I record any observations about the one student who did not wish to participate in the research. Not wanting to be distracting to the students or instructor by typing on my laptop, I took all my notes by hand. Often, I also wrote extra notes about what I observed in that week's seminar throughout the days

following—typically recording them on my phone as I was going about my daily activities, then transferring them to my notebook when I was back at my desk—as different thoughts, connections, and insights occurred to me. This process of noting observations, ideas, and reflections is encouraged as part of a reflexive research approach (Nowell et al., 2017).

Community partners

Data was collected from community partners using online surveys. Three surveys—all hosted by TooFast—were distributed throughout the course. Each survey was designed to be completed in 15 minutes or less and was open for a two-week window from the time of distribution. Each survey link was distributed by email and accompanied by a short message to remind community partners of the nature of my research. I also sent a brief follow-up reminder email three days before the deadline for completing the survey.

While the logic behind the survey distribution timing was consistent with the student surveys, I altered the timing slightly for the community partner surveys: since the beginning of the semester often sees students shuffling their courses around, I waited until the class list was stable before I contacted the community partners (as the final class list dictated which community partners would be working with the students in the class, I did not want to bother a community partner who ultimately would not be working with a 439 student). Therefore, the TooFast link for Survey #1 was emailed to the community partners in early October 2021 and received ten responses. The first survey included a mix of demographic and open-ended questions, inquiring about community partners' past experience working with the instructor (if applicable), other experiences participating in CEL with UVic, why they chose to participate with this course, and any benefits and challenges they anticipated from the upcoming CEL experience. Survey #2 was distributed to the community partners in mid-January of 2022 and

asked participants to qualitatively reflect on what went well in 439A, what could be improved on in 439B, and how project development was going with their student. Six community partners responded to this survey.

The third and final survey was emailed to the 11 remaining community partners (three were no longer participating with the course because their student withdrew from the course) in May 2022, after the course had concluded. This survey had the lowest response rate with only four participants. This final survey, like the student survey, asked community partners to reflect on the eight-month CEL experience and included questions pertaining to the partner's satisfaction with their student's work, what the student did well, what the student could have improved on, summaries of both working with the student and with the instructor, and the community partner's main takeaways (good and/or bad) from participating in the CEL experience. All questions for the community partner surveys can be found in Appendix I.

Although online surveys have numerous benefits (such as ease of access, timely distribution and collection, minimal cost, no researcher influence/bias, and often more candid responses), they also come with the drawback of potentially low response rates (Story & Tait, 2019). The community partner surveys did experience this low response rate with decreasing participation (10, 6, and 4 responses for Surveys 1, 2, and 3 respectively). I attribute this largely to the workload associated with the non-profit sector, although it is possible that a negative CEL experience may have discouraged survey participation.

Instructor

I interviewed the course instructor three times: first in mid-September, second in early January, and finally in early May. These three times captured the early first impressions of the course, the midway point (after 439A ended and before 439B began), and final thoughts following the

conclusion of the course. Each interview was semi-structured: because the instructor and I have worked together for several years and know each other well, I came to each interview with a guide to follow, but allowed space for the conversation to naturally progress and diverge from my prepared questions (for the interview guides, see Appendix J). Follow-up questions were also used to clarify the instructor's comments that I wanted more detail about (Roulston, 2018). Interviews were held in the instructor's office at UVic and audio-recorded with permission of the participant, and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.

In summary, all data collected includes: six surveys (24 total responses from students to three surveys; 20 total responses from community partners to three surveys); two focus group transcripts; 22 reflection assignments; three interview transcripts; and 20 typed pages of classroom observation notes and associated field notes. All data is qualitative apart from two quantitative questions on the first student survey and two quantitative questions on the first community partner survey. These questions gathered simple demographic information about the students (what year they were in and whether they planned to graduate at the end of the academic year), and information on the community partners' past experience with CEL (how many times they had worked with the instructor previously and how many times they had participated in CEL with any other course/instructor before, if at all).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity, in my view and others', is not only an important component of CEL, but also a critical marker of sincere and authentic qualitative research (Savage, 2022; Tracy, 2010). "Reflexivity" in this context refers to the examination of one's own actions, opinions, ideas, and processes throughout the research, with special attention paid to one's positionality and biases (Cousin, 2015). As Tracy (2010) notes,

> Self-reflexivity encourages writers to be frank about their strengths and shortcomings…Researchers can practice self-reflexivity even before stepping into the field through being introspective, assessing their own biases and motivations, and asking whether they are well-suited to examine their chosen sites or topics at this time (p. 842).

Reflexivity can sometimes be mistaken as a synonym for reflection, but treating it this way risks obscuring the necessary self-critical aspect of examining one's positionality; that is, one's location, personal history, and biography that influence how and why the research agenda is being executed (Cousin, 2015). Working reflexively helps the researcher to engage with the research process and data in a deeper way that both recognizes and brings potential biases to the surface, as a reflexive researcher is constantly evaluating themselves and their inner monologue before beginning and whilst completing the research (Tracy, 2010). It is beneficial for the researcher to be able to recognize their position—including their social and economic status—and any privilege they carry within them into the research environment. This engagement is applicable in any research context, but is particularly important when in community settings (Militello et al., 2017).

Reflexivity for the researcher requires an ongoing awareness of tendencies and biases towards the research process and the data and actively taking steps to mitigate this (Tracy, 2010). I am aware that my background in CEL as a student, as well as my past role as Assistant Coordinator in UVic's CEL Office (which I held during most of this research project), influence my understanding of CEL and belief in its transformational potential for students and communities are something I need to continually be aware of. Therefore, throughout the research project, I often asked myself, "What could be interpreted differently by someone less familiar with CEL? How is my position altered because of my history and experience? What lens do I use to examine the data due to my own preconceived ideas?" However, reflexivity also requires the researcher to understand that sometimes a small amount of separation can be beneficial, as

"closeness is required for familiarity, distance is required for abstraction and synthesis, and the ability to switch between the two perspectives is recommended" (Bonello & Meehan, 2019, p. 496). To practice reflexivity throughout the research process and take steps to mitigate my own potential biases, I took field notes to document my thoughts and emotions in the moment (Bonello & Meehan, 2019; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Nowell et al. (2017) advocate for the researcher to engage in reflexive journaling throughout data analysis activities as a key way to meet Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research, as this tracks how ideas emerge for the researcher. Reading these notes—those taken during both the data collection and analysis phases—at a later point helped me identify if my biases were present (though they will never be able to be fully put aside) and aided me in separating myself from the data, as Bonello and Meehan (2019) suggest.

While a certain amount of separation from the data can be useful, reflexivity also necessitates being conscious of the data, the choices I make in how to collect it, and how I am interpreting it. As Whitaker and Atkinson (2021) point out, "we are, surely, all agreed that there are no methods that stand outside the implications of reflexivity" (p. 397) and that our chosen research methods say as much about our biases and positionality as the words we use to write about the research outcomes. Indeed, research methods are not "innocent instruments" and can often support the social power structures they wish to interrogate (Schmitz & Hamann, 2022, p. 415). Acknowledging that I am not separate from my research choices nor the data (nor do I want to be), I now turn my attention to my chosen method of data interpretation, thematic analysis.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis

My data analysis is guided by thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a systematic approach of applying codes to data in order to identify, examine, and recount patterns for the end goal of developing ideas, meaning, and understanding of themes (Ozuem et al., 2022). Despite not having as much history as more popular qualitative approaches such as grounded theory, ethnography, or phenomenology, thematic analysis is a useful approach to research which offers a flexible method of identifying themes across qualitative data and is appropriate for a variety of research circumstances, including variation in the number of participants to the method of data collection and resulting data type (Clarke & Braun, 2017; Ozuem et al., 2022; Thompson, 2022). My research—with a small sample size and various data types from multiple data collection methods—benefits from the flexibility that thematic analysis offers. Clarke and Braun (2017) argue that thematic analysis is not only versatile regarding the types of research it can be applied to, but that it can also be applied within a critical approach in which patterns of personal and social meaning (and their implications) are interrogated. In addition, the versatility of thematic analysis is beneficial for noting the key features of a large data set, as it prescribes a systematic approach to handling the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Applying a thematic analysis to this research allows for flexibility in interpreting data from three diverse viewpoints (i.e., the students, the community partners, and the course instructor) while leaving space for further questions to be explored.

Data interpretation in thematic analysis relies on a systematic identification of codes and themes within the data to seek patterns which may reveal a deeper understanding of it (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). Braun and Clarke (2021) caution against confusing codes and themes

and being clear on which is which: codes, as an analytical tool, capture one facet of a larger concept, whereas themes are multi-faceted ideas which encompass multiple themes. Themes can be semantic (i.e., true to their surface meaning) or latent (i.e., capturing underlying ideas and assumptions) (Ozuem et al., 2022). The themes, when viewed together, help the researcher tell the larger story behind the data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In thematic analysis, the researcher is key to weaving codes into themes, and themes into this story through decontextualizing and then recontextualizing the data (Nowell et al., 2017). Indeed, the perspective of the researcher is integral to data interpretation in thematic analysis (Ozuem et al., 2022).

Although thematic analysis is used widely in research (whether labeled as such or not), scholars have not yet agreed on one definitive approach (Ozuem et al., 2022). However, Braun and Clarke (2006) propose six phases of thematic analysis:

1) Familiarising oneself with the data;
2) Generating initial codes;
3) Searching for themes;
4) Reviewing the themes;
5) Defining and naming the themes;
6) Producing the report.

All six phases have been followed in this research; however, not reflected specifically in this phased approach is the need to work iteratively. As this research is inductive (meaning that I did not begin the research with expectations of investigating any particular theory, but rather that I am seeing what I discover within the data and producing new ideas and connections from there), I left space to cycle through the code- and theme-generation phases to ensure that initial coding still resonated, and refined codes, themes, and definitions as needed (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Coding process

All data collected orally (focus groups and interviews) were manually transcribed from audio recordings. The process of manual transcription was beneficial for the first phase of thematic analysis, which is familiarising oneself with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Ozuem et al., 2022). These transcriptions, along with all the survey and reflection data, were uploaded to NVivo. NVivo is Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) used by many qualitative researchers (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). This program is useful for helping researchers to organize, manage, code, categorize, and visualize their data (Bonello & Meehan, 2019). Additionally, I added my observation notes (converted from handwritten to typed), all survey data, and reflections to NVivo for the purpose of keeping all my data in one place and being able to code my observations.

Although NVivo has automatic analysis capabilities, I used NVivo solely to organize and keep track of my data, as I prefer to analyze and apply codes manually. Coding by hand allowed me greater familiarity with and control over the data and eliminated any risk of NVivo mis-categorizing anything if I had used the auto-code function. I also consider manual coding as part of a reflexive research process: spending time with the data grants the researcher the opportunity to constantly refine their interpretations and work more iteratively (Basit, 2003). Indeed, manually coding the data for this research—rather than relying on NVivo's auto-coding—gave me time and space to develop and re-develop my codes, categories, and themes, while using NVivo for the benefit of keeping my data organized and contained.

Beginning with open coding, I applied a mixture of descriptive and eclectic codes to the interview data. Braun and Clarke (2006) would call this phase two of thematic analysis, or generating initial codes). According to Saldaña (2013), a descriptive code provides a summary of

the main topic within the excerpt that the code is applied to, whereas eclectic codes are "'first-impression' phrases derived from an open-ended process" (p. 5). I established a short definition of each code to clearly identify what the code meant at the time of creating it; this is useful both to remind myself of what I meant when I created the code and explain the meaning of the code to others reading my work (example codes and definitions can be seen below in Table 3).

Table 3: Example codes and definitions

Code	Definition
Course workload	Aspects of 439 that were challenging, regarding how much work was associated with the course or how much work was assigned
Lack of knowledge or skill	Concerns (voiced by the student) that they don't have the skills or knowledge needed for their CEL project
Career contributions	Any mentions of students feeling like the course or CEL experience is helping them with career development (i.e., resume building, career exploration, etc.)

All open coding was organized using NVivo's 'node' function, which operates somewhat like a more versatile version of "Post-it notes and highlighters" (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019, p. 77). The coding process required me to review the data several times before finalizing my coding scheme due to the new ideas which emerged throughout. This iterative process is integral to understanding the data thoroughly, as Saldaña (2013) argues that "coding *is* analysis [emphasis in original]" (p. 8).

Following the initial open coding, I then compared the codes and looked for connections between them to begin forming larger thematic categories. This process encompasses phases three to five of Braun and Clarke's (2006) model: 3) Searching for themes; 4) Reviewing the themes; and 5) Defining and naming the themes. Saldaña (2013, p. 13) models a visual charting method for making sense of codes and determining categories, which I found useful for organizing my ideas regarding the data. This visualization, too, required an evolving process of

considering the codes' organization. As Basit (2003) suggests, "[a] category…cannot be created in isolation from the other categories we want to use in the analysis" (p. 144). Saldaña (2013) explains that codes are grouped into categories, and categories are grouped into themes which can potentially build towards a theory. Therefore, after grouping individual codes into categories, I then reflected on the categories to begin building broader themes. These themes will be discussed in the following *Findings* and *Discussion* chapters.

Chapter IV: Findings (Part 1), September to December

This chapter outlines the findings from all data collected via surveys, focus groups, reflections, interviews, and observations. Presented chronologically, the chapter moves from September to December 2021. The following chapter details the second semester from January to May 2022. First, however, I will introduce seven students whose stories are reflected in this research.

Student Profiles

In order to contextualize some of the students highlighted in this research, I offer brief summaries of their journeys in Sociology 439. These students were chosen because they were the most consistent classroom contributors and research participants. Each also had their own distinct lens on CEL and had a unique journey of personal development over the eight month course. All students have been assigned pseudonyms. Organizations are not identified here to protect the anonymity of both the students and community partners.

Ava was a fourth-year student nearing graduation. Though quiet in class discussions, when she did speak, her classmates listened carefully to her thoughtful comments. Ava graduated at the end of Sociology 439 and had a government job in her home province lined up to begin at the end of the semester.

Brooklyn was a fourth-year student who was one of the more extraverted students and was always willing to share their thoughts in seminars. Brooklyn's CEL experience got off to a rocky start, however, as the first community partner they were assigned to work with had to withdraw their participation. After this partnership fell apart, a second community partner was assigned, but also had to quickly withdraw due to unforeseen personal circumstances. Finally, Brooklyn asked the instructor if they could work with an organization they had volunteered with in the past, and that partnership proved to be a (finally) stable community partner for them. Brooklyn

went on to work with UVic's CEL Office as a work-study student after completing Sociology 439.

Charlotte was a transfer student who left her previous city to attend UVic for the last year of her degree. Charlotte entered the course with a lot of prior community work experience, having worked extensively on disability services and advocacy in community settings. This experience was evident in her work ethic and dedication to her CEL project. Although not one of the more talkative students in the course, her written reflections revealed the trajectory of her year: settling into her new home, finding community in the Sociology 439 cohort, and experiencing a lot of personal growth along the way. Charlotte graduated after completing Sociology 439 and continued to work with her community partner in a paid position following the course.

Emma was a fourth-year student about to graduate. Emma was the youngest of the Sociology 439 cohort by several years; in the last seminar of the spring semester, the class learned that she was only 18 by her telling the group that she could not join for a celebratory beer at the campus pub because she was not of legal drinking age. This shocked everyone because her maturity and intelligence fully matched others in the class. Despite her relatively young age (compared to her peers), she demonstrated a thoughtful and dedicated approach to her CEL project. Emma graduated at the end of Sociology 439 and immediately began a job working at one of the Sociology 439 community partner organizations (although not the one she worked with in the course).

Isabelle was a fourth-year student who entered the course excited and prepared to give her community partner her best effort, but struggled throughout the eight months as the community partner gave her little time and guidance. She was a very reflective student and showed maturity when taking responsibility for her part in the communication challenges between her and the

community partner, realizing that she could have better advocated for herself. When it became clear that the partnership with the community organization was not working, she pivoted to completing a project for UVic's CEL Office, which was sharing the Sociology 439 cohort's work at an end-of-year campus-wide CEL event. After the course concluded, Isabelle completed a few more courses before graduating and aspired to go on to a graduate program.

Matthew was a fourth-year student who, perhaps more than the other students, struggled with seeing himself as a sociologist and was forthcoming with his reflections on this topic. He was a low-key but consistent contributor to class discussions and gradually came to identify his own approach to sociology over the eight months of reflecting on the CEL experience.

Sophia entered Sociology 439 with an interest and history in working with the community. Having worked with the university's community-oriented, low barrier, free university program, she was already immersed in working with vulnerable populations and had a healthy cynicism about the university structure. She completed Sociology 439 and graduated with her Sociology degree with a reinforced desire to continue working with community.

Course Assignments

The findings frequently reference assignments that students completed for Sociology 439A and 439B, including reflections, a research paper, the sociological artefact assignment, and their CEL project. For detailed descriptions of each assignment and the instructor's intention behind assigning them, please see Tables 1 and 2 (pages 39-41) in *Chapter III: Methodology*.

September 2021

Student Survey #1

This research aimed to assess student experiences before, during, and after the course. Therefore, the first student survey was circulated by email prior to the course beginning in September 2021 and received 13 responses. This survey gathered information about students' demographics, previous history of volunteerism, motivations for taking the course, and worries or concerns for the course. Data shows that the cohort was mainly made up of fourth-year sociology students who were in the final year of their degree (see Figure 2). This is consistent with most CEL course enrollments, as CEL courses tend to be offered as capstones for senior undergraduates (Love & MacIlroy, 2021; Shostak et al., 2019). Most students had previous experience working with a community organization, and many were motivated to enroll in this course because they were interested in applied sociology and wanted to use their skills to benefit the community.

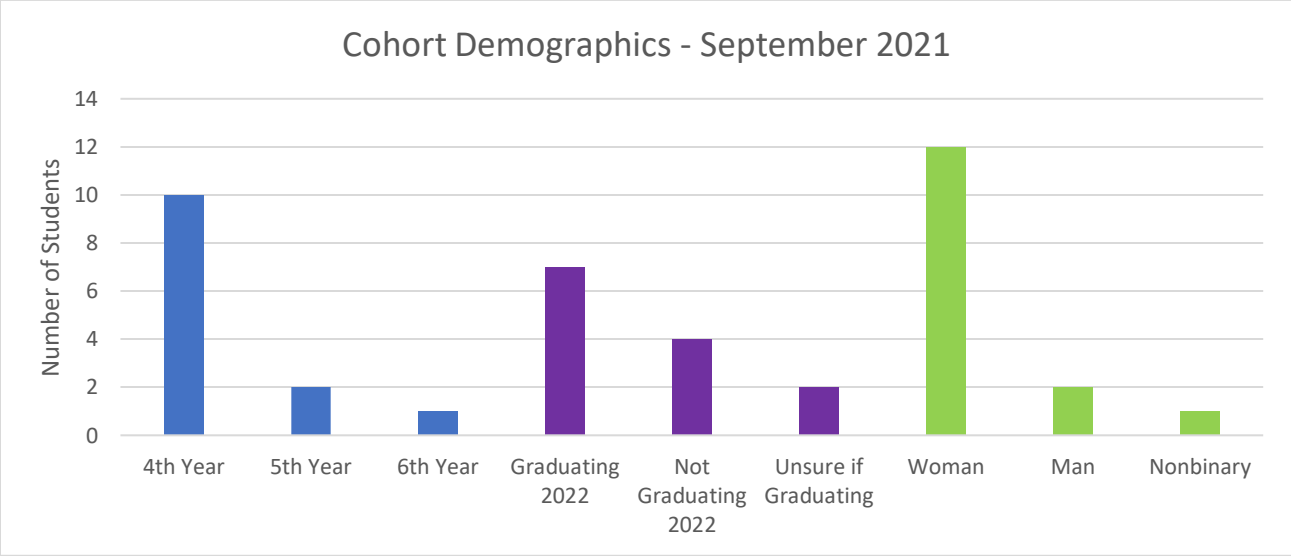

Figure 2: Cohort demographics (year of study, graduation timeline, and gender) as of September 2021. Although the survey did not specifically ask about gender identity, observational data provided this information.

After establishing those demographic data points in Questions 1 and 2, Question 3 asked students, “Why did you decide to take this class? (Please check all that apply)” Responses were:

Answer	**Responses**
Reputation of course	2
Reputation of instructor	5
Interest in helping the community	8
Interest in topic of applied sociology	10
Course is a good timetable fit	0
Just need to get a 400-level credit	6
None of these	0

These results show that most students enrolled had picked the course for interest, but were also motivated by graduation requirements (i.e., needing a 400-level credit to meet major requirements set by the department). Some students also chose the course because of the instructor, who many students were familiar with from taking Sociology 100 with him earlier in their degree.

Question 4 asked students, “Do you currently, or have you ever volunteered for a community organization? If you answer ‘yes’ please briefly explain your experience(s) and who you volunteered with.” Nine students answered Yes. Students reported volunteering for a wide range of organizations, from the David Suzuki Foundation to local soccer teams to various non-profit organizations to on-campus clubs. Four students reported that they had never volunteered.

Question 5 asked students, “What are you excited about/looking forward to in this course?” Answers spoke to themes of having the opportunity to work with community organizations, making an impact in their community, gaining real-world experience, career preparation, applying knowledge learned during their degree program, learning from the instructor, and getting outside of their comfort zone. One student wrote they were “excited to start getting [their] hands dirty” to support their community organization. This desire to move

from textbook-based *learning* to practical, tangible learning and (more importantly, for some students) *doing* is commonly expressed by students (Lake et al., 2021).

Question 6 asked students, "What are you concerned about/nervous for in this course?" Five students indicated their concern for the workload and time commitment of the course. Several students mentioned being worried about their ability to achieve a good grade in the course, with one writing:

> [I am concerned about] not being fairly graded or not knowing that I will be assessed off of something more than the subjective feelings of one marker. This is an unusual class, and I am worried that the fact that it is unusual will mean that there are not good grading rubrics/methods and this will penalize me.

Although course grades are arguably not the most important outcome of a CEL experience, they feel like high-stakes and are often a fear for CEL students (Savage, 2022).

Others shared concern for their ability to develop a good relationship with the community partner. One student wrote, "I am most nervous about coming into the community with too much entitlement. I do not want those guiding me to think I am participating in this course because I have a saviour complex—or as something to add on my resume." This fear of being perceived as a 'saviour' is prevalent among CEL students, especially those who recognize the place of privilege that they occupy (Stanlick & Sell, 2016). Health concerns were also prevalent, and one student noted that they were worried about getting sick from working in-person with their community partner during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Question 7 asked students, "Are you interested in working with the community? Why or why not?" Twelve of the 13 students answered Yes, offering reasons like the opportunity to work with people, connecting with and giving back to the community, and wanting to put their skills to use. One student noted that working with the community is "a large reason [they] decided to major in sociology in the first place…I am excited and ready to being using the privileges I have

towards supporting those who did not have as much luck as I have." The one student who answered No to this question wrote, "I believe my interest will build with familiarization of the community, currently I feel disassociated."

In summary, results of the first survey demonstrated students' mix of excitement and nervousness for the course ahead. While most students were entering the course with community work experience, there was still some apprehension about this new mode of learning and had several fears about achieving a good grade and how to develop a relationship with their community partner. This split between excitement and nervousness is also seen in the first seminar of the course, which will be described later.

Student Reflection #1

Students wrote their first reflection assignment prior to the first seminar, as the instructor followed Eyler's (2002) recommendation that students complete a "preflection" to interrogate their positionality prior to beginning the CEL experience. In the three reflections received, students recounted their familial backgrounds and early university experiences that drew them to sociology. Charlotte noted that—although beginning her post-secondary journey in teacher education—her work experience in non-profit and government roles throughout her university years "re-sparked the interest" in sociology from an introductory course she had taken in her first year. Like many sociology students who are unsure of their post-graduation job prospects (Senter, 2020), she also noted that they hoped the 439 CEL experience would help determine their career direction after graduation. Another student, Sophia, echoed this sentiment:

> Since switching majors from music to sociology, while it feels like 'I am getting somewhere here,' I still am searching for meaning and a path for my career and where I fit best in devout pursuit of community advocacy….As of now, I am not sure the life of academia is where I want to be.

She continues later in the reflection to write:

> Since arriving at university, I have felt more lost than I did before applying. My journey has been complex and full of uncertainty, strangeness, disdain and stress. My tunnel vision continues; which is why I chose to take this course. Currently, I am able to see that I want to continue meaningful community work but am unsure of where I want that to be and where my place is in the vast realm of support work, advocacy, activism, community holding, social work, non-profit groups, one-on-one support.

The third student commented on a theme that was also reflected in the first student survey: that the course instructor—who also teaches the majority of the introductory sociology courses at the university—was the first person to introduce them to sociology, and that Sociology 100 course was essential in igniting their interest in sociology and choosing it as their major.

Now understanding the students' perspectives at the outset of the course, I then interviewed the instructor for the first time to hear his perspective.

Instructor Interview #1

I conducted the first interview with the instructor, Bruce, on September 16th after the first seminar of 439A. Our conversation reviewed the instructor's motivation for using a CEL pedagogy, first impressions of the cohort, what he was looking forward to, worried or concerned about in the course, any challenges he expected, and differences anticipated in the transition from a one-semester to a two-semester course. We ended the interview with a discussion of what the instructor hoped students would "get" out of the course.

After having delivered the course (as a one-semester offering) four times previously, the reason the instructor continues to teach this CEL course is simple:

> For me, it's the best opportunity we have in sociology to give students the experience of what sociology is without just reading about it. Because I think sociology at best is visceral, is feeling uncomfortable, on the edge, or empowered…I keep seeing students have these defining moments in these meetings with community partners that I just feel obligated to continue ensuring that somebody gets those experiences before they finish their undergrad.

This echoes Savage (2022) whose motivation for using a CEL pedagogy is creating the opportunity for students to experience sociology in action and develop their sense of personal agency. She discusses CEL as a way to practice sociology and show students how they can be part of the solution to complex social problems. The instructor's mention of feeling uncomfortable is also a teaching tool; Boler (1999) explains that a "pedagogy of discomfort" invites both "educators and students to engage in critical inquiry regarding values and cherished beliefs, and to examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others" (p. 177). In this discomfort, deep learning can occur (Ibrahim et al., 2016).

Next, we discussed Bruce's first impressions of the cohort we had met a few days earlier. "I felt quite good about this group and meeting for the first time. I got a good feel from that, that they're all there by real choice." Despite this optimism, there was still an underlying concern about ensuring students know what they are signing up for, as CEL is not yet a commonly understood pedagogy (Rocha Beardall, 2023). The instructor voiced his apprehension around having students underestimate the commitment required in 439 and end up withdrawing from the course (and potentially leaving their community partner in the lurch with a half-finished project). To combat this, the instructor purposefully overcompensates by repeating often the 40-hour-per-term commitment in hopes that students will decide early in the first semester whether the course is for them. Beyond leaving community partners with a partially completed project, the other worry for Bruce is damage to the relationship: "I've built relationships with the community partners and I don't want to damage that relationship by having [a student] be flippant." But, also being an experienced teacher, he recognized, "I'm hopeful but jaded, hopeful but practical. I think about what it must feel like for [the students], right, 'cause it is a very different course…you know, what's in it for them?"

When students *do* complete the whole course, it is gratifying for Bruce. When asked what he was most looking forward to with the class, he shared,

> It is those moments that the students communicate afterwards that made a difference, those moments of transformation…I'm putting them consciously in a place where I think fosters those moments more than in a classroom…That's what I'm inspired by, [and] I see my job as providing that place for it to happen.

The potential for these moments of transformation is a key draw for instructors, and is seen as one of the most valuable outcomes of CEL for students across disciplines (Bringle & Wall, 2020; Lake et al., 2021; Mitchell, 2008; Ricke, 2021; Warren, 2012).

However, it is challenging to witness student transformations and still be required to assign a letter grade to that experience. The instructor shared,

> My ongoing fears and frustrations are that natural tension between the experience I'm trying to foster and grading…This is a sociology course for credit, and they want to be able to gain their A…I'm frustrated by it and I'm concerned with it, but I know that's the playing field on which I must participate. And the grades are the currency that we co-negotiate that experience.

Indeed, this is a tension many instructors experience when teaching CEL (Arantes do Amaral, 2019). This is especially difficult when it comes to grading reflections, which are an essential element of CEL pedagogy but highly subjective, necessarily personal, and challenging to give guidance on. Unsurprisingly, Bruce reported that the first reflection (which students submitted before the first day of class) was not as reflective as he had hoped. Given that students spend years having their writing molded to academic conventions, writing reflectively is a new skill to be developed—one that is as difficult to teach as it is to learn. Bruce confessed,

> I don't want to be so prescriptive in what they are writing that I close down what they want and need to say…because that would confine thinking….I want to provide that space for the student where they can take a risk, and force them to think about thinking and to think about their journey…to make them better sociologists…I don't know if providing more parameters and guidance is helpful for a reflection….The best reflection in my experience is one where you're not worried about the grade.

Another challenge for the instructor is balancing giving students enough support when truly needed, but not over-managing the relationships between the student and their community partner. Ultimately, Bruce reminds himself often that "our student's project with them is not [the community partner's] core business…they have programs to deliver to clients that matter" and that it is a privilege for students to be there. It is not a bad thing for the student to have to do their own problem-solving when a community partner is busy and not as responsive as hoped.

In terms of course design, the unknown with the 2021/22 delivery was the switch from a one-semester to a two-semester experience. The potential that two semesters offers for relationship-building and project development was a main draw for redesigning the course, but does have the trade-off of requiring a longer commitment from students (thus increasing the concern of student "flake factor"). With this switch to two semesters, the course (which, when offered as one-semester, filled up quickly and always had a wait list) saw lower enrollment. In the interview, I expressed my surprise at this. Bruce explained his point-of-view on why it is okay for the course to be less popular:

> [CEL] is not for everyone. We know the experiences that we're hoping students have in CEL, but that may not resonate with everyone. The idea of leaving [campus] and going somewhere else is really intimidating and although I think it's an equal amount of work to doing another course, it's a different type of work.

Not all students want to engage with the community in this type of setting. While instructors and researchers recognize the benefits of this style of learning, plenty of students are content to graduate without having to step outside of their comfort zone.

For students who are willing to do so, there are tangible benefits that CEL can offer: for one, CEL is a great resumé-builder. Bruce noted,

> I got the feel [from the cohort]—the desire for more experiential, marketable, intangible things for the [job] marketplace, plus to show the value of their sociology degree. I think that's a healthy thing. If they come to it thinking, 'This would be a great line in my

> resume,' I'm OK with that too, 'cause I'm still going to get them to work with the community group.

This desire to make meaning from a sociology degree is linked to greater conversations within the discipline about career advising for undergraduate sociology students and a fundamental lack of understanding by a wider audience of what a sociology degree can afford graduates (Senter, 2020; Senter et al., 2020; Virnoche, 2023). The practical application of sociology via the CEL experience is a useful way for students to answer their own question of "what can I do with a sociology major?" (Virnoche, 2023, p. 363).

We next discussed what the instructor hoped the students and community partners would "get" out of the experience. For the students, "the 'get' would be confidence. If a student comes out of this feeling a little more competent and confident…that would be a great get." Another valuable learning from the course would be understanding what kind of work they are (or are not) passionate about, and what they may want to pursue after graduation (whether it be graduate school, a career path, or otherwise). A third "get" for students is more community connections: "The people we interact with in CEL are fantastic human beings doing great things for the community and the more connections we can make with those people for students is a wonderful 'get,' too."

For community partners, the instructor viewed the main "get" as the opportunity to complete a project that they otherwise would not have time, capacity, or resources to do. In addition, the community partner can build relationships with the university community. Lastly, "by having people work and be around their organization means they've got yet another advocate in the community that understands the value of what they're doing…I think those ripples have lasting benefit and I think the non-profit organizations know that."

The interview ended on a hopeful note. With one class completed and eight months of the course still to go, Bruce was thoughtful about how he hoped the experience would unfold:

> I predict that this one will not be like the last class of all [the students'] other last classes, because they're going to have that shared experience with the community partner over eight months, not four. I think it's going to have more gravitas, potentially, I hope, 'cause it's tangibly different.

In all, the instructor demonstrated his balanced perspective on the course: cautiously optimistic and excited to see how the next eight months would unfold.

September Observations

The students met for the first time on September 14th. Most of them already knew the instructor and had been in communication with him over the summer to choose their community partner. The atmosphere was a little excited, a little nervous, and I could sense the buzz of slight apprehension from the group as they rearranged the tables and chairs into a circle at the instructor's request. The first order of business was a round of introductions. In addition to names, students also shared why they had signed up for the course and what drew them to majoring in sociology. Many reported being excited for the course, hearing about it in their first or second year and looking forward to enrolling in it for several years.

By the second class, I could see that trust had already started to build amongst the students as they started sharing more personal information about themselves: for example, their Covid-19 vaccination status, previous community work experiences, and their history with university and sociology. I was also trying to establish personal relationships with each student, making conversation with them before class, letting them use the microwave in my office (down the hall from our classroom) during breaks, and purposefully not using my cell phone or laptop in the classroom so as to be present and open for conversation. I hoped this would help establish

rapport with students and encourage interest and engagement with my research. Although we would not know this until later in the year, our collective efforts to get to know one another from an early stage in the course (me getting to know the students, the students getting to know one another, the students getting to know the instructor and vice versa) would pay off as the communal atmosphere strengthened every week.

On the project side, students wanted examples of past CEL initiatives that had been done in this class in previous years. There was some discussion of feasible project types—client surveys, staff interviews, website resources, to name a few—but students were still unsure of how to balance taking on a project they were confident in completing, but not wanting to underwhelm their community partner. I was not surprised by this worry; as many sociology students enter the discipline because they desire to understand and address social problems, the students' worry about completing a project that would not create change was to be expected (Snedker et al., 2023). This preoccupation with doing something meaningful would plague many students throughout the CEL experience (Savage, 2022). This theme will be explored further in the findings and discussion.

September was also busy with introducing assignment types that would be regular agenda items throughout the first term: article summaries (leads and discussants) and written reflections. Classroom discussions centered around keystone articles from authors such as Paulo Freire, Michael Burawoy, and Ernest Boyer. These discussions on topics like transformational education, public sociology, and the scholarship of engagement were critical in laying the groundwork for the rest of the course.

October 2021

Student Reflection #2

Students wrote their second reflection following their site visit/first meeting with their community partner in October. This reflection required students to use a sociological concept to explore their work and relationship with their community partner. I received nine submissions for this assignment. Sociological concepts invoked included intellectual imperialism, Marx's alienation, positionality, reciprocity, Foucault's biopower, symbolic interactionism's idea of the 'self', the white saviour complex, Mills' sociological imagination, and Durkheim's functionalism. Through all these concepts, this reflection assignment demonstrated the wide variety of first encounters, projects, anxieties, and triumphs that the students had experienced. Matthew, who had not yet settled on a specific project with their community partner, shared this observation:

> I am one of the students that had not been given a defined project. Instead, I listened as my community partner pitched idea after idea without sticking to one. Their excitement led to an inability for them to decide on how best to use my help. Not knowing what to do with me is not a bad thing. It is also nice to know that I have choices with how to allocate my time. Still, I have lingering feelings of worry. I see some of my classmates talking about the amazing projects that they have planned with their partners. Similar to many people, I hate the feeling of being left behind. I do not want to be the last person to not have a project to work on. So, while it makes me joyful to see the excitement on the faces of the people around me, I cannot help but feel a little jealous of their success. Though I guess that is what makes me human.

Other students who had been offered a project already established by their community partner worried about their ability to complete it, or the feasibility of the community partner's idea. However, Emma shared that although she wanted to help her community partner, "challenging the project they gave [her] was intimidating" and she was "very worried because [her] initial motivations for challenging this research design were not based on…ethical considerations but were based on [her] own preferences."

Similarly, Charlotte voiced concern for whether she was the best person for the project, as she was new to Victoria and did not have prior community experience that may inform her work on the project. Despite this initial worry, an encounter with a community member during the student's first site visit quelled this fear:

> It was in that moment I realized my concerns for not knowing the community, the connections or the best resources was irrelevant, because I was there, I was present and I was able to offer myself as a person who could empathize and listen to understand.

This fear was echoed by Sophia, who was very aware of her position going into her community project: "I feel more nervous about the project due to fears of the workers thinking of me as some privileged student who is being told (controlled) to work on this project through UVIC rather than acting on will and interest." One's position of privilege is a natural (and in my opinion, healthy) thought to reflect on, as student privilege when entering a community setting is a common criticism of CEL when it goes unchecked (Dostilio et al., 2012; Dunn & Konrad, 2019; Mitchell, 2008). These sentiments of being privileged and potentially an imposter without the experience to validate their project efforts was viewed differently by Alison, who shared that "even though [she] felt inexperienced, [her] interest in the work itself and motivation to do it compensate for this inexperience."

This same student had a very positive first experience with her community partner and came away from the first meeting surprised (and suspicious) of the great encounter: "[The meeting] went so well that after some pondering I was questioning everything. Did I miss something?" In contrast, Brooklyn—who, through no fault of their own, was the sole student who had yet to be placed with a community partner at the time of writing this reflection—had to come to terms with the experience not unfolding like they had expected or planned:

> As you know, my experience with this course has been… challenging so far… It isn't going quite how I planned it. With one community partner that never replied or

> acknowledged my eagerness to work with them, and another that is keeping me on my toes while I wait to find out if we can work together, it's safe to say, a month and a half into the course, I'm definitely re-evaluating my self-concept.

These reflections demonstrate the range of experiences students had with their community partners—a theme that would continue throughout the rest of the course.

Student Focus Group #1

Nine students participated in this focus group that was held on October 26. In this conversation, students were two months into the course and therefore knew enough about the course structure and the instructor to offer more informed commentary on them. The students had also spent enough time together where they were comfortable speaking in front of their peers. Worries about project feasibility and workload were already prevalent and students suggested different additions to the course that could be helpful in their preparation for the second semester when they would complete their projects. Despite the anxieties, exhaustion, and stress that are common at this point in the semester (also known as "midterm season"), students were hopeful about the outcomes of their CEL experience and excited to see how their projects would unfold.

The focus group opened with a discussion of what was going well for students at that point in time. All participants agreed that the biggest and most pleasant surprise was how engaging the weekly seminars were, and how beneficial they were finding the classroom dynamic to be. Brooklyn explained:

> I think that despite the struggles that we've been facing, at least I know [that] coming to class and connecting with my peers—we can talk about how we're stressed with the paper. We can talk about the positive things and the negative things going on with community partners.

The camaraderie built in the classroom at an early stage in the course was essential in helping students feel supported in their CEL projects. Sophia shared, "When I think personally about my

project, I get kind of freaked out about the bearing of the responsibility. But having these conversations every week and knowing that everyone else is going through it too is really comforting." Students acknowledged that a tangible contributor to this community-building was the physical arrangement of the classroom: "Part of it is…the fact that we sit in a circle and I can look at the people and actually talk to them." Ava followed this comment up with the thought, "We're talking to each other instead of talking via [the instructor] to other people." This physical reconfiguration is a way to silently redistribute power in a classroom, demonstrating to the students that the instructor is a participant in group discussions rather than the 'sage-on-the-stage' (Cundiff et al., 2020, p. 108; Mitchell, 2008).

Although the reconfigured classroom helps to rebalance power in the seminar setting, a common view from many students was that the instructor was a central and significant element of creating the supportive, communal classroom experience: Emma shared, "It does really seem that [the instructor] actually cares about our success and is on our side, and is actively working with us for success." Instructors play an important role in managing stress, anxiety, and uncertainty for students completing CEL projects (Rasch et al., 2022). The role of the instructor was also key to students in his capacity as a cheerleader, advocate, and sounding board, and in the careful design of the syllabus, which helped students understand how the weekly readings, activities, and assignments support students' CEL experience and overall learning. Emma further commented,

> It's been really obvious that [the instructor] is invested in the course and is willing to put in time with us and that's so nice. The course load is heavy, but at the same time it all makes sense—it doesn't feel like there's just random assignments that don't have any purpose… It's such a different experience than a lot of other courses which are like, now you get to learn how other people think as sociologists. Whereas we're actually thinking as sociologists, which has been so interesting and very fulfilling.

However, although the classroom experience was largely positive, Ava explained that this emerged in part from a set of circumstances that was challenging but ultimately beneficial:

> I think this shared experience really kind of 'trauma bonds' us in a way. Like, it's not just that we read the same paper and now we have to pretend to be engaged with that together. It's like we actually have this real experience that I relate to your struggles, you relate to mine…and that is really connecting the group, I think.

This connection over shared experience became an often-cited reason for why the classroom dynamic and peer group became so central to students' own view of their success. Indeed, peers have been found to be a key variable in a positive CEL course experience for students (Lake et al., 2021).

As positive as the classroom environment was, the course was not without challenges. One common sentiment among students in this discussion was their struggle with the workload, which is a common struggle in CEL courses (Arantes do Amaral, 2019). Students reported Sociology 439A to have higher expectations and a more rigorous assignment structure than their other 400-level sociology courses. This, plus the expectation that students would contribute 40 hours each semester to their community partner project, created some doubt for students that they would be able to successfully manage it all. Students also struggled with the open-ended nature of the reflection assignments; after years of writing structured papers with certain academic expectations, students were unsure of how to write more freely without instructor-imposed guidelines (Savage, 2022). Emma shared,

> It's really hard because it feels like I'm not being given the tools to succeed in that way, even though I'm not sure that those tools exist…I realize [the instructor] is saying that we should write for ourselves and we shouldn't write based on what [the instructor] wants. But in the end, he's grading it.

This statement demonstrates that students found it hard to grasp the reason behind the assignment, not understanding (despite discussions about it in class) that the instructor

intentionally left the reflection open-ended to encourage students to think and write reflexively for themselves—not just writing what they thought would help them achieve a high mark, or what they thought the instructor would want to hear. However, workload and stress around assignment expectations aside, students were pleased to get grades and feedback returned quickly, as "you're knowing where to improve on before you have to start your next steps." Quick replies to emails to the instructor was also seen as beneficial and a factor that helped reduce students' stress about the course.

An additional topic that surfaced during this focus group was the ways in which the weekly seminars could address topics seen as more directly relevant to their CEL projects. Many students were in favour of spending in-class time on research methods skills, since although sociology students must pass three methods courses prior to entering their fourth year seminars, many reported either not receiving what they considered to be quality instruction or not remembering the details of what they had learned. Undergraduate research methods are taught inconsistently, resulting in not all students receiving the same training throughout their programs (Medley-Rath & Morgan, 2022). Students expressed that spending time on topics like constructing and analyzing surveys and statistical analysis would be helpful in preparing them for their CEL projects. Ava explained,

> My trajectory is data analysis with surveys [the community partner has] already taken and now they have to be analyzed and create some tangible results. I took stats maybe three years ago now, I literally remember nothing. I don't know how databases really work…I'm currently a little bit panicked about that. I'm just like trying to trust that guidance will come and I'll figure it out.

Recognizing that the diverse array of projects in the class would make it difficult to address all the relevant skills students were struggling with, a student suggested a seminar (or a few partial seminars) dedicated to open project time, where students could work independently or

collaboratively on their projects, while being able to ask the instructor for guidance. Other suggestions were to bring in guest speakers with expertise (such as quantitative methods) to give students a workshop on certain research methods skills, or to allow students to work on CEL projects in pairs or groups to create complementary skillsets.

Wanting to end the focus group on a positive note, I asked students what they were looking forward to in the next six months of the course. Students expressed excitement for progressing past the project development stage and getting to work collaboratively with their community partner on the project itself. Emma candidly said she was most looking forward to "just seeing what the outcome of my project is" as it currently felt very hypothetical and distant. Brooklyn shared their happy anticipation of the end-of-term celebration (a less formal gathering during the semester's last seminar where the instructor brings snacks and students share their project proposals with the group) as a chance to collectively acknowledge all the work the class had done that semester: "I'm really excited to see what people are going to be doing with their projects and to actually finally take a moment and be like, oh my God, we made it halfway—yay, pats on the back and all that good stuff."

At the end of the focus group, I asked each student to share three words that indicated their feelings towards the CEL experience at that point in time. The following word cloud shows the words shared:

Figure 3: A word cloud from the first focus group which shows how students were feeling about the CEL experience at the end of October, just two months into the first semester.

The words shared here show the many emotions students were feeling at this point in the experience. The most common words were 'stressed,' 'challenging,' and 'hopeful,' suggesting that although the students were feeling the strain of learning how to do CEL, they still had optimism for how the experience would unfold over the remainder of the course.

Community Partner Survey #1

After only collecting data from students and the instructor for the first month of the CEL experience, it was time to add the third stakeholder group: community partners. The first community partner survey was distributed in October (to account for the dynamic nature of course enrollment) and received 10 responses. Question 1 asked if the community partner had worked with the instructor previously; sixty percent of community partners had, and the remaining 40% were new to the instructor and the course.

Question 2 asked partners if they had participated in other CEL experiences with other courses, students, or instructors at UVic, and if so, to explain their prior experience(s). Five

community partners answered Yes and described a variety of experiences ranging from partnerships with Geography classes to hosting practicum students to working with students in the general Social Sciences CEL course.

Question 3 asked community partners, "Why do you participate in community-engaged learning?" Reasons included: reciprocal knowledge exchange; creating awareness of the organization for more people; being a part of students' learning journey; benefitting from students' research skills and enabling the organization to take on projects that they otherwise would not or could not; and to contribute to mentoring students. One community partner shared,

> I believe it is part nparcel [sic] of good stewardship to participate in this way as it assists the work at hand while building partnerships, assists vital student learning as well as our own and it provides a sense of making a difference as a collective unit equating to our purpose and communal belonging.

This perspective recognizes that successful community engagement between universities and communities depends on principles of partnership, reciprocity, and the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledges and resources (Renwick et al., 2020). This community partner's notion of "good stewardship" also underpins a common belief that students should graduate from university prepared to be community contributors (Beaulieu et al., 2018).

Question 4 asked community partners what benefits (if any) they expected to come from working with the 439 students. The community partners' expectations largely reiterated their reasons shared for participation in CEL, including knowledge sharing, completing research projects, making new connections, increasing work capacity, and awareness and advocacy for the organization. Community partners also expected other benefits, such as innovation and trying new research methods; "free help"; and access to university connections and resources. One community partner noted that

> Personally, I enjoy the interactions with young minds who share new ways of thinking and doing. I also believe that we have a civic responsibility to mentor and support emerging professionals. As an organization we usually benefit from the investment of time, skills, and knowledge.

Other community partners also indicated that a benefit of hosting CEL students is that they often end up as paid employees after the CEL project is completed, as these students already have organizational knowledge and the community partner is familiar with their work ethic. CEL students' ability to transition to paid agency roles is a documented benefit of CEL for community partners, ensuring good hires who need less orientation to the organization (Mitchell, 2008).

Question 5 asked community partners what challenges (if any) they expected when working with the students. Anticipated challenges ranged from individual student attributes that require more support from the community partner (including lack of motivation, difficulty in communicating or scheduling, or being unprepared or less engaged) to broader challenges (such as how quickly a semester can go, lack of resources/capacity for the community partner, conflicting priorities, and realizing projects that are feasible and meaningful for both parties) (Greenberg et al., 2020; Hoschild et al., 2014). One community partner sums it up: "There is no 'one-size-fits-all' when it comes to student placements…even in the best of circumstances schedules and priorities can conflict, leading to less than ideal placement conditions."

Question 6 asked, "In your opinion, what might students gain from participating in community-engaged learning?" The most common response was that students gain the invaluable experience of working with an organization and learn firsthand what the non-profit space looks like "behind-the-scenes." Community partners voiced that students also gain awareness, practice communication, develop new or existing skills, engage in networking, and explore career possibilities. One community partner summarizes: "[Students] can see how what they learn at university translate[s] in the real world and how those skills will prepare them for

their future endeavours." CEL students also have the opportunity to have "a sense of belonging to something bigger"—something sociology students especially crave (Shostak et al., 2019; Snedker et al., 2023).

The last survey question asked community partners, "In your opinion, what do you think your organization might gain from participating in community-engaged learning?" As universities like to think of CEL as "win-win," it is not always equally beneficial between the students and community partners, with the latter making time and resource sacrifices for the sake of student learning (Verges Bosch et al., 2021); I therefore wanted to learn what outcomes the Sociology 439 community partners hoped for. Several respondents answered with concrete gains regarding support on a specific project the student would be working on, or potential data analysis about a particular topic that could inform organizational change. Others answered more broadly, indicating they hoped their organization would gain fresh perspectives, knowledge sharing, and "the camaraderie of a new colleague, which is super helpful when you work in such a small team." Above all, one community partner shared one sentiment that was echoed throughout other responses: "Our research and work will be enriched and the student will allow us to go way further than we could on our own."

October Observations

In the first week of October, students completed their site visits, during which they were to meet their community partner (either in person, which was encouraged if possible, or online via Zoom) and begin discussing project ideas. Site visits, ideally, were in-person and should help the student understand their community partner more deeply (Lake et al., 2021). While some community partners requested online site visits, this was disappointing to students as it did not accomplish the goal of the student physically visiting the space where their community partner

operated. Johnston (2020) also points out that authentic relationships are harder to form with community partners if minimal time is spent together in person. The site visits had mixed results: some went smoothly and the students came away with solid project concepts; other site visits left the students feeling uncertain, uneasy, or worse, unwanted, and often left them floundering with what direction to take the project. Successful first meetings seemed to occur when the community partner came prepared with specific project options in mind, and less successful ones appeared to be the outcome of a more laissez-faire approach wherein students were given free choice in what kind of project they wanted to do (with little or no direction from the community partner). However, even those students whose community partners presented specific project ideas to them conveyed their nervousness, as sometimes project asks felt outside of the student's comfort zone or the skills they felt confident in.

A third outcome of the first meeting was that for some students, it just simply did not happen: a few community partners were out of town or students had not yet been able to get a solid commitment to meet. Brooklyn's community partner completely stopped communicating with them with no explanation or further contact. This student—who was one of the most gregarious and eager in the class—reported feeling rejected and unsure of where that left them. It also fed feelings of inadequacy and fears that they would fall behind on their project. Bruce assured them that would not happen, and that they would work together to determine next steps (i.e., establishing a new community partner).

Outside of community partner site visits, the students' second reflection was due in mid-October and (as discussed in the first focus group) students were finding it difficult to understand what the instructor was looking for in their reflections. The instructor commented to the class that it was okay for their first reflection not to be "good" at writing reflectively yet, because most

students need to practice writing reflectively in an academic context (Lewis, 2021). Debates about how to grade reflections (percentage/letter grades, or pass/fail?) ensued but Bruce explained to students that ultimately, the best reflections are not written for the grade and that he hoped by April that students could let go of that tension and just write for themselves—that is when their reflections would really shine.

Overall, October went quickly as students navigated through managing community partner and instructor expectations in addition to their other coursework and personal obligations. By the end of the month, I observed students being tired, overwhelmed, and a bit frustrated with the CEL process and the amount of work 439A was requiring of them. I noted in my own reflections on the course experience that I hoped the students would trust the process and persevere through the challenging moments.

November 2021

November Observations

With the end of the semester rapidly approaching, the mood in the classroom on November 2nd was at a low ebb, with students being visibly tired and stressed. Bruce acknowledged this to the group and opened the discussion with a simple statement: "Undergrad sucks. Discuss." The students jumped at the opportunity to express their thoughts on their undergraduate experience. Although each week had featured an engaging class discussion about the week's assigned readings, this was the first week that an openly critical conversation about university structure and sociology as a discipline was actively encouraged. Students brought up topics such as the lack of interdisciplinary opportunities in post-secondary education, the lack of courses that interested them within the department, the schedule and flow of mid-term season being stressful, university being expensive, and the overall ideological underpinning of the university as a

business. This frank discussion seemed to rejuvenate the class and opened the door to more honest and uncensored conversations in future seminars.

Meanwhile, CEL projects were still progressing, although they felt somewhat "on the back burner" as students worked on competing priorities like their research paper and article summaries for the course. Most students had well-developed project ideas and were able to work on the project proposal due at the end of the term. Various guest speakers attended seminars to discuss their takes on community work, ethics, and decolonization of the academy.

One seminar also featured a visit from three graduate students in the sociology department so that the group could ask questions and get a taste of what graduate studies could look like. Before this visit, I heard one student remark, "Oh, today some grad students are coming in to push an agenda," a reflection of the variety of conflicting opinions on what should or should not be included in the course. Some felt that the information on grad school was helpful (as it was an option they were considering), while others felt like it was not something they signed up for nor necessarily wanted. Regardless, students were respectful and engaged with all the grad students and other guest speakers and voiced later that these presentations were helpful.

The last day of November coincided with the last seminar of 439A. This was less of a formal class, and more of a celebration: we all met in a different room than usual and enjoyed food that the instructor provided. Sharing food is a known community builder (Doonan, 2015), and was especially welcome among hungry students. Knowing this, the instructor often brought snacks to class (a balanced offering of cookies and fruit!) so food was not a novelty to the group, but this seminar included a catered feast, which added to the celebratory atmosphere and signalled to students that they could collectively exhale after the stress of the semester.

Students informally shared their project proposals with the group, which I found interesting; after many weeks of seeing students struggle to determine a project direction, it was nice to learn what ideas had been decided on. The instructor also invited a conversation about what had surprised students about the term. Most responses were positive: that the reflections were more enjoyable to write than anticipated; that it was not a lecture-heavy class; that the power balance between the instructor and students was better than in most courses; that the weekly check-ins that occurred at the beginning of each class were helping to build camaraderie with their peers; and that the "vibe" of the class was great. One negative surprise surfaced when a student bravely shared that it did not feel like their community partner was excited to work with them, when they had expected mutual regard and professionalism to come from the community partner. It was a marker of the community that had been built in the cohort that the student felt comfortable voicing this, and it was met with support and reassurance from their peers.

This end-of-term celebration was a good time to re-group and send students off for the winter break in a positive way. It continued conversations around the course experience and what was working (or not), but in a less formal structure that felt tangibly different than the weekly seminars. I, personally, ended this month on a satisfied note—pleased with the relationships I had built (with the students especially), data collected, and insights gained so far and looking forward to what January would bring.

December 2021

Student Survey #2

The second student survey was distributed after 439A concluded and received six responses. The students had now had one full semester of CEL and this survey was intended to capture the

students' perspectives at this mid-point before beginning the second half of the course. The first open-ended question asked if Sociology 439A had met or differed from the student's expectations. Responses varied widely, including expecting the class to have more students, surprise at the class being more research-focused (versus project-focused), having more class time to prepare their project proposals, and not expecting the workload of the course. Students also voiced thoughts about working with their community partners and reported expecting that relationship-building to go more smoothly. While the students found that part more challenging than expected, they reported the overall course to have gone better than they expected, which they attributed to the environment created by their peers and instructor, stimulating class discussions, and high level of support from the instructor,

Question 2 asked students what, if anything, they were enjoying about the CEL experience (focusing on the work with their community partner, not the course). Most students expressed their appreciation for being able to practice skills in a real-world setting that would build their resumés. Charlotte elaborated on what elements she was enjoying:

> I really love working with my community partner, the first semester was based around volunteerism and getting to understand the day-in, day-out experiences of the staff and volunteer team, this has really helped me prepare for this second semester as I know I feel comfortable with the team and know who I need to connect with for any questions. I feel that it would've been hard to reach this comfortability and vulnerability with my community partner had we only had one semester to achieve the relationship and accomplish the project.

Question 3 asked students what, if anything, they were finding challenging about the CEL experience. Unsurprisingly, there were many things the students found challenging: communication (particularly in the Covid-19 pandemic context, where there were more demands on non-profit organizations to support vulnerable populations, and therefore less availability for student support); navigating imposter syndrome; not wanting to let the community partner down;

time management (among other academic and personal responsibilities); and balancing timing of the course expectations and community partner needs. These challenges are consistent with what other students report as difficult about CEL experiences (Rocha Beardall, 2023; Soyer et al., 2023; Vance-Chalcraft & Jelks, 2023).

Question 4 asked, "Thinking about your relationship and work so far with your community partner, what (if anything) has gone well?" Several students commented on communication style, explaining that they appreciated the approach of communicating when needed rather than having a prescribed schedule. Clear expectations from the community partner was also seen as beneficial to the relationship, as well as having "a sense of mutual respect and understanding." One student said, "I can tell that my point person at the organization really values me and my work, and [they have] been able to mentor me in meaningful ways." Another student noted that one thing that helped their relationship with the community partner was the community partner having a clear project in mind for the student from the beginning. Finally, Charlotte gave further detail about her relationship with her community partner:

> I think it's really reassuring to feel like I know the real questions to ask the right people. I feel it's very important that at the end of this I produce a sustainable project that can be utilized by the organization for years to come and I want to be cognizant of how this will impact the current and future team and do a good job. Taking the time to build those relationships in the first semester was quintessential to my success on this project and having buy-in and support from the team that I'm creating the training manual for.

Question 5 asked again about the student's relationship with the community partner, but this time inquired about what (if anything) was challenging about the partnership. A common challenge reported was the expectation around timing: some community partners expected the student to begin their project in the first semester (which was designed to be about the project proposal, with the bulk of the project occurring in the second semester). Students also expressed worry for going over their allotted time "limit" of 40 hours per semester and then having to

juggle workload and community partner expectations. Covid-19 protocols also made relationship-building a struggle, as many community partners were requesting online meetings to protect their clients.

The survey then turned towards gauging feelings and expectations of the second semester. Question 6 asked, "What, if anything, are you concerned about going forward with Sociology 439B next semester?" Most concerns were about timelines and students' ability to finish their project. Students also echoed worries from the earlier in the year about the quality of their final deliverable not meeting the community partner's expectations or not creating a final product that was meaningful or useful for the organization. Charlotte expressed worry about her career direction, candidly sharing,

> I took this class because I have experience in both the non-profit world and in municipal government and was hoping this course would help me determine a career path and I'm concerned that I still won't have clarity on that after this semester and graduation…I would like to be pushed more this semester, whether though my work with my community partner or with myself…

Shifting to a more retrospective view, Question 7 asked students if they thought any changes should be made to the 439A syllabus/course structure (other than one particular article discussant assignment, which had already been thoroughly discussed in-class). These responses varied widely, but broadly addressed either the grading scheme or the structure of the class. Students advocated for less overall assignments with higher weighting, shortening the final research paper, having more breaks in class, and organizing a dedicated social time or happy hour at the start of the first semester to help everyone get to know each other better. Jamie also mused that they would like "more guidance/coaching on how to practice reflexivity from a sociological perspective rather than personal" because they found that distinction challenging.

Question 8 asked specifically about the assessment structure: "Do you think the assessment structure for this course is reasonable? Please explain why or why not." Sixty-seven percent of students did think the assessment structure was fair, but with some tweaks (such as increasing the weight of the research paper by 5-10% and/or reducing the number of article leads and discussants). Two students did not think the assessment structure was reasonable and expressed that the research paper was not valued highly enough for the amount of work required to do well on it (and should be weighted significantly higher). The number of overall assignments (combined with the 40 hours per semester required for their CEL project) was also seen as too much work.

Question 9 asked students how well they thought Sociology 439A had prepared them to undertake their CEL project in the second semester. Responses were split: some students felt well-prepared, while others were worried they were under-prepared. The students who felt prepared reasoned that the readings and group discussions were beneficial and that the classroom environment fostered feelings of preparedness: "I think [the course] has prepared us greatly, particularly in creating an environment where I feel like my peers and instructor want my project to succeed." Eva explained, "I think last semester has helped prepare us to be reflexive throughout this next semester, at least I'm hopeful, to be very aware of the big picture of what we're really doing which is connecting with the community." However, among those who felt unprepared, Claire worried, "I feel like we focused too much on the educational side and not enough on collaboratively discussing and planning our projects so that we all feel prepared next semester. I'm still worried I am not prepared enough." Alison elaborated, "I don't think 'prepared' is maybe the right word…I think due to the diversity of our needs/projects, the class can't fully prepare us all."

Lastly, Question 10 followed the theme of preparation and asked students, "What, if anything, would you add to the Soci 439A syllabus to help you prepared for Soci 439B (i.e., actually doing your proposed CEL project)? What, if anything, would you remove?" Students offered some concrete ideas that would help them feel more prepared, including dedicating specific class time to project planning, reviewing research strategies and methods in class, reviewing past CEL projects from the instructor's previous course iterations, and having some in-class training if relevant to the year's cohort (for example, bystander intervention training). Improvements to the course mechanics were also suggested, such as putting all assignment guidelines in the syllabus and giving students the option to submit assignments electronically.

This survey painted a picture of students who were excited but nervous to embark in earnest on their CEL project in the second semester. Fears around Covid-19 also influenced the tone of the transition between the first and second semester and created some uncertainty about how January would begin. The students reported a balanced perspective of 439A, showing that the semester had been challenging but manageable and that most students were feeling ready to jump into their project work in January.

Student Reflection #3

Students wrote their third reflection at the conclusion of the 439A semester in December. At this point, students had met their community partners, established working relationships, developed a project with and for the community partner, written a research paper about a topic relevant to their community partner, and submitted a project proposal. While I received only three reflection assignments (which I attribute to students' large workload of the end-of-term), these reflections demonstrated the diversity of experiences students were having in this course. The reflections featured themes of personal identity and its relationship to sociology as a discipline, course

experiences to date, and what it means to practice an academic discipline in non-academic spaces.

One student, Sophia, described her discontent with sociology prior to the CEL experience and her challenge in knowing how to take sociology from the classroom to the community:

> As someone who desires action…I was not sure where I was going as a sociology major solely reading and reciting words that expressed the corrupt systems in which we are trapped within… I have felt lost as to how to bridge my life from studying sociology in school to applying it to community work.

This sentiment is common in sociology students, who often feel helpless against many complex social problems (Savage, 2022). However, as Sophia worked with her community partner and saw how her sociology skills could be used to help the community, she expressed a positive turn in her approach to sociology and a newfound optimism:

> The idea of doing real, meaningful work and becoming more educated on conducting/participating in research that involves marginalized persons has lit a fire in me. I am so excited for where this is going to lead, and to where I am going to go after. I have never felt more enthused about the skills I am building and to the important work they are going to be used for.

Matthew also spent time reflecting on his proximity to sociology—not his view of the discipline, but rather his own identity as a student of sociology:

> I still find that I do not feel comfortable calling myself a sociologist…I may be able to look at the world with a certain perspective characteristic to sociologists, but I do not feel as if that is all there is to being a sociologist. Our class has shown me just how little about sociology I actually understand.

The most common sentiment shared by students was how challenging yet rewarding the course was. Matthew summarizes in his reflection:

> This class has truly been the most challenging experience of my degree. For starters interacting with an organization has been truly terrifying. My anxiety flairs before meetings and when I think about all the work I have ahead of me. Yet I have come to love these feelings. When approached with something I feel I cannot do I now get excited for the feelings of joy that come from overcoming them.

Several students expressed how the course challenged their perception of self and prompted them to think deeply about how they want to use their sociology in the world: “This school year has brought with it many challenges to who I am and who I want to be. Amongst those challenges has been the idea of what kind of student of sociology I want to be.” Matthew ended his reflection on an optimistic note about his ongoing learning:

> My understanding of sociology has more than doubled since joining our class. The yearlong class has allowed me to take my time and mature with my learning…I have changed significantly since September, and I well expect to be changed further by April. This class has played no small part in that change.

These reflections demonstrate that although CEL can be overwhelming for students, the personal growth that can occur makes it worth the challenge (Snedker et al., 2023).

With the first half of the course complete, the students, community partners, and instructor had some idea of what to expect going into the second semester (which would begin in January). Although only halfway through the CEL experience, students were already exhibiting signs of learning and growing as individuals and sociologists. The next chapter will explain the findings from Sociology 439B (i.e., the second half of the course).

Chapter V: Findings (Part 2), January to May

This chapter outlines the findings from data collected in the second half of Sociology 439 from January to May 2022. Like the previous chapter, the findings are laid out chronologically and include data from student surveys, reflection assignments, focus group, classroom observations, community partner surveys, and instructor interviews.

January 2022

Community Partner Survey #2

The second community partner survey was distributed in January and received six responses. Like the second student survey, this survey was meant to capture perspectives at the mid-point of the CEL experience. Question 1 asked, "How do you feel your student did with developing the project for your organization? Please provide any feedback you feel would be helpful." Half the respondents said their student did well and took charge to lead the project. Markers of success for these community partner-student dyads included the student taking time to explore different ideas, discuss appropriateness/relevance with staff, and doing background research to ensure their understanding of the issue. One community partner responded that the project development phase took a while to become focused, and another noted that their project development was not yet complete. A community partner with several years of CEL experience summed up lessons they have learned in what helps project development go smoothly:

> Make the project concrete and timebound; better if the project is a 'nice to have' initiative or something that we have not gotten around to, rather than a core project/funding deliverable; it is helpful if the student can take the lead/drive the project.

Question 2 asked community partners if the student project is something the organization would have done anyway (i.e., without the student's help). Four respondents shared that their organization would not have had capacity to take on the project without the student. One

organization was already planning on taking on the work that the student was participating in. Speaking broadly about all their CEL experiences, the sixth community partner responded that some projects would have been done with or without student involvement, but that "others were created to engage a student on a special initiative." Answers to this question indicate that for the majority of community partners, CEL students add significant capacity to their organization and enable projects that otherwise would not be possible or a priority (Maddrell, 2015).

Question 3 asked what was going well with the student up to that point. Many community partners spoke to the collaborative process with the student and good communication as key markers of the successful partnership that had developed. This contradicts the student survey, wherein many students commented that they found the communications with their community partner challenging (however, it is possible that those students' community partners did not respond to this survey). One community partner noted that the student was an excellent problem solver; others commented on their appreciation for the student's ability to take initiative and be proactive.

Question 4 asked about what could be improved about the student's work and/or the CEL process more generally. Two community partners felt the project was running smoothly and that there were no obvious changes to suggest. One respondent pondered whether the second semester would be enough time to complete the full project, given how long the project development took. Another community partner suggested that "perhaps a conversation with the supervisor at key times during the project to make sure we're all on the same page" would be useful. Lastly, a community partner voiced:

> Perhaps more willingness from students to learn how to accept and integrate feedback on their work. Students are used to 'doing their own thing' with few repercussions except their grade. Maybe increased mindfulness about the impacts (both positive and negative) on the organization and community members involved in the projects.

However, despite some suggestions for improvement, when asked in Question 6 if the community partner had any concerns (about the student, their work, or the CEL process) for the next four months, 83% of respondents said they had no concerns. The only concern reported by a community partner was the "ability to complete the work due to restrictions with [Covid-19] health orders," which was largely outside of anyone's control.

The final question of this survey asked community partners if they had anything else they would like the researcher to know. The common sentiment in all responses to this question was how beneficial they think CEL is, as exemplified by this community partner:

> I truly believe in all the benefits of the CEL process, this is a great experience for us as an organization to get an external and academic view of a specific project and we in return give the experience of a great organization and the work that goes on in this community, winners all around ☺ We feel very fortunate to be asked to participate.

One community partner also shared that the instructor is a key piece of ensuring a good experience for the community partners:

> I think [the instructor] deserves a lot of credit for setting a framework that is easy for partners to understand and connect with. He plans out well in advance of deliverable dates, his communication style is easy and informal—but still purposeful, and he shows that he cares about the outcomes for all the partners without being unnecessarily involved in the logistics and minor details of the project. He provides a great balance of care and competency!

It is clear from student and community partner feedback that the instructor was essential in setting the tone for the CEL experience. However, Savage (2022) notes that some success of the experience can be attributed to the individual instructor, but some focus should also on the actions said instructor took to create positive relationships (as these are what others can learn from and use in their own teaching). This community partner's response outlines replicable behaviours that other instructors could take inspiration from to establish rapport with their community partners.

In summary, the results of this survey indicate that the community partners were generally satisfied with the CEL experience mid-way through. Although they knew there was still work to do to ensure the overall success of the projects and process, they thought their student could accomplish their shared goal(s). However, with a response rate of 50%, it is possible that only the community partners with good or great student experiences responded to the survey.

Instructor Interview #2

In the second interview with the instructor, Bruce, we discussed both how the first semester had gone and his expectations for the second semester. We began by reflecting on what had gone well in 439A. Top of mind for Bruce was how the classroom community had developed, and how he "did start to see students come out of their shell a little bit." There was one tipping point that made a big impression on the students and instructor:

> When Isabelle [who is white-passing] talked about her family dynamic [and about how] she has visibly Black members of the family…a few students came up to her afterwards [and said], 'Thank you for saying that.' And I think her being vulnerable…I kind of sensed we started to have a bit of a different environment after that.

This moment of courage from Isabelle not only gave the class a better understanding of Isabelle's perspective on the world, but also—whether consciously or subconsciously—moved the group to a new level of cohesion as they realized this was a safe space to share their own personal sociology.

However, despite the relationship-building within the classroom exceeding expectations, the relationships being built with the community partners were not consistently developing as the students hoped. I asked Bruce to explain his internal reaction to the reports from some students that their first meeting/site visit with their community partners had been a let-down:

> I'm disappointed…There's enough [students] in that situation that forces me to think about my expectations of the community partners…I'm starting to believe [that in their minds] they're mentoring our students as a service to UVic, not as an opportunity to do something they need done. And I think that's just a difficult disconnect from the course.

This disconnect between course expectations and intent could be attributed to several factors: first, the community partner's level of preparation and experience; second, the switch to two semesters requiring more commitment from community partners; third, the impact of Covid-19 on non-profit organizations (i.e., more clients seeking services, budget cuts, staff shortages, and more resources required to operate safely). These factors are a lot for one instructor to manage on top of the students who may be affected by non-responsive community partners. Bruce worried, "I'm still struggling with students in February whose community partners have not helped them develop a project and there's probably three where I'm going to have to step in, and I just don't know how I could have headed that off earlier" despite putting significant effort into communicating expectations and planning with community partners prior to the course beginning.

Turning our attention back to the students, I inquired about whether the quality of reflections had increased since our first interview in September. Overall, the instructor confided that he was still waiting for students to dig a little deeper: "Their reflections seem quite surface level…and I don't know what that's from because I think there are some very capable students in that room." Although "the quality has not been as strong as previous years" of delivering the course, Bruce was hopeful that by the end of 439B, "maybe it'll just pop" and students will reflect more deeply on their CEL experience, and even retrospectively reflect on their degree as a whole.

Now at the halfway point of the CEL experience, we also discussed how realistic the instructor felt the students' projects were: "If I had to generalize, I think the projects are largely

doable and reasonable. [But] surely given eight months, we should be further ahead than we are." At this point, the course had experienced some attrition and enrollment had changed from 15 in September to now having 11 students enrolled. Of the 11 projects, the majority were going well (i.e., projects progressing at a pace where they would be done by the end of the course and sufficient communications between the student and community partner to ensure progress), but Bruce acknowledged that several would require his intervention to get back on track with the community partner. One thing he was clear on, though, was that this would not negatively affect a student's final course grade: "[Students] shouldn't be fearful of not getting a grade for things they can't control." This empathetic approach was felt and appreciated by students (Wynn et al., 2023), as I would learn later in my data collection.

On the bright side, when I asked Bruce if he thought the students were learning sociology in the course, he said,

> I do, I absolutely do, and why I would say that is: even when they're not speaking up, I can watch their eyes. The [assigned] article is a start for discussion, but when they start to talk about what decolonization means and what sociology has done, should be doing, what the department is like, what you want to do after graduation, why they have such tension with their family and their background, and [that student] talking about her parents. That's all sociology…It may not be learning exactly what Gans meant, but I don't care, right? I'm not testing them on Gans.

He went on to explain,

> [The students] are not benefitting from learning sociology as much by leaving campus than in other years and talking to partners and seeing and helping clients—that's less significant than in previous [deliveries of the course]…But they're learning a different type of sociology than they had in the past.

Ultimately, the CEL pedagogy is reproducible, but the outcomes and *type* of sociology students learn will vary depending on the circumstances of the year (Savage, 2022).

We spoke candidly about what Bruce was looking forward to in the second semester. "I'm really hoping that we gain some momentum over the next five to six weeks…Hopefully

their projects are progressing. They're thinking about graduation. They're thinking about resumés. What's life going to be like?" His answer hints at the shift in 439B's focus, where discussions of community engagement and public sociology are supplemented with conversations about what is to come for students after they graduate. Visits from career counsellors, academic activists, and more discussions of graduate school possibilities punctuate the term as students consider their post-graduation options. This part of the course fills a gap in the department, which does not offer a dedicated career preparation course, despite studies demonstrating their usefulness for senior students (Senter, 2020; Spalter-Roth et al., 2010; Virnoche, 2023)

Career preparation aside, there was a lot to do for students' projects between the time of the interview and the end of the term. Bruce shared that the thing he was most worried about for 439B was the CEL projects, particularly for those students who experienced some turbulence with their community partners throughout the experience. He worried about students "finishing [the project] and putting a bow on it and feeling good that they've done something of value, not something that's going to be just put on the shelf." And given that some community partners had been less engaged than the students and instructor hoped, the instructor shared, "Do I need to rethink: are we really a service to the community partner? Do we help them more than we cost them?"

Bruce was not going to make decisions about potential course changes until understanding the final outcomes of the year. He expressed being "a little bit worried, or reflective about what [he] can meaningfully adjust for next year" to help address some of the challenges that this year produced. One possibility he was considering at the time of this interview was outlining specific types of projects sociology students were equipped to do and

offering community partners this "menu" to choose from (if they had no specific project in mind when meeting with their student for the first time). The constant tension between offering guidance without confinement, structure without the loss of creativity, and support without micromanagement weighed heavily on the instructor at this mid-way point in the CEL experience.

January Observations

In January, the class reconvened in an online setting due to an uptick in Covid-19 cases that prompted provincial health orders and subsequent university protocols to restrict in-person gatherings. The first two seminars of 439B were, therefore, held online via Zoom. We started with a mental health check-in. The main frustration shared by all students was reverting to online classes, which was a troubling reminder of the last two years' worth of challenges that the pandemic had created.

In addition to disappointment about returning to online classes, students were also struggling to understand how to achieve a high grade on their final CEL project deliverable. This was evidently a challenge for the instructor to address beyond the general advice of demonstrating quality and effort, as the students' projects were taking many forms that a single rubric could not capture. I observed this to be the first time the reality was setting in for students that they were going to be graded on whatever they could produce by the end of this semester: the final deliverable was now more than just a distant, hypothetical obligation.

Despite this slight air of panic, as the month progressed, some students still seemed stagnant in their work. The instructor asked each student to consider two things that they would do in the next two weeks to help advance their project. For some students, this was a matter of accountability to themselves; for example, *actually* drafting an outline of their report instead of

just thinking about it. For others, it was scheduling a meeting with their community partner to ensure both parties were on the same page. It was also starting to become clear to me which projects were going to be finished as planned and which partnerships were falling apart and needed instructor intervention. I noted in my observations being particularly impressed by Charlotte—whose project had been progressing smoothly, from what I could tell—who discussed making a concerted effort to frontload as much project work as she could, because she knew that the last six weeks of the term would be demanding. She also had weekly meetings set up with her community partner to ensure the project could be completed and that her 40-hour commitment would not be exceeded.

The topic of this 40-hour commitment did not come up in class discussions regularly, but I was aware that students were always conscious of keeping their commitment to their projects in balance with their other school and life obligations. Some students expressed being concerned that they would "go over" their allotted hours for the term, but were fearful about letting down their community partner if they had to say no to any requests. This, paired with the continuing desire to do meaningful work for the community, was a source of internal conflict for some students.

Cumulatively, January was a month of uncertainties: students' worries about completing their projects, their final grades, the potential effects of provincial pandemic health orders, and political rumblings across Canada and the world in the midst of the Russia-Ukraine war and civil unrest from the trucker protests in Ottawa. However, within this uncertainty, I observed one moment that I think made a difference for the group. In any cohort, there are students more comfortable speaking up and sharing, and students who are quiet, more reserved, and less likely to speak unless directly addressed. In the last seminar in January, in a larger discussion prompted

by that week's readings, one quiet student, Ava, surprised the class by sharing, "Going to university taught me that I *can* do hard things." As the instructor later discussed with me, Ava did not speak often, but when she did, the group paid close attention: this small moment made an impact and gave a sliver of light to an otherwise difficult month.

February 2022

Student Reflection #4

In February, I received five reflection assignments from students. This reflection prompted students to write about what the CEL experience taught them about themselves and their sociology. It is challenging to synthesize students' responses to this prompt into concise themes, as each student had deep and personal contributions and I want to recognize that. However, the majority of students wrote about four prominent themes that I will explore: their growing confidence in themselves; the influence of the supportive classroom environment; their academic journey through sociology; and being comfortable claiming the identity of being a sociologist.

Students reflected on the many ways in which the CEL experience was helping them become more confident in their own knowledge, skills, and ability to apply a sociological lens to a variety of contexts. Sophia shared,

> There has been real growth in me in this course so far, not only with hands-on attempts to eliminate imposter syndrome and have faith in my abilities…but with the opportunity to critique and assess sociological pedagogy as a tool of social justice.

Brooklyn explained their own similar revelations over the last several months:

> On a personal level, this course has helped me find my voice. Most significantly…this course has helped me realize that I am not merely a number on a paper, but rather a budding sociologist with my own direction, purpose and voice. This course, along with the ongoing encouragement from Bruce, has helped me realize that *I* am the author, the driver, the creator of my own work, not the theory.

In addition, a student (who was often quiet in class discussions) wrote, "This experience has allowed me to grow into a small amount of confidence that I did not think I possessed before, and it has allowed me to find a bit of my voice." These quotes demonstrate that not only did the students grow in confidence (which I witnessed), but that they also recognized that in themselves.

Part of this increased confidence was fostered by the supportive classroom environment. Sophia shared:

> I am so appreciative of our class discussions. It has been a validation of what I and my peers know, and gives the feeling that we *are* sociologists talking as sociologists do (if only we had cigars and sat around a fireplace)!…I love the feeling of going through this experience with my classmates, as we have a community of our own sharing the nerves, imposter syndrome, and interest in engaging in this process.

Eva echoed this, stating that "the environment in the classroom has exceeded my expectations. I did not expect for the class to be as engaging and conversational as it is." However, despite the positive classroom dynamic, Isabelle pondered why it was not the answer to her university woes:

> Despite the challenges that I have faced while working with [the community partner], I have still found more community in our classroom than I have had throughout the entirety of my degree. [The instructor] is only the second professor that has ever learned my name. So if my longing for community in a University setting has finally been fulfilled, why do I still feel so detached from my degree?

Many students reflected on their academic journey through university, their view of sociology as a discipline, and the ebbs and flows of alternately appreciating and feeling disdain for sociology. Students reckoned with their difficulty in seeing themselves reflected in the discipline. Isabelle wrote:

> One thing about this CEL experience that has confused me is 'my sociology'. I find it difficult to write, but there have been multiple times that I have come home from class and wondered if sociology is for me… Writing this reflection has shown me that I am afraid that I do not 'fit in' [with] sociology.

However, she goes on to recognize that this ability to reflect is part of what defines her as a sociologist:

> I began [this reflection by] writing and reflecting on how my CEL experience has shown me the ways in which sociology may not be for me, and then concluded that by reflecting on how I have been shaped by environment and experiences that I am, in fact, a sociologist. Oh the irony.

Sophia reflected on a similar topic:

> I think as my education through sociology has bloomed, it has grown critical of sociology itself, I find the analysis to be stagnant, immaterial, through a biased perspective of educated white men and women who observe oppressive systems through which they haven't endured the deepest marks. CEL, in both the project element and the class readings and discussions has illuminated how wrong I have been, AND how my cynical observations of sociological scholars were not solely my own. Indeed there is a space for critique, which is what sociology is all about.

These musings point to the deep reflection students engaged in at this point in the CEL experience. Although the instructor purposefully encourages a healthy (and sometimes critical) discussion of sociology as a discipline, it is clear that students were thinking about this topic independently and drawing useful conclusions about what studying sociology can mean. Sophia summarized it well in relation to CEL: "Sociology can mean whatever we wish it to mean, as long as the sociological lens is operated. This sentiment is increasingly growing on me, and [serves as] a reminder that sociology and community were meant to work together."

The final element that was common amongst students was reflections on being a sociologist. Isabelle explored her own doubts about using this term to describe herself and recognized that this label might be restrictive:

> In my head a sociologist is someone who has had the privilege of studying the everyday oppressions of people without having to endure the lived experiences of them. In a way, I feel as though I am separating myself even further from my community and family by pursuing a degree and considering grad school. I think that this reflective piece is revealing the counter productiveness of dwelling on everything about 'sociology' that I am not, rather than allowing myself to blossom into the sociologist that I can be.

Brooklyn explained how the CEL experience was helping them feel comfortable in claiming the identity of a sociologist:

> The CEL experience has helped me feel valued and seen in the work I do. As many students do, I used to often struggle with imposter syndrome and feeling like I wasn't educated, well-read or experienced enough to "do" sociology. This course has squashed that fear by helping me recognize that, whether I like it or not, I have crossed the threshold of the sociological perspective from which there is no return. It has clicked into place and cannot be turned off, no matter my efforts or worries. I guess, then, I'm a sociologist whether I feel like one or not.

In summary, these reflections proved the students' increased self-awareness as a result of the course (Savage, 2022). Although the course was still two months away from concluding, students were already recognizing their own growth and how the CEL experience was shaping their identity and relationship to sociology. Isabelle says it well:

> In two semesters this class is showing me, mainly through interactions with my classmates, that there is no 'sociologist'. Everyone's sociologies are unique, and are shaped by their own experiences and beliefs. My classmates and Bruce have pushed me to reconsider what it means to do sociology, and perhaps more importantly, what it means to be a sociologist.

February Observations

February always comes with some relief for students because of the week-long Reading Break that falls at the end of the month. Despite having this to look forward to, at the start of the month, the students and instructor both were in the doldrums due to current world events like the trucker protests in Ottawa and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The heaviness of these larger issues overshadowed the first half of the month, and resurfaced what is often perceived as a problem for sociology education: there are so many large problems in the world, and how can one student affect any change (Rocha Beardall, 2023; Savage, 2022)?

Though at a low ebb, the students persisted. Claire reported being nervous for her first interview for her community partner, but that it went as she had hoped (and the whole class

cheered for her). Other students reported concerns about a lack of communication from their community partners, which was preventing them from moving forward with their projects. Bruce challenged those students to be proactive and troubleshoot on their own: "What can you do for the community partner to make it easier for them? How can you make it easy for them to say 'yes'?" This reframing seemed to help students.

Isabelle, who had experienced consistent problems with lack of engagement from her community partner from the start, made the decision with the instructor that it was time to consider the partnership over and move on. With Bruce's support, she turned her attention to creating a presentation about the cohort's projects for an initiative with UVic's Community-Engaged Learning Office. Throughout the disintegration of the partnership, I noted in my observations being continually impressed with Isabelle's approach. I reflected on how she demonstrated maturity and grace in bringing the project to a close, and owned her part in why the partnership did not work; namely, she reflected after that she should have been more forthcoming on what she had to offer the community partner, and advocated more for herself. One thing she said about her circumstance that stood out to me was that she wished she could have said to her community partner, "I'm worth your time." Tellingly, Isabelle told me that throughout it all, she never once was concerned for her grades—she felt secure enough in the course structure and her knowledge of Bruce's way of handling problems to know that she could still do well in the course, even if changing direction unexpectedly was needed. Many students in her position would conceivably have withdrawn from the course, but she described how the classroom dynamic and her peers were a big contributor in her continued participation. Her maturity was further demonstrated when she intimated that she actually appreciated the adversity she faced in her CEL journey, because that was teaching her just as much or more than if her

experience had gone to plan. This reflection demonstrates that projects *not* going well is just as instructive as projects that go to plan, if not more (Ross & Call-Cummings, 2020).

While Isabelle's circumstances were changing, the topic came up in class of building trust with community partners, and the extent to which a trusting relationship could make or break a partnership. When asked how they established trust with their community partners, answers included trying to be open, listening actively, explaining motivations behind actions or choices, and getting buy-in and support from the community partner's on-the-ground team. A key feature of this conversation was acknowledging that trust-building has to go both ways: the community partner also has to want to build trust with the student. This is supported by Greenberg et al. (2020) who argue that mutual trust between students and community partners is central to successful collaboration.

In the final seminar before Reading Break, six of eight students in attendance reported that their projects were progressing well: communications with their community partners were smooth and they anticipated being able to complete their CEL project on time. The remaining two expressed that they were having some communication challenges with their community partners. Although this is also traditionally the start of a busy time in the semester for students due to upcoming midterms, the group seemed collectively less stressed and less fatigued than they had at the same point in the first term. February ended on a higher note than it began.

March 2022

Student Focus Group #2

In March, the second student focus group took place with seven participants. At this point in the course, the cohort had been together for seven months and were in the final stages of implementing their CEL projects. It was also the second semester's midterm season, meaning

that most students were also writing papers and exams for their other classes in addition to trying to complete their CEL project. I began this focus group by taking an informal tally: I asked each student to consider how their CEL project was going and rate their experience out of 10 and explain why. Answers ranged from 7 to 10, with the average being 8.6. Brooklyn and Isabelle both rated their experience a 10 and explained that although they had faced a lot of adversity in dealing with their community partner throughout the course, they felt they had handled it as well as they could have and done what they could to make the best of some difficult situations. Brooklyn shared, "I'm really proud of myself for how I chose to solve the problem." Ava and Emma had rated their experience as a seven and expressed that although they felt their projects were going fairly smoothly and "looked good on paper," there was still a lot of work left to do and they worried about getting everything done in time. The three students who rated their experience as an eight or nine felt that their projects were progressing well, but that minor improvements could have been made in terms of their communications with the community partner or their own time management.

The remainder of the focus group was spent discussing how the CEL experience was impacting students' understanding of sociology, how the classroom dynamic had influenced students' identity, and their greater reflections about their learning journeys. Classroom dynamics and the discussions that occurred in weekly seminars—like in the first focus group—persisted as an important component of the students' experiences. Sophia shared, "The class discussions that we have had have been the most validating experience of being a sociology student I think I've had…It feels really unique [compared to group discussions in other courses]." She appreciated the conversations had with classmates because she knew her peers

would understand the sociological context her ideas were grounded in. However, Emma voiced her perspective on enjoying the discussions, but with some critical reflection:

> Since we all have a fairly similar educational background, we can kind of ignore some other perspectives sometimes…We could have used our sociology [during discussions] to step outside of our own position…I think [our class discussions] really showed me that I, as a sociologist—the times I need to be most reflexive are the times when I'm most sure that I'm right. Especially in the times when I'm with other people who think I'm right too. And I think that is one of the things about these discussions that has been amazing…looking back on them has taught me a lot of things that weren't officially examined…How do I behave in a class where I think I'm right?

She later went on to reflect, "The classes have been impactful for how I think about sociology internally and how it impacts the words I say, why I say them, and the places that I go."

The linkage between classroom discussions and personal growth resonated for other students, too. Many students reported regularly reflecting on the course and themselves outside of class. Charlotte explained,

> This [experience] just sets us up for lifelong examining of ourselves—I think that's a huge takeaway. It's been eight months and it's sometimes slower than others, but it's sort of those slower times where you're actually reflecting on yourself, where you're at, and you can see how far you've actually come.

This was echoed by Sophia who had learned to have more patience with herself:

> I think with that slowing down process, too, there is a kind of gentleness and patience that I personally have developed within myself because I've always held myself to the standard where I've always got to be in the know…having that gentleness in going forward in understanding that we're all learning is really what I've taken away, too.

Like the findings of Savage (2022) and Snedker et al. (2023) who report that CEL helped their students better understand the variance in how sociology can be applied, other students commented on how the course helped them understand how sociology can be used outside of the academy and pay attention to different types of sociology at work in the community. Seeing that sociology is not confined to academic spaces helped students to feel less isolated and more hopeful for how they could "use" their degree after graduation.

Students' CEL projects were also impactful on their understanding of sociology. Sophia summarized, "It's like the project itself is…like a physical manifestation of us navigating the social world and the class is a place where we can dissect it." The project, although challenging for students, was a tangible outcome that demonstrated to students that they were capable of working as sociologists—something many sociology students question (Virnoche, 2023). Many students also recognized, though, that they had more learning to do. Brooklyn commented:

> My project has helped me realize that we're all in a constant state of becoming and a constant state of learning and transforming. And it's not just like big transformations, it's also just little moments and little conversations and interactions. And I've come to value those and relationships way more highly than I did eight months ago and I don't think that I would be the same sociologist without that.

Despite how impactful the project and CEL experience were, the students always returned to the classroom environment and the relationships with their peers as the most meaningful outcome of the course. Ava stated:

> It feels like we're becoming sociologists in this class and I think that that mutual journey…couldn't have been done without each other… The discussions and the camaraderie is what transformed, at least for me, it transformed my sociology and showed me that sociology is not done staring at a textbook in your bedroom late at night. It's in community, it's in working together.

This focus group left me feeling so proud of these students, many of whom had worked their way through a busy year and sometimes stressful circumstances and *all* of whom had committed thoroughly to completing the course to the best of their abilities. At this point, however, there were still three weeks of seminars left in the term and, for many, lots to do before their projects would be complete.

March Observations

March's seminars brought a flurry of activity: students navigating the final stages of their CEL projects, balancing other course workloads, and for some, wading through uncharted territory of

deciding what to do after they graduated in June. This weighed heavily on Emma in particular, who was very goal-oriented and practical in her approach to the transition from being a full-time student to (hopefully) landing a full-time job as soon as she could. Key among her strategy for job applications was using her CEL experience to demonstrate the hard skills she had learned during her undergraduate degree. After class one week late in March, she shared with me that she had interviewed for a job with one of the community partners of Sociology 439 (although not the one she was working with for the course). Convinced she would not be successful, Emma was already brainstorming other places she could look for work. I carefully suggested to her not to discount her abilities, trust in herself, and—perhaps most importantly—to not assume anything until she heard one way or the other. A few weeks later I would learn that not only had she had landed the job, but that two of her classmates had also received job offers from community partners, and Brooklyn had been hired by UVic's Community-Engaged Learning Office. This confirmed for me that CEL is impactful not only practically for students' skill and knowledge development, but hopefully also for their confidence in their abilities and value to an employer (even if it took a while for this part to take hold).

Job searches and other courses' commitments aside, March also brought with it the Sociological Artefact assignment. This was a new assignment the instructor was trialling in which students would pick an artefact of any sort, do a write-up of why it held sociological significance to them, and then bring it to class to present to the group. When the assignment was announced in January via the 439B syllabus, the group had many questions about it. The instructor's solution was to select and present his own sociological artefact so that students could better understand what he had in mind. On March 8, Bruce presented his artefact: a book from C. Wright Mills' (a personal hero of sorts, to the instructor) personal library, purchased for the

instructor by one of his best friends who he was not able to see often anymore. He explained that this book represented many things to him, including his friend's dedication and deep understanding of him, and as the instructor gave his presentation, he was visibly emotional. The class was quiet as he got a little choked up. In this moment, it was clear that while it was a risk for the instructor to share such a vulnerable piece of himself with the class, the communal trust was there and had allowed for this mutual experience. I do not think I have ever witnessed such a moving moment in a classroom setting.

This paved the way for some tremendously impactful artefact presentations from students. Although Bruce did not specifically ask the students to share highly emotional or personal artefacts, most did anyway. Isabelle's artefact was a soccer ball, which signified her relationship with her father. Ava shared a photo of her and her brothers and talked about the gender expectations placed upon her as a child. In a particularly personal presentation, Charlotte shared a family photo and explained her family's unspoken history, which she only recently came to understand was not acknowledged because her grandparent was Indigenous and persecuted because of it. Every artefact presentation came with deeply reflective sociological themes, ranging from race to gender, religion and class, and others. Every presentation was treated with trust and respect, including the presentation wherein the student brought their father's RCMP badge and explained their lifelong sense of pride in having a policeman for a parent. While some students were visibly uncomfortable with this due to the history of the police's actions against marginalized communities, it was a marker of the community that had been built in the class that the students listened attentively and asked thoughtful questions to try to better understand this student's perspective. At the end of the class, I overheard one student remark to the others, "That was like a group therapy session!"

March 29th marked the last seminar of 439B and of the course overall, and therefore the end of my in-class observations. Despite being visibly exhausted and stressed with end-of-term commitments, the students were in it until the end: happy to be there, sad to see the classroom community come to a close, and eager to finish their CEL projects and deliver them to their community partners.

April 2022

Student Reflection #5

In this fifth and final reflection students were required to write for the course, students had the opportunity to put the course and their sociology degree into context and explore "what it all meant." I received only two reflections from students in this round (which I attribute largely to it being a chaotic end-of-term for many students). One noticeable commonality with both reflections is how the students wrote directly to Bruce and addressed him by name. For example, Brooklyn wrote about their experience in their introductory sociology course (also taught by Bruce) and the gateway it provided to their interest in sociology: "The way that you, Bruce, walked about the lecture hall stage with passion lit a spark and passion in me, too, and I was determined to get to a place where it all made sense, or at least I had the ability to work through it." Brooklyn also reflected extensively on their journey through their sociology degree, concluding that despite applying for UVic as a general social sciences student, after learning more about sociology in the introductory course, there was a greater magnetism pulling them towards sociology: "My fate was sealed – no more messing around with elementary school education, psychology, or linguistics. I was meant to use sociology, I just didn't know I could be a sociologist."

Both students also remarked on how difficult this reflection was to write. Approaching a large life event like finishing one's undergraduate degree and being challenged to reflect on the swathe of time and experiences that have led to being awarded that parchment is emotional. Brooklyn describes this:

> When I try to think back to the start of my degree and ponder how I've changed over the course of my undergraduate degree, I am both overwhelmed and unsure. I can feel and see all the changes that have occurred in myself, but can't find the words to express them. Five years doesn't sound like that long until you sit back and try to tease it apart for formative moments.

However, despite how difficult this reflection was for students, both students offered poignant summaries of their experience in the course and the personal growth that they noticed in themselves. Charlotte wrote:

> Looking back at the beginning of September…I was making excuses for why I was an imposter, but the best way to do something is to just do it and find yourself along the way. The experience and growth I've felt over these two semesters is something that humbles me, and I hold with gratitude. I feel like this experience is one that I will cherish and protect and continue to recall with increasing fondness… So here I am, allowing myself to close these final moments in our community-engaged course, knowing that I have the tools necessary to continue a life-long exploration of community-oriented work and finetuning of my sociological lenses. As someone who entered this course seeking community and connection, I am grateful to say that I found it in the feeling of safety and curiosity I felt on Tuesday afternoons, and with the group of ten individuals I now call friends.

Brooklyn shared:

> Through community engagement with treasured peers, incredible partners, and a phenomenal mentor and leader, this classroom laid out the possibilities of sociology and solidified my place within it. I have really 'come into myself' this last year, and I don't think that would be the case without this course. I have become more confident, more critical and more reflective…making me a better sociologist in the process… I think this course helped me understand not only what sociology is, but what it can be. It has helped me recognize the diversity of people and work going on within the faculty, and create a wide-open future in sociology that I feel confident placing myself in.

Together, these two reflections highlight the changes students have noticed in themselves and their realizations about what this can mean for their futures. These thoughts, bravely shared with

the instructor and me, demonstrate the power of CEL and a supportive classroom environment. However, perhaps more than anything, the reflections show what valuable insights students come to when challenged to dig deep and make their experiences meaningful for themselves (Kaufman, 2013).

May 2022

Student Survey #3

The third student survey, which received six responses, was important to ask students to think retrospectively about the entire 8-month CEL experience. Unlike most of the other student data collection methods, surveys were anonymous and students could share their uninhibited feelings about the course. The survey opened with a summary question: "Given your entire course experience from September 2021 to April 2022, what were the best things about Sociology 439?" Overwhelmingly, the most common response was the community built in the classroom, as explained by Alison: "Definitely the community, and with that, the feeling of not being alone in a big project that feels a lot more scary when you are facing it. Having a community in the classroom made it feel easier to engage in community elsewhere." Emma echoed this by saying, "The class gave me so much. I think the most important one was the connections I gained to my classmates, Alexandra and Bruce." Furthermore, Eva reported that the best thing about Sociology 439 was "finding community in the classroom! It was such a pleasure to experience such tight-knit relationships with every person in our class – I have never experienced that before." These quotes echo Greenberg et al.'s (2020) finding that CEL courses enable students to develop peer relationships further than in traditional course settings, as well as Virnoche's (2023) assertion that instructor mentorship is vital for developing the classroom community.

Other pieces of the course experience students commented on included motivation to work harder on course assignments, skills development (such as time management, people/communication skills, and research methods), and "the ability to discuss the nuances of being an academic engaging with community spaces with people who are marginalized." All of these "best things" about the course are supported in the literature as commonly appreciated aspects of CEL courses (Greenberg et al., 2020; Lake et al., 2021; Savage, 2022; Mitchell, 2008; Warren, 2012).

Question 2 asked, "What, if anything, was challenging about Sociology 439" in terms of the whole 8-month experience. Students reported many challenges: navigating relationships with the community partner, working primarily online with the community partner due to the Covid-19 pandemic, timelines and workload, and having to navigate their own project and learn new skills on the fly. Jamie reported that they felt most challenged by "navigating placements/the trickiness found in non-profit work (lack of funding, time, and capacity)." These challenges—whether the students recognized it at the time or not—aided in preparing for life post-graduation and dealing with challenges in the workplace (Soyer et al., 2023). However, Isabelle had an optimistic view of the primary challenge she experienced: "For me, the biggest challenge was trusting myself and my abilities. As the course went on, I felt increasingly equipped with the knowledge and trust in myself that was given through course content, and the encouragement from Bruce and my classmates."

The third question asked students what (if anything) they thought could be added to Sociology 439 that would have helped them to complete their project. Several students suggested allowing students to work in pairs or groups to complete projects; one person noted that this would help to "confirm that you aren't the problem" when working with a community partner.

Working in groups is common in CEL and can be beneficial to students and community partners but can also contribute to challenging circumstances if group members have interpersonal conflict or do not contribute equally (Rocha Beardall, 2023). Claire remarked that examples of past CEL projects would be beneficial, as they "felt limited by [their] own ideas of what could be completed." Students also wished to have more face-to-face communication with their community partner and clearer project guidelines (although recognizing that this is challenging due to the diversity of projects across the cohort).

Question 4 asked, "To what extent has your CEL experience helped you better understand sociology, if at all?" Students reported developing a better understanding of how sociology exists in practice outside of the classroom, having seen it demonstrated in social justice and community work. The CEL experience also helped students develop their own "sociologies": "I've never heard so many of my peers share their sociologies in discussion, which in turn helped me discover things about my own that I otherwise wouldn't have." Jamie echoed this by explaining they now see "how [sociology] is present in anything and everything" and that the CEL experience helped to increase their "ability to self-reflect on personal and social experiences." Happily, Alison noted that it "showed [her] that there are job opportunities in the field of sociology." These findings build on others' research which establishes CEL as a useful tool for deepening students' understanding of sociology (Greenberg et al., 2020; Lake et al., 2021; Savage, 2022).

Question 5 asked students, "Do you feel more prepared for post-graduation because of your CEL experience? Why or why not?" All students who answered this survey answered yes. Some simply indicated that this was due to now having lived experience working in the field, while others explained in more detail: "I feel more prepared because I have valuable work

experience to boost my resume, lasting connections with peers and organizations that offer new opportunities, and literacy around the type of work I want to do after graduation." Emma commented on being more confident in their own abilities, feeling better prepared to establish a working relationship with a future boss, and "how wonderful it is to have a community in your workplace." Finally, Jamie shared this response on feeling more prepared for life post-graduation:

> I did not trust my ability and skillsets, truly, until this course. The trust from Bruce, the process of working with organizations, and the classroom discussions demonstrated how everyone emerging from their degrees have different interests and skills that they are bringing to their future. Before this class I was concerned that I was the same as everyone coming from this degree, but CEL has illuminated the unique skillsets and capacities I bring to the table that are particular to me! I trust myself more now.

Question 6 asked if the instructor could include anything else in Sociology 439 to help students prepare for careers and/or life after graduation. Four students answered no, indicating that they thought what already existed in the course was sufficient. Two students commented that a useful addition could be a "how-to" session for explaining the CEL experience on a resumé. Virnoche (2023) suggests that instructors aid students in learning how to identify transferable skills, articulating their training, and describing their CEL experiences to potential employers, because students commonly are unsure of how to explain the breadth and depth of their learning in less traditional courses.

The final question of this survey asked students, "What are your key takeaways (good and/or bad) from this CEL experience?" Responses to this question will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

Community Partner Survey #3

The third and final survey of community partners was distributed once the CEL experience was complete: the community partners had the final deliverable from the student and had concluded working together in the CEL capacity. This survey returned the lowest response rate with four respondents. Question 1 asked, "Were you satisfied with the work the student did for your organization? Why or why not?" 100% of community partners answered that yes, they were satisfied. One elaborated: "She did a great report that I have already used to provide to others about the services that we provide." Another said, "Absolutely, the student was very professional and assisted us in delivering research that we will use in the future." Another student "exceeded all [the community partner's] expectations," and the final respondent explained that "the student was very organized and self-directed which was very helpful."

Question 2 asked what the student did well. Responses included the final deliverable, careful listening, taking initiative, professional communication, reliability, meeting deadlines, organization, thoughtful planning, being self-aware, and offering creative ideas. One community partner kindly said, "Without the student's help it would have been very challenging to complete this project. Additionally, they were very professional and lovely to work with."

When asked in the third question what the student could have improved upon, half the respondents had no suggestions. One community partner answered that "the report was done at the last minute so there was little opportunity for discussion or how we can continue to do the work that she did." Another community partner spoke about project scope and feasibility: "This is with practice—but I would suggest narrowing down the project more to make the research manageable. This narrowing was done after a few tries and meetings—but we got there!"

Question 4 asked the community partner to summarize the year with the student. One community partner concisely said: “Inspiring.” Others voiced appreciating the collaboration, consideration, and willingness of the student to learn. Another community partner explained:

> Really enjoyed having the sociology students help with this project. The student helped us with evaluating a program, making recommendations for improvements and developing new training and support resources. Since implementing the changes the program has been getting amazing feedback from staff, clients, and volunteers. The final product was exactly what we had hoped for and the experience working with the student was positive. Very happy to report that they have been hired for a paid staff role this summer.

In Question 5, the community partner was asked to summarize the year working with the instructor. Responses were positive and demonstrated community partners’ appreciation for the instructor’s support and clear and timely communication. In summary, the instructor “was very proactive and responsive to supporting both the student and the organization. He was respectful of all of our needs and capacities to support and deliver the project in a good way.”

Like in the third student survey, the final question asked community partners about their main takeaways (good and/or bad) from participating in the CEL experience. These will be addressed alongside students’ and the instructor’s key takeaways at the end of this chapter.

Instructor Interview #3

The third interview presented an opportunity to reflect on the instructor’s whole Sociology 439 experience, which stretched out longer than the experience of the students or community partners due to the amount of time and energy he typically spends planning the course and laying the groundwork for all parties. Like the second interview, we began by discussing what had gone well (or not) in the term. The structure of the second semester felt better for Bruce, who acknowledged that the timing was better and the assignment schedule was less “busy.” Additionally, the familiarity within the cohort was remarkable: “The students were more

comfortable with each other and me… I think the best thing that happened was in that room, them sharing their personal stories. I think that was the success of the term for sure for me."

However, one thing Bruce wanted to improve on in future deliveries is vetting the community partners for the course. The diversity of community partner investment was troubling, and the instructor voiced that "this was obviously busywork for [the community partners who were not as committed] that they either felt obligated to do…but they never really took it as an opportunity to work closely with a fourth-year student." At the other end of the spectrum, Bruce was grateful that some community partners "gave so much support and validation and direction" to students. Although he wished this disparity was not so wide, it is a valuable teaching tool:

> The community partners that are particularly difficult to work with, or aren't responsive, is also a lesson that I think students need to learn… Students have told me that they do value having that experience in the safety of a course…I think I need to message better/earlier with students that there are going to be a diversity of experiences and I'm going to do what I can, but it's not going to go smoothly for everyone.

One way of managing adversity for students is recognizing when a project is not on a good trajectory. Bruce acknowledged that going forward, he would try to trust his intuition more and help a student determine a new path forward (with or without the community partner) if he knows things are "starting to go south."

Fortunately, there were many positive aspects of the course that outshone the more difficult ones. I asked Bruce to reflect on his favourite parts of the 439 experience:

> It was really just a gift to be able to spend those [eight months] with the same group of students over that common experience. Just being able to remember that the conversations we had in September were very different than the ones we had in April, and they were so much more confident in their sociology at the end… That's what I look back on, that those eight months led to better sociologists, for people that now say they're sociologists. That's exceptional…My takeaway is that *this works.*

As identified by both the students and the instructor, the community in the classroom had a big impact on helping students develop their sociology. Perhaps—at least in this delivery—the class dynamic was the most influential factor in the CEL experience successfully "working." Bruce commented on this not just being a by-product of this particular group of students:

> I think there always will flourish a feeling of community in that course because all those students are looking for it… I provide the oxygen and…I think I'm pretty good at allowing them to talk, but I think they're looking for that too. I think they want community and that's why it comes out.

He went on to explain the linkage between the type of student that chooses a CEL course over a more traditional lecture-style offering: "It's selection bias, right? If somebody is interested in CEL, there's a reason they're interested. They want community."

A memorable phrase from the first interview was that students often have "defining moments" when participating in CEL. I reminded the instructor of his words and asked him if there were any defining moments occurred in the last eight months. Each student had their own defining moment in the eyes of the instructor that marked when the CEL experience and sociological learning really took off. Bruce explained,

> It feels like [the student is] not making much progress, and then all of a sudden things just multiply or combine, and then it's different. And that's kind of the beauty of that two semester [course]—I think they're going to get there. I don't how when they're going to get there, but then when it happens, it just takes off.

This is one reason why the instructor viewed the two-semester delivery as a beneficial change from its previous one-semester design. Students and community partners have voiced one semester as not being long enough to develop relationships and complete a CEL project (Lake et al., 2021); this change from one to two semesters verifies that a year-long course is favourable. Despite worries about requiring more commitment from students and community partners alike,

these defining moments for students (that often do not occur until the second semester) make that risk worth it.

After a challenging yet rewarding year, the instructor reported that almost three-quarters of the students received As in the class (and the remaining quarter were Bs). Many students had shown substantial effort and produced quality final projects. Some students underachieved, perhaps due to a lack of understanding of what could be achieved in 80 hours of work. One area that continued to puzzle Bruce was how to teach students to reflect, as even after writing and receiving feedback on five reflections over the last eight months, some students still struggled. But overall, most students achieved good outcomes: some reflected in their grade, and others which were less tangible and difficult to reflect in the university grading system.

As with the students and community partners, I asked Bruce to summarize his key takeaways of the CEL experience. These will be discussed in the following section.

Key Takeaways

It seems impossible to capture all facets of the CEL experience across the three diverse perspectives of students, community partners, and the instructor. This section will attempt to summarize what each group shared as their key takeaways from this shared eight-month experience.

Students: "It was hard but I'm glad I did it"

Many students reflected on both the benefits and challenges of doing CEL over the past eight months. Most reported feeling that the CEL course was "enriching" and helped them gain real-world experience, develop tangible skills, and create community bonds with their peers and instructor. One student commented that the CEL experience was a "lovely reminder of why we

enter this study [of sociology]." Several students also identified their personal growth and improved self-confidence as a key takeaway (and one they did not expect from the experience). A student summarized: "Overall, this course has been transformative and has helped me step into the space of being a sociologist, through and through."

There were several takeaways that identified the challenging nature of the course, including that CEL is time-consuming, complex, and at times stressful. Emma commented,

> As a student we are not normally thinking much more than a semester ahead. The class requires you to be constantly trying to plan and replan all the time and it can be stressful and there are definitely points where you think it can't be done.

These benefits and challenges are consistent with other studies about CEL and have been documented numerous times in the literature (Bringle & Wall, 2020; Ciabattari, 2018; Clever & Miller, 2019; Gordon da Cruz, 2018; Lake et al., 2021; Mackenzie et al., 2019; Mitchell, 2008; Morton et al., 2019; Ricke, 2021; Van Auken, 2013; Warren, 2012).

However, despite the stress, the difficulty of the course was couched in the greater context of being grateful for the experience and the benefits outweighing the challenges: "This experience was very tough…however, I regret absolutely nothing from this experience. I feel this course has pushed me to be a better student." Another student reflected, "This class gave me an opportunity to be vulnerable and real about sociology in a way I had not yet experienced, and that alone was invaluable." Finally, Sophia summed up their key takeaways by simply stating: "I'm a sociologist and I deeply value community."

Community Partners: "Win, win, win all around"

The main takeaways for the community partners who responded to the final survey were that CEL enables organizations to expand their capacity and take on new projects; working with students opens new possibilities and brings in fresh ideas; students gain confidence in their skills

and knowledge as they gain practical experience; organizations can build connections with the university; spending more time developing the project with the student likely results in a better end product; and the community gains a tangible deliverable that can have lasting impact on the organization and the clients they serve. These takeaways are consistent with what other community partners have reported (Greenberg et al., 2020). One community partner summarized, "The CEL program is an accessible bridge that helps us build partnerships and start new conversations."

Instructor: "It's a lot of work, but it's worth it"

The instructor shared that one of his key takeaways is that teaching this CEL course "is a lot of work but it's worth it." This is frequently described by instructors who use a CEL pedagogy: Snedker et al. (2023) note that this kind of teaching is extra work, but is highly rewarding, and Arantes do Amaral (2018) agrees that CEL requires more time and effort than a traditional course. Bruce echoes this: "It's so rewarding that I get to see the students have those insights" that students begin to express as they grow and learn throughout the course. For the instructor, he does not teach CEL because he loves CEL; he employs CEL as a pedagogy because he knows it will help students learn sociology: "I'm committed to the idea of it for making better sociologists and I'm committed to the idea of engaging the community—good, bad, and the [in-between]." These students—many of whom now consider themselves sociologists, but did not when they entered the course in September—have undergone great personal growth because of this CEL experience and their interactions with the community.

Another takeaway for the instructor is the lower enrollment in this year's two-semester delivery, and realizing that he is okay with that. He explained that although he sees the transformative power of CEL and wants all students to have the opportunity to experience that,

he understands that CEL is not for everyone. It takes a particular kind of student to choose and immerse themselves in a CEL course. Those who do not choose this experience can still graduate from university with a sociology degree, but those who do—and see it through to the end—may be rewarded.

The final takeaway for the instructor is that CEL is a vehicle for improving students' confidence in their sociology, their employable skills, and giving them a memorable undergraduate experience. "If eight of the eleven students in that class…would say, 'That was one of the best experiences I've had as a student'…That's fantastic." This is also good for the greater discipline of sociology, as students go out into the world and become ambassadors of the field. Bruce sums his takeaways up by saying, "My lasting impression is that I get frustrated with the institution sometimes, but it's the right thing to be doing, so I enjoy doing it."

In summary, the findings from all data collection methods (surveys, focus groups, reflection assignments, classroom observations, and interviews) chronicle a transformational journey for students and a fulfilling experience for the instructor and community partners. Although it was not without challenges, the CEL experience and course itself were found to be of high value. The benefits and challenges for the students, community partners, and instructor will be discussed in the following chapter, as well as those insights gained from studying the intersecting experiences of all three stakeholder groups.

Chapter VI: Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the key themes that I observed in the data and established in the findings. These themes include: the benefits and challenges of CEL for students, community partners, and the instructor; the life cycle of CEL; and key outcomes and takeaways for students, community partners, and the instructor. I will also discuss insights gained from studying all three stakeholder groups simultaneously.

Benefits of CEL for Students

Community in the classroom (and how to build it)

The "community" focused on in CEL is usually the community partner; however, the literature tends to overlook the importance of the classroom community. The community developed in the classroom was the most commonly reported benefit and "best part" of this experience for students. Remarkably, Isabelle, who struggled consistently with her community partner, shared with me that it was the group dynamic in the classroom that held her dedication to the course. This anecdote, along with the findings on this topic explained in the previous chapter, lead me to believe that the classroom community is a far better predictor than the CEL experience itself of how successful students subjectively perceive themselves to be in a CEL course. This aligns with Lake et al.'s (2021) finding that the instructor and the other students are the most important variables in a student's CEL experience.

Why was this cohort able to grow so close over the eight months of the course? One factor is that this course was uniquely situated at a time where classes were just beginning to return to 'normal' (i.e., in-person classes) following the Covid-19 pandemic and the students were keen for human connection. This, in combination with the circumstances of the CEL experience, created an ideal setting for the students to gel as a cohort. However, there were some

other key factors (largely due to the decisions and actions of the instructor) that I believe encouraged the development of a strong community between the students and with the instructor.

First, the attributes of the course design: namely, the instructor's choice for the class to meet in-person for a three-hour weekly seminar (rather than online, or for shorter class periods) and having the course run for two consecutive semesters (instead of one, as in most other university courses) both were important in giving students extended exposure and proximity to one another. The physical layout of the classroom (i.e., the group sitting in a circle and facing each other, rather than the students all facing the instructor at the front) was also influential because—as simple as it sounds—being able to look at each other during discussions seemed to build trust and a sense of belonging for the students (Mitchell, 2008). In combination, these attributes allowed students to get to know one another as people, rather than somewhat anonymous 'others.' Lastly, the length of the course mattered: developing community over two semesters, instead of the standard one semester, allowed twice as much time for students to develop relationships with each other, the instructor, and their community partners.

Second, class discussions delved into deep topics. Sometimes starting with the assigned reading for the week and other times beginning the class by posing a question, the instructor always seemed to know how to encourage the students to think more critically about the subject at hand. For example, one class discussion (during midterm season when the energy in the classroom was particularly low) started with the instructor bluntly stating: "Undergrad sucks. Discuss." This frank acknowledgement of the experience the students were having in that moment and the conversation that followed fostered trust within the group and invited a critical discussion about post-secondary education that most students never get to talk about with their instructor. This empathetic demonstration that the instructor (i.e., an authority figure at the

students' university) understood what the students were experiencing and was willing to bring up this somewhat taboo topic was instrumental in creating the group dynamic.

The third factor in creating the positive classroom dynamic was the instructor setting the tone at the top (Savage, 2022). In this context, because CEL was new to the students, the instructor became an important rock to ground the students in the experience. Setting the tone involved subtle elements such as the instructor sitting in a chair as part of the circle during class (rather than standing at the front behind the lectern) and more overt forms of modelling, like when the instructor completed and shared his own sociological artefact assignment with the class before the students had to do their own. These actions, in my view, demonstrated that the instructor was 'in it' with the students and dismantled the power hierarchy commonly seen in educational settings (Garoutte, 2018; Mitchell, 2008). Beyond these actions, the students often remarked on the caring way the instructor interacted with them, which made the students feel understood and able to ask for help if things went wrong in their CEL projects. This created the opportunity for students to be successful in the course.

What I have explained so far regarding the key factors that influenced the classroom community makes it sound as though all students had a fantastic time and felt closely connected to their peers; although I am confident that this is the case for the majority of the cohort (as confirmed in the findings), this is not my intention. Rather, I explain these factors to highlight that the actions of this instructor are reproducible by others looking to foster community in their own classrooms (Savage, 2022). My research has pointed towards this specific instructor being a strong influence on the positive experience for students, but other instructors can also use these lessons to build a similarly positive group dynamic within their CEL courses.

Identity as a sociologist

A second benefit of the students' CEL participation was its impact on their identity development. In the first seminar of the course, the students, instructor, and I sat in a circle and introduced ourselves. I noticed that almost all the students had what I call a 'sociology origin story': most experienced a similar cycle where they had not come to university to study sociology, but had felt pulled towards the discipline due to a desire to contribute to society. This is not uncommon: many students choose sociology for exactly this reason (Senter et al., 2015). Many Sociology 439 students commented on feeling dissatisfied with reading and writing about sociology and wanted to actually "do" sociology outside of the university. This mutual view of sociology not only brought the cohort together in that first class, but marked the first building block of the students developing a stronger identity of being sociologists. In each seminar, the group discussed assigned articles and critically interrogated the structure of the university and sociology as a discipline. The combination of these discussions and practicing skills in their hands-on CEL projects developed students' confidence and knowledge of sociology significantly (which was acknowledged by both the instructor and the students themselves). This aligns with previous findings from Soyer et al. (2023) who identified improved confidence and subject matter expertise as key benefits of CEL for students.

By the end of the course, the majority of students spoke about what a difference the course made to their personal sociology and understanding of how they could use their sociology in the future (not just as a set of skills for a career, but to apply to their lives in general). For many students, a central outcome of the course was the transformation of their identity and the recognition that they are sociologists. This completes the cycle that begins with entering post-secondary in another discipline, feeling pulled to sociology, grappling with how to transfer

reading and writing about sociology to actually 'doing' sociology, and then—finally—identifying as a sociologist. This outcome of CEL is not reflected in the literature, although Mayer et al. (2019) similarly found that participation in community-based research reinforced their students' personal identities as social scientists. This ownership over students' newfound identity is challenging to develop in a course where students only read and write about others' sociology. If we want to empower sociology graduates to use their sociology when they transition out of post-secondary, my findings suggest that helping them see themselves as sociologists is not only possible, but necessary.

Doing something meaningful

The third benefit to students was achieving their goal of wanting to do something meaningful with their sociology. From the beginning of the course, students repeatedly referenced their desire to make a meaningful contribution to their community. After all, this was a key driver for their interest in sociology and many entered the course frustrated that all they had done up until that point was read and write for an academic audience (their instructors). By the end of Sociology 439, not only did students report that they had deepened their understanding of sociology, but also felt that they finally knew how to apply their disciplinary skills and knowledge in the field. This practical application helped students realize they could make meaningful contributions to their communities and that sociology is a viable avenue for addressing the social problems they had studied throughout their degree.

Students' personal growth

A last prominent benefit of both the Sociology 439 course and CEL experience was the personal growth of the students, which is widely acknowledged in the CEL literature as a common benefit

(Arantes do Amaral, 2019; Carlisle et al., 2017; Garoutte, 2018; Greenberg et al., 2020; Huisman, 2010; Ibrahim et al., 2016; Lake et al., 2021; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2010; Warren, 2012). This personal growth was not just something the instructor and I witnessed, but also was recognized and reflected on by the students themselves. These journeys of growth and maturity for the students spanned a wide range of areas, including better understanding their and/or their family's position in society, growing into more thoughtful academics and community contributors, coming to terms with their identity, and evolving in their career hopes and plans. I felt privileged to watch this group of young adults develop week to week, persevere through challenging circumstances, and experience personal epiphanies. In some ways, it felt like a window into my own years as a student and young adult (as I was, at the time of the course, only a few years older than most of the students in the class).

Personal growth is sometimes hard to recognize in yourself while it is happening, but many of the students did the hard work of reflecting on themselves to realize how their CEL experience was influencing their development as citizens, peers, academics, and sociologists in real time. This real-time reflection demonstrates a certain life cycle, also, as students reflected on their experiences and journeys at points-in-time during Sociology 439, then integrated the learning from their reflections, continued with their CEL projects, and began the reflection cycle again. By the end of the course, some students explained that the reflection they did during Sociology 439 had set them up for a lifetime of engaging in this cycle of self-reflection.

Challenges of CEL for Students

Workload

CEL is commonly reported as a type of learning that students perceive to be more work and require more time than others (Arantes do Amaral, 2019; Pederson et al., 2015; Ricke, 2021).

While CEL may or may not objectively have a higher workload for students, the *perception* is true for the students and it affects their experience in the course. Sociology 439 was no different to these previous findings. Students noted the challenge of balancing their academic assignments and the community focus required to build a relationship with their community partner and develop their CEL project. In a similar way, the instructor needed to balance intended student learning outcomes between the academic side of CEL and the skills fourth-year sociology students should be developing while also allowing time and space for relationship building with the community partner. Amidst this balancing act, students still reported feeling underprepared in some areas for their CEL projects. These competing priorities and the consistent reports of heavy workloads in CEL make it clear that there may be no solution: CEL is an intense and immersive learning style. However, for those students who put in the work, the outcomes are generally rewarding.

Communication with community partners

Regardless of strategies brainstormed with the class and instructor of how to improve, some students experienced consistent challenges around communication with their community partners. At critical times in the project development and/or execution, community partners were reported to have gone missing-in-action. The instructor coached students to be proactive in their communication and "make it easy for the community partner to say yes" (i.e., students should put in effort up front to minimize the work required by the community partner), and yet communication issues persisted. This often led to students floundering and sometimes required the instructor to intervene in order to get the community partner to respond. Another issue was lack of communication around clear expectations of the student from the community partner, which left students unsure as to whether they were on the right path for their project. These

challenges are not uncommon for students, as other scholars have also recognized communication to be a barrier to successful CEL (Lake et al., 2021; Johnston, 2020; Rocha Beardall, 2023).

As this course ran at the end of the Covid-19 pandemic, we cannot know if these communication issues were (at least partially) due to the extreme pressures non-profit organizations were facing as a result. One significant impact of the pandemic was that some organizations were hesitant to have students physically visit their offices for fear of risking their clients' health. The relationship-building between the students and community partners seemed to go more smoothly for those students who were able to meet with their community partner in person, perhaps due to the rapport fostered by being physically in the same location. For example, Charlotte spent the first semester volunteering weekly at the organization to get to know the staff and clients. Her project turned out well and both she and the community partner were happy with the outcomes. Although a lot of this is probably attributable to Charlotte's work ethic and maturity, I cannot help but speculate that this was also influenced by the good communication fostered by working together in person with her community partner. This theory is supported by Bringle et al.'s (2009) finding that lack of physical proximity between a student and community partner hinders the relationship development.

Imposter syndrome

As the lesser known relative of psychology, the less popular subject than political science, and the university major most often confused with social work, sociology as a discipline has been called out for having an identity crisis (Hauser et al., 2004). It is therefore no surprise that students of sociology find it hard to know where they fit in the world, what skills they have to contribute to the labour market, and how to talk about or demonstrate their skills, especially if

they have not had hands-on practice during their education. This has led to sociology students feeling like imposters when they make it to the professional world and as CEL is often students' first exposure to using their sociology in a work environment, they often experience imposter syndrome (Berard & Ravelli, 2020). This CEL experience, for many students in the course, was the first time they were required and trusted to work as a sociologist with real people counting on the outcomes. In the beginning, students were unsure of their own capabilities and worried about their ability to satisfy their community partner's expectations.

Most community partners were generous with their students and subtly helped them overcome this imposter syndrome by treating them much the same as other employees of the organization; others, however, did not extend this grace, which reinforced students' fears that they did not have much of value to contribute to the organization. This treatment, while challenging in the moment, encouraged personal growth for the students. One of my most memorable moments during the course was a conversation I had with Isabelle, who experienced many challenges with her community partner: she said to me that she wished she had realized earlier in the relationship that her imposter syndrome had prevented her from standing up for herself. In hindsight, she wished she could have said to her community partner that she was worth their time and had good skills to contribute to their organization. In part, this realization was spurred by spending time with her Sociology 439 peers: discussing sociology with the class, sharing experiences of practicing their skills in the field, and learning how to deal with challenges from each other. She also identified that the adversity she had experienced was beneficial because it mirrored a situation she could encounter when she became a working professional (and taught her how she could deal with it in the future). By the end of the course,

although her CEL project did not go to plan, Isabelle was no longer feeling the intense imposter syndrome she had earlier in the year.

Benefits of CEL for Community Partners

The benefits for the community partners largely align with what is found in the literature. The benefits community partners experienced from participating in CEL included receiving tangible outputs from students, such as research, reports, and data analysis, as well as the opportunity to try research tools they may otherwise not have had time or opportunity to explore. This echoes the findings of Arantes do Amaral (2018) who reported a main benefit to community partners being the products and services his students created during the CEL course. Like those community partners who worked with Rocha Beardall (2023), Sociology 439 community partners remarked that this collaboration allowed their organization to complete a project they otherwise would not have had time to do due to limited time and resources. The partners also noted that a benefit of partnering with an academic institution builds capacity and opens up possibilities for longer-term relationships with the university. Indeed, the link with the university offers community partners access to resources (including the instructor) that their organization may not otherwise be able to, and to collaborate with people in fields other than their own.

Other benefits to the community partners centered around the relationships that are made with the individual students. Community partners noted that it was refreshing to work with students who brought new ideas and the most recent knowledge about sociological topics (which is consistent with the findings of Blouin & Perry, 2009). This, along with the passion the students demonstrated, allowed for knowledge exchange between students and community partners. This exchange—rather than a one-way flow of knowledge from students to the community—is acknowledged as the preference in CEL as it counters the criticism that CEL can

reinforce power hierarchies between universities and community organizations (Ricke, 2021). In addition, the camaraderie of gaining a new colleague (even if for only a short time) also boosted the community partners' morale.

Beyond the scope of the eight month collaboration, community partners also recognized that a key benefit of working with students is developing allies for the organization: when the student concludes their CEL experience, they become an advocate for the organization and is more likely to promote the community partner through word-of-mouth. In some circumstances, the community partner may get a good employee out of the experience (as occurred with several community partners/students from Sociology 439) who has already been vetted through the CEL experience (Greenberg et al., 2020).

The community partners also recognized that their clients will experience benefits which are downstream from the CEL projects. Research, program evaluations, data analyses, and other project outcomes are all done with the intention of improving services for their clients. Although it may take weeks, months, or years before the clients feel tangible benefits, this is the guiding principle behind why the community partners do what they do. This acknowledgement—that CEL project outcomes ultimately should serve the organization's clients--surprisingly goes unmentioned in CEL literature beyond the work of Blouin and Perry (2009).

Challenges of CEL for Community Partners

Though the community partners recognized many benefits of participating in CEL and working with Sociology 439 students, there were several challenges expressed. However, given that only four community partners responded to the final survey which asked respondents to identify challenges, there are likely more to be identified and addressed (and it is possible that those community partners who experienced challenges with the CEL experience did not want to

respond to the survey). Challenges of CEL for community partners are not commonly reported in the literature, perhaps (optimistically) because they do not experience many challenges or perhaps because community partners' CEL experiences are under-researched (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Carlisle et al., 2017; Jakubowski & McIntosh, 2018). It is also possible that community partners are hesitant to be seen as complaining about CEL. More research is needed to better understand the community partner perspective of challenges faced in CEL. Among challenges that are reported are the slow pace of university bureaucracy (Greenberg et al., 2020) and the time required to plan a CEL project that will mutually benefit the organization and the student (Davis et al., 2019). Neither of these were reported as challenges for the community partners in this research.

The first challenge reported by community partners was the task of developing the project. They explained that students had difficulty narrowing the project scope to make it more manageable within the given timeframe, which required several meetings between the student and community partner to develop an appropriate scope and the details of the project. One community partner also described that giving feedback to the student proved challenging and that the student could have been more willing to learn how to accept and integrate the feedback on their work.

This is closely linked with a second challenge, which was the varying level of student mindfulness about both the positive and negative impacts on the organization and clients involved in the project (although community partners seemed to report this as a general challenge with CEL, not one specific to this Sociology 439 cohort). If a student is aware of their own presence and actions while working with the organization, it likely results in a good partnership with beneficial outcomes for clients. However, if the student is less thoughtful about

how their presence and actions may affect the organization and/or their clients, students may unintentionally harm them (for example, making insensitive comments during client interactions, citing incorrect information about the organization, or using incorrect terminology to describe the clients or work of an organization). This challenge is reminiscent of the cautionary tale from Blouin and Perry (2009) who advise that a lack of student preparation can result in harmful behavior when working with community partners and their clients.

A last challenge reported was managing timelines within the rigid university semester schedule: specifically, the community partner's ability to influence or manage the student's project progression relative to the end of the course. Despite students and community partners knowing in September that the CEL project needed to be complete by April, the timeline was difficult to meet. The community partner noted that the student's report was completed at the last minute before the end of the semester, leaving no opportunity to discuss the student's work or how the organization could continue the work the student did. This creates difficulty in making the work useful in the long term as the community partner may not have enough context or rationale for how the report was created. A simple solution to this challenge is to set clear expectations and deadlines for the student, including a deadline for the final project prior to the end of the course so that time is built in to review the project outcomes together.

Benefits of CEL for Faculty

Instructors who teach using a CEL pedagogy will likely tell you they are not doing it for their own benefit; they are teaching with CEL because they recognize how worthwhile it is for students, and hope that it is worthwhile for the community partners they work with (Greenberg et al., 2020; Savage, 2022; Snedker et al., 2023). However, despite the motivations behind using this style of education, it is clear that there is benefit to faculty: it is high effort but high reward.

The instructor used terms like “rewarding,” “worth it,” a gift,” and “meaningful” to describe the course experience and the relationships he was able to build with the students over the course’s eight months. This was enough time to witness (and positively influence) the personal growth of the students as well as the development of their understanding of sociology. While CEL may not (yet) have the tangible benefit of being a deciding factor in career evaluation (e.g., tenure and promotion considerations), the personally fulfilling side of teaching that comes from working with young minds and mentoring students is surely the key benefit of CEL for instructors.

Challenges of CEL for Faculty

The instructor experienced several challenges throughout the CEL course. CEL instructors are responsible for managing the expectations and experiences of the students and the community partners (and often their department and university). This requires laying the groundwork ahead of the course delivery, sufficiently preparing all parties, and consistently monitoring to ensure students and community partners are on track. Like reports from Greenberg et al. (2020), Arantes do Amaral (2018), Shostak et al. (2019), and others, the instructor acknowledged that CEL takes a great deal of time and effort. The workload required of instructors is the primary challenge, and likely the main deterrent for instructors *not* wanting to use a CEL pedagogy, especially for young professors who are early in their career and may not have “extra” time to devote to CEL when research and publishing are far more likely to help them achieve tenure and promotion. In addition, sessional instructors—which are increasingly relied upon by universities to teach courses—lack the job security and renumeration to make stepping outside the traditional lecture-style course appealing (Lucal, 2015).

A second challenge for the instructor was the course structure and its effect on enrollment. This was the first delivery of Sociology 439 as a two semester course and the

instructor witnessed this lowering enrollment. In previous (one semester) deliveries, the course reached capacity immediately and had a long waitlist. Now, in the two semester model, the course was never at capacity, which the instructor attributes to it being a bigger commitment for students (in addition to the potential effects of Covid-19, which caused many people to be leery of public settings like community organizations where transmission was possible). Although the two semester model was reported by students and community partners to be beneficial, there are considerations beyond what the preferred structure is. If a course has low enrollment, it may not be offered. This draws attention to the fact that a university operates as a business: enrollment determines if a course is "worth" offering, not the qualitative outcomes for the students in it (Renwick et al., 2020).

Another challenge for the instructor is accessing financial support for CEL courses from the institution. CEL is recognized by UVic as a worthwhile endeavour and yet offers little sustainable financial support. UVic has one university-wide Experiential Learning Fund grant, but it provides funding one time per course—it is not a renewable grant that instructors can access repeatedly every time they teach a CEL course. In this time of austerity in post-secondary institutions,[4] departments have little or no extra funding available for CEL courses. Funding is not strictly necessary, but does help provide for things like thank you gifts or honoraria for community partners, food for gatherings at the end of the course where students and community partners celebrate the work done, teaching/research assistants where needed, and other supplies required for projects. The instructor has paid for expenses like these out of his own pocket when grant funding has not been available. Once again, this would likely be unfeasible for an

[4] At the time of writing, UVic had just made provincial and national news headlines for announcing significant budget cuts as a result of the aftermath of reduced international student enrollment during and following the Covid-19 pandemic (University of Victoria, 2024). Many other Canadian post-secondary institutions are facing similar financial challenges (Crawley, 2023; DeRosa, 2024; Fallis, 2024; O'Connor, 2024).

instructor just beginning their career. If the university wants to continue promoting CEL, they need to invest money in CEL to ensure students continue to have these opportunities and community partners feel adequately recognized for their contributions. These financial challenges are seldom mentioned in CEL literature (although Eby, 1998, has pointed out that financial compensation for community partners is a way of recognizing their contribution to the CEL partnership).

A last challenge that stands out for the instructor is how to teach students how to reflect. Reflection is a necessary part of CEL and is arguably what produces the biggest opportunity for students to learn about themselves and their discipline (Tarantino, 2017; Tinkler et al., 2014; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). However, reflection continues to be a challenging task for students, and it is hard to teach reflection skills without giving students all the answers. For example, some students have requested samples of reflections from the instructor's past students, but reflection is about a dialogue with oneself, and the instructor is therefore reluctant to point students toward other students' work as a source of inspiration. Reflection is also challenging to objectively assess and give feedback on so the students know how to improve, which is a tension that students and the instructor find equally challenging. The instructor noted that the students' reflections did improve over the eight months of the course, but that teaching reflection continues to be challenging and possibly "endemic" to reflection assignments. There is also tension in deciding how many reflections to assign: too few and students do not have enough time to practice their reflection skills, but too many and students may begin to feel overly forced to reflect and not engage in the exercise genuinely. These challenges are not represented in the CEL literature and further research on how to teach students *how* to reflect would be worthwhile.

Outcomes and Key Takeaways

The most significant takeaway from this research is that all three groups felt their participation in the CEL experience was beneficial and that the challenges were outweighed by the benefits. Despite many students facing adversity of varying levels throughout the CEL experience, most students did well in their final CEL projects and their efforts were reflected in their course grades. For those who did respond, community partners also reported being satisfied with the outcomes of the projects. In the final surveys collected, students and community partners expressed gratitude for the opportunity and acknowledgement that CEL is a worthwhile endeavour. The instructor spoke about Sociology 439 requiring a lot of work, but he still teaches it year after year because he thinks it is the best opportunity he has to teach students sociology. What makes CEL remarkable, in my mind, is this consistent acknowledgement from all stakeholder groups that it is a challenging experience (particularly for students), and yet all groups remain motivated to keep engaging because they recognize CEL's transformative potential (Jakubowski & McIntosh, 2018; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). The following sections illustrate the intersections between stakeholder perspectives, and where warranted, suggestions on how to bridge the gaps between stakeholders in the CEL experience.

Life cycle of CEL

When reviewing the findings chronologically, it becomes clear that the student cohort shared some highs and lows throughout the eight months of the course. They began in September with optimism about what they could achieve over the two semesters with their community partners and a general sense of some dissatisfaction with their university experience to date. As the fall semester progressed and their CEL projects began to take shape, they both celebrated the wins and commiserated over challenges as the reality of doing work in the community set in. The

unknowns of how to work in community and how to be successful in a course that looks and feels different to a traditional lecture-style one created a common challenge for the students to band together against (Cundiff et al., 2020; Gururaj et al., 2023). This led to a cohesive cohort that created strong bonds with one another alongside becoming comfortable with CEL, the course, and their community partners as they began to gain momentum towards finishing their projects in the second semester.

The beginning of the second semester—which was halfway through their CEL experience—brought the lowest point of the group morale due to challenges in the CEL process (as well as world events outside of the students' control). As students moved through the second semester, the pressures of finishing their projects (and for some, their impending graduation) surfaced with intensity. However, students also began to return to their optimistic attitudes, but this time about their ability to apply their sociology outside of the university environment as well as a shared appreciation for their community experience in the classroom. At the end, when projects were finished, the feeling of relief amongst the students was palpable. Almost all students in the course followed this same trajectory from September to April, although some demonstrated it more overtly than others.

Indeed, this was also my experience when I completed a sociology CEL course during my undergraduate degree. Although my peers, my community partner, the time frame, and my individual experience were all different than those in this Sociology 439 course, I (and my cohort) went through the same trajectory of the excitement and optimism at the beginning, the stress and uncertainty in the middle, and the relief and satisfaction at the end. I would argue that this is also the life cycle of the undergraduate university experience at large, and perhaps the life

cycle for many people in experiences that are new, daunting, and challenging for individuals and groups.

Although this research is exploratory and not necessarily universally applicable, I suspect this is a trajectory that many students follow during a CEL experience. I therefore question: if this life cycle is a common trajectory for students (which community partners and faculty undoubtedly feel the impacts of), how do we better prepare students for this cycle? The instructor of Sociology 439 has noted that year after year, he always tries to better prepare community partners and students for what lies ahead, and yet some always experience challenges. Is this just the nature of community work where there is an element of unpredictability? Perhaps, but instructors (and community partners) might consider how they could help students learn how to pivot projects quickly and trust that their efforts will pay off.

By the end of the course, many students reported that the difficulties they faced throughout their CEL experience were challenging in the moment, but ultimately benefited them as they learned to overcome them. Although instructors may sometimes wish to protect their students from the unpredictability, stress, and frustration that come with CEL, perhaps this life cycle—which necessarily includes some challenges—is a part of the greater learning for students. With this knowledge, instructors and community partners should prepare to support students through the ebbs and flows of CEL.

Instructor influence

This research would be incomplete without mentioning the impact of the instructor on this course experience. The students and community partners both voiced appreciation for how the instructor led the CEL experience, offered support and guidance without micromanaging students' actions or projects. He was (and is) what Yogan (2015) terms a "connector" who has the ability to

"enhance the solidarity and sense of community within a class" (p. 5) which was instrumental in creating the classroom dynamic. Rasch et al. (2022) explain that instructors play an important role in managing the uncertainty and stress among students doing work in the community. Both the students and community partners recognized the calm and empathetic approach the instructor took throughout the course which reassured them that their uncertainties would be resolved. Having delivered many CEL courses and worked with many students and community partners, his experience and dedication to Sociology 439 was recognized by the students in this cohort and is acknowledged by the many community partners that return to work with him year after year.

Part of the instructor's positive influence is attributable to his transparency with the students. In class discussions, the instructor shared that he, too, grapples with the same things as the students, including the structure of the university, the history of sociology, and challenges that arise within CEL experiences. This approach builds trust and rapport with students and was highly influential in developing the classroom community. In reading an early draft of this discussion, the instructor assumed that all CEL instructors have similar conversations with their students. However, while these conversations may be occurring in CEL classrooms but not reported in the literature, I think it likely that few instructors approach class discussions with such transparency. This is a missed opportunity for developing trust between the instructor and students. Whether this transparency helps students see that they have the same concerns, doubts, and questions as their professor, or facilitates the view that it is "us" (the students and the instructor) against "them" (societal structures that formed the basis of many class discussions) rather than the students versus the instructor, it is clear that students respond well to such honesty from their leader. This also produces the environment wherein students are not afraid to ask questions, seek clarification, or challenge the status quo with their peers and instructor, not

fearing being seen as an imposter but rather being comfortable in their own position as a student and critical thinker.

Communication challenges

Throughout the eight months, both the students and community partners expressed finding communication challenging. This begs the question: if students thought they were communicating well but not receiving equivalent communication from the community partner, where was the breakdown? I think the answer here is in two parts: first, that students have not learned what "good" or "professional" communication looks like, and while we assume they know how to communicate, university education does not necessarily teach this skill or provide students with this experience (although this is not the goal nor responsibility of post-secondary education). Therefore, students may think they are communicating well (and many probably are), but the communication style is not working for the community partner, or possibly that students are afraid to ask for what they need from their community partner for the project to progress smoothly (which is, of course, linked closely with imposter syndrome and students not yet feeling comfortable advocating for themselves). This does not excuse community partners from their shared responsibility in communicating with their student(s), though, because it is a shared responsibility and a requisite part of a successful partnership (Dumlao, 2020).

Second, in communication, there is a tendency to think that *our* priorities are *their* priorities. However, community partners and students only have capacity for so much at one time and likely have other priorities that the other party is not privy to. The life cycle of CEL also indicates that students have priorities and stress points at certain times in the semester which may not align with the community partner's timeline. Having grace when communications break down is necessary, as conflict is bound to occur and therefore what matters most is how it is

dealt with (Dumlao, 2020). Community partners, especially, have a great deal to manage, and CEL students are not their main priority. Acknowledgement from the students and instructor that they need the community partners more than the community partner needs the students/instructor/university (and that community partners cannot always be attuned to the students' timelines) provides important contextual understanding for all parties.

Solving communication problems sometimes requires instructor intervention. This is a challenge in itself, as the instructor must balance giving the students enough autonomy to figure things out for themselves (a key aspect of learning and growing) while not letting a communication breakdown create project circumstances that are beyond repair. The instructor is also only one person and does not have enough hours in the day to manage a dozen (or more) student-community partnerships. In this research, I heard from one community partner that they wished there was more intervention from the instructor, but then another who said they appreciated that the instructor was not overly involved in the process. There seems to be no perfect approach here except to adjust to the needs of individual students and each community partner. The instructor has also reasoned that one way to manage the communications workload would be to have one community partner work with the whole class; however, he is reluctant to pare down the number of community partners, because he wants the students to be able to choose an organization that resonates with them. Perhaps the communications workload needs to become a greater factor in weighing priorities while course planning (i.e., student choice or instructor time), but this is likely easier said than done and communication challenges may persist regardless of which choice is made.

Communication challenges may also be aided with some instruction to students on how to build trust and rapport with their community partner to develop authentic and professional

relationships (Johnston, 2020). It is easy to assume that students and community partners enter a CEL experience already knowing how to do this, but some may not have this knowledge. Community partners are (understandably) less likely to put significant time into building a relationship with a student who will leave at the end of their CEL experience, so the onus generally falls on the student to build rapport (although as previously mentioned, both parties have responsibility here). While teaching community partners is outside the scope of CEL, including discussions or activities in the course to help students further develop their interpersonal skills may help ease communication challenges. Discussions on how to foster trust with others in a professional setting, how to build relationships in the workplace, and how to have difficult conversations if communication becomes challenging will benefit students during the CEL experience and beyond.

Project scope

Closely tied with communication challenges was students' and community partners' ability to develop a manageable project. Students reported finding it difficult to establish a concrete project with the community partners, and community partners similarly noted the challenge of narrowing a project down to a reasonable size with their student. The only partnerships where this did not appear to be a problem were those where the community partner already had a clear, well-defined project in mind for the student from the beginning of the course. Some students explained that they wanted the community partner to tell them what project they needed completed, but many community partners expressed that they wanted or expected the student to identify the type of project they were interested in completing (so as not to force them to work on a topic they did not find interesting or did not have the skills to complete). This tension created

challenges for both parties and caused pressure on the project development timeline as students struggled to narrow in on a feasible project.

Possible ways of mitigating this in future CEL courses could be to ask all community partners to have one or two concrete ideas of projects prior to the course beginning and sharing these with students before picking their community partner, or conversely, creating a "menu" of project types sociology students are equipped to do that community partners can use as a base for their projects (for example, program evaluations, literature reviews, client interviews, etc.). However, using a "menu" approach may remove some of the 'good adversity' (i.e., challenging CEL circumstances that ultimately encourage personal growth in students as they learn how to resolve them) students experience during project identification and development. CEL instructors can consider what is most appropriate for their cohort, given the time frame of the course, subject matter, and needs of the community partner(s).

Career preparation

Like conversations aimed to help students develop interpersonal skills, students and community partners (as future employers of students) will benefit from conversations around career outcomes (Senter et al., 2015). Students knew how their CEL experience prepared them for work, but struggled to explain what they learned and practiced in their CEL experience when applying for jobs. Similarly, community partners—and other potential future employers—want employees with the skills their organization needs but cannot always read between the lines when a student lists a CEL experience on their resume. If a student can articulate how their CEL experience has helped them become more employment-ready, both the student and employer will benefit (Senter & Spalter-Roth, 2020). Sociology 439 did include a presentation from a university career advisor but was a general discussion about careers in sociology. For this reason,

I suggest that a workshop specifically on how to translate a CEL experience to a resumé would be beneficial for students. A university career advisor can do this, but the instructor leading the conversation may be more impactful for students as they understand the disciplinary context and are deeply familiar with what CEL entails (Senter, 2020).

Workload for students and instructor

Students and the instructor both noted the extra time and effort required for CEL courses (when compared with traditional lecture-style courses). Students also identified extra workload as a concern from the outset of the course. When looking at the parallel experience of these two stakeholder groups, it seems clear that some adjustments should be made to trim the time and effort associated with CEL to align better with other courses. What is less clear is exactly *what* could be removed from the experience to achieve this alignment while still meeting the desired outcomes and transformative potential of CEL. The time and effort put into planning and preparation are crucial and the students still need to experience both academic and practical learning. However, if more students and faculty are to be encouraged to participate in or deliver CEL respectively, lessening the time commitment and workload may entice more participants.

The workload of CEL for students and instructors is referenced commonly in the literature, but few authors propose any solutions (Arantes do Amaral, 2019; Davis et al., 2019; Dumlao, 2020; Greenberg et al., 2020). I suggest that, for the instructor's side, one strategy may be employing a teaching assistant to help with course administration to lessen the burden (but this is dependent on funding availability). For students, the answer is likely fewer conventional course requirements (like readings and assignments) to account for the time spent working directly on the CEL project and building a relationship with their community partner. Practically, however, this may be difficult as although CEL is substantively different to traditional university

courses, it still exists within a university context and needs to maintain those conventional course elements that make it creditable and palatable to academic institutions.

Institutional support

As described previously, there is tension between UVic promoting CEL and including experiential learning as a part of its strategic vision, yet not adequately supporting CEL courses. I argued earlier that the university needs to invest in and provide more support for CEL. However, I also question: institutional support often also comes with increased oversight, and would CEL participants therefore *want* more institutional support? Would the students have the same experience as they did in Sociology 439 if there was more oversight from the university (for example, would the same critical conversations about higher education and sociology as a discipline be able to occur if, say, the university prescribed specific learning outcomes that altered the syllabus)? Would CEL be or feel as transformational for students if it felt more 'inside the system'? Many students in this cohort—and indeed, many sociology students in general—have a distrust and cynicism towards institutional interference and I fear that *too* much institutional backing of CEL may take away the magic of the CEL experience for students. A careful balance needs to be struck of institutional support without heavy handedness or excessive oversight (Saltmarsh et al., 2015).

This balance can only be achieved when the university dedicates itself to understanding the core of CEL pedagogy and the true benefits and challenges for students, community partners, and instructors. UVic has a Community-Engaged Learning Office which, thanks to the dedication of and momentum generated by the long-standing manager of the office (who recently resigned from this role), does tremendous work to connect students and instructors to community partners and support projects (acknowledging that I am biased, as I previously worked in this

office). However, for the last several years, the CEL Office has had only one permanent full-time staff member and therefore limited capacity. Until recently, this office was part of the university's Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation centre, which (in my opinion) was a good fit as it placed the pedagogy of CEL as the priority. In 2023, the CEL Office was moved into the Co-operative Education and Career centre. Be this an institutional politics decision or a financial one, this move may reveal the university's fundamental misunderstanding of the goal of CEL, which is not just to prepare students for their careers (although this is a positive outcome from CEL participation), but to help students learn about themselves and their discipline. It dismisses the pedagogy behind CEL and reduces CEL to a labour market training program, which is not far off from other accusations against the neoliberal structure of post-secondary institutions and their evolution towards training workers instead of developing engaged citizens with critical thinking skills (Lucal, 2015; Otto & Dunens, 2021; Senter et al., 2020). What more do we need to do to prove the value and purpose of CEL goes beyond preparing graduates for the workforce? With this structural change of where the CEL Office sits within the university indicating a larger shift in institutional priorities, it is possible that the life cycle of institutional support for CEL has entered into its next phase, wherein faculty, students, and community partners will need to fight more than ever to ensure CEL is supported at UVic.

I argue that the university has some work to do to in order to achieve what they propose in their strategic plan (as outlined in the Introduction chapter of this thesis). UVic claims to support CEL and encourage experiential learning for students, but more effort should be put towards understanding what occurs in CEL experiences and the hard work that goes into making them successful. This includes learning about students and faculty experiences, but also necessitates careful consideration of the community partners—many of whom put great time and

effort into supporting CEL at UVic and, as found in this research, *want* the ongoing relationship with the university (Davis et al., 2019). A better institutional understanding of CEL by the senior executive should result in more support for this program.

Summary

This chapter has discussed the benefits and challenges of CEL for students, community partners, and faculty, and the outcomes and key takeaways from the research. Although CEL requires time, effort, and commitment from all three parties, it is beneficial and fulfilling to those involved. Benefits of CEL for students include community in the classroom; developing the identity of a sociologist; the opportunity to do something meaningful; and experiencing personal growth. These benefits are realized alongside several challenges experienced, which include the workload, communications with community partners, and imposter syndrome.

The benefits of CEL for community partners include tangible outputs (reports, survey data, etc.); the injection of energy from students who bring fresh ideas to the organization; client benefits; university partnership and access to institution resources; and students who become community allies. Challenges for community partners include project development; student mindfulness; and student and university timelines.

Faculty experience one primary benefit of teaching using CEL, which is the personal fulfillment from seeing students grow and develop over the course experience. Challenges of CEL for faculty include the time and effort required for this style of teaching; designing the course structure for optimal student and community partner experiences without compromising course enrolment; financial support from the university; and effectively teaching reflection.

With these insights in mind, the following conclusions will answer the research questions, outline project limitations and opportunities for further research, and offer my closing thoughts.

Chapter VII: Conclusion

This research is guided by two overarching research questions:

1. What are the primary benefits and challenges to students, community partners, and instructor in one undergraduate community-engaged learning course?
2. In what ways do their experiences (benefits and challenges) intersect?

Benefits and Challenges

The primary benefits to students in Sociology 439 included the community in the classroom; development of an identity as a sociologist; the opportunity to do something meaningful in the community; and experiencing personal growth. In contrast, some commonly reported student benefits of CEL that did not surface in this research include the development of civic identity or an emphasis on civic engagement (Battistoni & Mitchell, 2018; Garoutte, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2016; Lake et al., 2021; Warren, 2012) and CEL contributing to students' sense of addressing social problems directly (Rocha Beardall, 2023; Snedker et al., 2023; Vance-Chalcroft & Jelks, 2023).

The primary challenges for students included the intense workload; communication with community partners; and experiencing and dealing with imposter syndrome. Several challenges of CEL for students that are reported in the literature that did not arise prominently in this research include the logistical challenges (e.g., scheduling time to complete CEL work, physically getting to community partners) students sometimes experience (Arantes do Amaral, 2019) or the lack of familiarity with CEL as a pedagogy (Ricke, 2021).

The primary benefits of participating in Sociology 439 for community partners were the tangible outputs received; the partnership with the university and access to university resources; the new energy students brought to the organization; the allyship students provide for the

organization after the CEL partnership has concluded; and client benefits that result from the CEL project.

Challenges for community partners included project development; varying levels of student mindfulness (and the potential risk this poses to the organization's clients); and working with the student within university timelines. Community partners in this research confirmed the benefits of CEL found in past research (Arantes do Amaral, 2019; Greenberg et al., 2020; Jakubowski & McIntosh, 2018; Rocha Beardall, 2023; Veyvoda & Van Cleave, 2020). However, one challenge that was not found in this research but has been reported in the literature is lack of clarity or understanding about expectations of the community partners (Davis et al., 2019). The absence of this challenge in my research is likely because most community partners had worked with the instructor and course before and therefore were already familiar with what CEL is and what was required of them.

The primary benefit experienced by the faculty member in this research was the personal fulfillment from witnessing the students' growth and development over the eight months of the course. The primary challenges included the time and effort required for Sociology 439; designing the course structure to satisfy competing priorities; financial support from the university; and effectively teaching students how to reflect. The primary faculty benefit of personal fulfillment aligns with the findings of Shostak et al. (2019), Snedker et al. (2023), and Tinkler et al. (2014). The benefits of CEL for faculty may increase as CEL develops profile and becomes a (larger) factor in tenure and promotion, although faculty will likely remain dedicated to CEL because of the personal fulfillment, not the career benefits.

Challenges for faculty that surfaced in this research which are not cited in past scholarship include lack of financial support for CEL from the university; designing an effective

course structure; and the challenges associated with teaching students how to reflect. Time and effort requirements and institution recognition and support are common challenges reported in the literature and were also found in this research (Garoutte, 2018; Hoschild et al., 2014; McKinney, 2018; Morton et al., 2019; Vance-Chalcraft & Jelks, 2023).

Although the primary benefits experienced by students, community partners, and the instructor differed, there is significant overlap in the challenges experienced. These intersections reveal the areas in which more work could be done to improve the CEL experience for all three stakeholder groups. This research also highlights some intersecting benefits and challenges that are underreported in common narratives about CEL in sociology, such as the students' development of a sociologist identity, the importance of the classroom community for student success, the lack of financial support for CEL from the institution, and the cyclical nature of CEL that is experienced by student cohorts (regardless of individual circumstances).

Insights from Studying Students, Community Partners, and Faculty Simultaneously

This discussion also outlined several outcomes and key takeaways across all three stakeholders. These include the life cycle of CEL; influence of the instructor; communication challenges between students and community partners; refining project scope; students' career preparation; workload for students and the instructor; and institutional support.

The benefits and challenges experienced by students, community partners, and faculty are necessarily connected. For example, students do something meaningful by creating tangible deliverables for community partners. The instructor is challenged by designing a two semester course structure and seeing lower enrolment, but students and community partners benefitted from the longer course timeline. Students' personal growth and development of a sociologist

identity creates personal fulfillment for the instructor. Drawing these connections is important in understanding *why* CEL is complex, challenging, and often transformational.

Tracing the experiences of all three stakeholder groups from beginning to end of this CEL course reveals areas where all are satisfied and areas where gaps may be addressed. For example, without the knowledge that both students and community partners find communication challenging, there may never be attempts to mitigate this within CEL experiences. As CEL has the potential for far-reaching ripple effects (for students, community partners, and instructors, but also for university departments, institutions, organizations and their clients, and the wider community), understanding challenges is key to reducing associated risks (Chazdon & Langan, 2017). In my view, these challenges are best studied in their relational context as what one stakeholder group experiences is seldom isolated. The intersections of student, community partner, and instructor experiences also reveal just how influential CEL is in communities on and off campus.

Limitations and Future Research

This research was limited to one undergraduate sociology course and therefore one instructor, one student cohort, and a specific set of community partners. Therefore, it was exploratory in nature and may not be representative of all CEL experiences. It also only included students from one discipline and therefore may not be applicable to those outside of sociology, although some findings may transcend disciplines. The research was also limited by the data collection methods chosen; for example, online surveys were chosen for community partners so as to limit the time required to participate. However, the survey participation decreased with every survey and important experiential feedback was missed due to lack of participation.

Future research should continue to focus on studying the experience of all three stakeholder groups simultaneously to continue to uncover gaps and challenges in CEL. Concerted effort should go towards collecting data from community partners and faculty, who are underrepresented in literature on CEL when compared with research on the student experience. Particular attention to the challenges faced by community partners (perhaps through a more direct data collection method such as interviews or focus groups) may return more fulsome feedback. Future research should also examine and compare CEL experiences across disciplines, across instructors, across student and community partner cohorts, and across post-secondary institutions, particularly in Canadian contexts (as the majority of current research stems from the United States). There would also be value in conducting research on CEL courses that are mandatory to eliminate the self-selection bias of students who are already interested in community work (as is the case with this research).

Concluding Thoughts

Those who have had the privilege of experiencing CEL understand the power of this pedagogy. While it is challenging and time-consuming, it can produce benefits for those involved that have profound ripple effects on individuals' lives. As an avenue for public sociology, CEL is a method of addressing those social problems that haunt students after reading and writing about them year after year, class after class. As much as this research has solidified my belief in CEL as a tool for teaching, learning, and contributing to society, it has also raised questions about its status in the institution and how that can be improved so that students, community partners, and faculty continue to have (or create) CEL opportunities. I end this thesis—and with it, my own life cycle as a graduate student and researcher before returning to my 'regular' life of full-time working policy sociologist—inspired to keep advocating for CEL in whatever small ways I can,

in hopes that the individuals who read my work or experience CEL firsthand will be also recognize this pedagogy's transformative potential and grow the network of advocates.

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Appendix A: Ethics Certificates

University of Victoria

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR	**Bruce Ravelli** (Supervisor)	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER** Expedited review - delegated	**21-0149**
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT	**Alexandra Haupt** **Master's student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE	27-Jul-2021
UVIC DEPARTMENT	**Sociology SOCI**	APPROVED ON	27-Jul-2021
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE	26-Jul-2022

PROJECT TITLE **Before, during and after: A case study of community-engagement**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS **None**

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING
University of Victoria (UVIC), University of Victoria

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL
tcps2_core_certificate.pdf - 21-Jun-2021
Data Collection Questions.docx - 21-Jun-2021
Further info re Reflective Journals.docx - 15-Jul-2021
Recruitment and survey email drafts.docx - 18-Jul-2021
Participant Consent Form_Instructor_V2.docx - 18-Jul-2021
Participant consent form_Students_V2.docx - 18-Jul-2021
survey consent info_V2.docx - 18-Jul-2021

CONDITIONS OF APPROVAL

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Modifications
To make any changes to the approved research procedures in your study, please submit a "Request for Modification" form. You must receive ethics approval before proceeding with your modified protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropiate standards of ethcis as outlines by the University of Victoria Research Regulations Involving Human Participants.

[redacted]

Dr. Rachael Scarth
Associate VP Research Operations

University of Victoria

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval - Annual Renewal

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	**Bruce Ravelli** (Supervisor)	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER** Expedited review - delegated	**21-0149**
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT:	**Alexandra Haupt** **Master's student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	27-Jul-2021
UVIC DEPARTMENT:	**Sociology SOCI**	APPROVED ON:	23-Jun-2022
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	26-Jul-2023

PROJECT TITLE: **Before, during and after: A case study of community-engagement**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: **None**

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING:
University of Victoria (UVIC), University of Victoria

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
tcps2_core_certificate.pdf - 21-Jun-2021
Data Collection Questions.docx - 21-Jun-2021
Further info re Reflective Journals.docx - 15-Jul-2021
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Participant consent form_Students_V2.docx - 18-Jul-2021
survey consent info_V2.docx - 18-Jul-2021

Conditions of approval

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Amendments
To make changes to the approved research procedure in your study, please submit "Amendments" or "Annual renewal with amendments" form. You must receive research ethics approval before proceeding with your amended protocol.

Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a “Request for Renewal” form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a “Notice of Project Completion” form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.

University of Victoria

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Certificate of Approval - Annual Renewal

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	**Bruce Ravelli** (Supervisor)	**ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER** Expedited review - delegated	**21-0149**
PRINCIPAL APPLICANT:	**Alexandra Kroeker** **Master's student**	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	27-Jul-2021
UVIC DEPARTMENT:	**Sociology SOCI**	APPROVED ON:	13-Jul-2023
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	26-Jul-2024

PROJECT TITLE: **Before, during and after: A case study of community-engagement**

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS: **None**

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING:
University of Victoria (UVIC), University of Victoria

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
tcps2_core_certificate.pdf - 21-Jun-2021
Data Collection Questions.docx - 21-Jun-2021
Further info re Reflective Journals.docx - 15-Jul-2021
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Renewals
Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a “Request for Renewal” form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a “Notice of Project Completion” form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.

Appendix B: Student Consent Form

University of Victoria

Participant Consent Form

Before, During and After: A Case Study of Community Engagement

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Before, During, and After: A Case Study of Community Engagement that is being conducted by Dr. Bruce Ravelli and Alexandra Haupt.

Bruce Ravelli is a Teaching Professor in the department of Sociology at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by email at [removed]. Alexandra Haupt is a graduate student and research assistant in the department of Sociology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her by email at [removed]. Any questions you may ask of Alexandra will be held in confidence and not be shared with Bruce.

As a graduate student, Alexandra is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Sociology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Bruce Ravelli, who you may contact with any questions at the email above.

This research is being funded by an Experiential Learning Fund grant from the University of Victoria's Community-Engaged Learning Office (Division of Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation).

Purpose and Objectives
The purpose of this research project is to explore, examine, and understand a community-engaged learning (CEL) experience throughout a two-semester course (Sociology 439A & 439B). This project will investigate the experiences of the 3 primary stakeholders in the course: the undergraduate students, the community partner organizations, and the course instructor.

Importance of this Research
Research of this type is important because we are not aware of any research following a CEL course experience from beginning to end for the students, community partners, and the instructor. This research will offer an important contribution to our understanding of the experiences of the three primary stakeholders in CEL courses. This research will inform CEL practice by documenting the real-world experiences across an entire, two-semester undergraduate sociology course.

Participants Selection
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are an undergraduate Sociology student who is enrolled in Sociology 439A and 439B: Applied Sociology: Community-Engaged Sociology I & II.

What is involved
If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include three components:

1) Online surveys: You will be asked to complete four anonymous surveys online via the TooFast platform. You will be emailed a link for each survey in August 2021, November 2021, March 2022, and October 2022. Each survey will require approximately 15 minutes to complete and will be done on your own time. You may choose to complete none, some, or all of the surveys.
2) Reflection assignments: Over the course of Sociology 439A & 439B, you are required to write and hand in 6 reflections on the process of community-engaged learning. While these assignments are mandatory to fulfill course requirements, you may choose to submit an extra copy of any or all reflections to be included as data. To do so, you may bring an extra paper copy of your reflection (without your name on it) on the due date and drop it in the "For Research Study" dropbox, or you may email a copy to her using the email address above (using this method indicates that you will **not** be anonymous to Alexandra due to being able to identify your email address). Reflections are graded by the course instructor as a mandatory component of your final course grades, but submitting your reflection(s) for use in this research project is **optional**. You may submit as many or few reflection assignments as you choose, and submitting one does not mean you need to submit all your reflection assignments.
3) Focus groups: Two focus groups will occur. The first is scheduled for mid-October 2021 and the second is scheduled for mid-February 2022. Focus groups will be audio-recorded for the purpose of transcription. Focus groups will be approximately one hour and will occur during class time in the UVic classroom where the class meets weekly. Should you not wish to participate in one or both focus groups, the time that the focus group takes place will be shared ahead of time and you can choose to not attend class during that time. The course instructor will not be present for either focus group.
4) Observation: Alexandra will be joining Sociology 439A & 439B seminars from September 2021-April 2022. Over the course of these 8 months, she may take notes regarding what is being discussed in the classroom. At no point will she record names or any identifying details of students or community partners. Notes will be focused on general observations about the themes that are coming up in class discussions. This element of data collection will require no extra time commitment from you as a participant, as it will all occur during regular class time. She will only include you (anonymously/without identifying details) in her notes if you consent to participate in the research by signing at the bottom of this form.

Please note:

- **All** data will be collected and analyzed by the research assistant and participation **will not** be linked to your grades for this course. The course instructor will have no knowledge of who participates.
- The course instructor, Bruce, is the co-developer of the TooFast platform (the technology that will host the online surveys for this research project). However, the software is designed such that not even the developers can trace survey participants (i.e., IP addresses). While Bruce maintains the TooFast platform, he will have no ability to access any information shared in surveys on the platform and will not be able to identify who has completed surveys on TooFast.
- If you choose to submit a paper copy of your reflection assignment(s), Bruce will not be in the room during the collection of these; therefore, he will not know whether or not you submit your reflection assignment(s) as data.
- Participating in one aspect of the research does not mean you must participate in all aspects. If you just want to do the surveys and focus groups but not submit reflections, or you only want to submit your reflections but not participate in other aspects, any combination of activities (or none!) is okay and you will never be penalized for participating or not participating.

Inconvenience
Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including time for filling out each survey, time for emailing your reflection(s) if you wish to submit them as data, and/or printing out second copies of any reflection assignments if you choose to submit them that way.

Risks
There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research: you may be concerned that your choice to participate in the research or **not** participate in the research may put your grades for Sociology 439A & 439B at risk. You may also be concerned that sharing something negative or contradictory about the course or the instructor may result in a poor grade.

To prevent these risks the following steps will be taken: your choice of whether or not to participate in the research will not be shared with the course instructor; only the research assistant (Alexandra) will have this knowledge. The research assistant will have no part in assigning grades or marking assignments. All information you share in surveys or focus groups will be read only by the research assistant. Data collected will be shared with the course instructor only once Sociology 439B final grades are submitted, with one exception: in the case where a participant discloses something during a focus group that could put you or someone else at severe risk, the research assistant will be obligated to seek help, which may include notifying the course instructor or the Sociology department chair, for safety reasons. For data collected through reflection assignments and in-class observations, the course instructor will already know about it because it is part of regular class activities.

Benefits
The potential benefits of your participation in this research include the opportunity to reflect more deeply about the CEL experience. Reflection may be beneficial to increasing the learning in CEL, particularly for students.
By undertaking this research, we may develop ways to improve the CEL experience. This may result in improving the quality of students' CEL projects for their community partners, in turn improving community partners' capacity (including improved services and/or improved understanding about the issues important to their work).

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time prior without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, data may or may not be possible to remove based on the data type:

- Should you choose to withdraw from any survey before submitting your answers, the data from that survey will not be included in the research. If you submit the survey, survey data will be impossible to remove from the database due to the anonymous nature.
- Focus group and observational data will be impossible to remove due to the group setting it is derived from. However, you may leave the classroom at any time to withdraw from the focus group partway through. Any data gathered from group settings will be generalized; any identifying details will be removed.
- Any or all reflection assignments may be withdrawn from the database up until May 1, 2022 by emailing the research assistant (Alexandra) with the request. Paper copies that are submitted anonymously will be removed and shredded (however, participants must share the first sentence of their assignment with the research assistant so that she can identify which reflection is theirs). Reflections that are emailed to the research assistant will be erased from any computer or USB stick where they are being stored.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants
The lead researcher in this project (Bruce) is also your course instructor. However, although Bruce has initiated this research, all data collection and analysis will be completed by the research assistant (Alexandra). The course instructor will have no knowledge of who is participating and choosing whether or not to participate (as well as anything you might share during the course of the research) will have no impact on your course grades. The research assistant will not share data collected from surveys, reflection assignments, focus groups, or in-class observations with the course instructor until after Sociology 439B grades have been submitted.

On-going Consent
To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will:

- Ask you to re-affirm your consent before beginning each survey.
- Remind you of your ability to withdraw from the research without penalty before each focus group.
- Remind you that you may withdraw your reflection assignments at any point until May 1, 2022.

By submitting a copy of your reflection assignment(s), you are giving implied consent for use of that assignment as data for this research project. You will be reminded of this at the time of submission of the reflection assignment(s) by Alexandra as well as the following information posted on the "For Research Study" dropbox: "By providing your anonymous reflective assignment for research purposes, you indicate that you understand the conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this part of the research project."

Anonymity
In terms of protecting your anonymity, all participants will be anonymous in the dissemination of the results and will be assigned a pseudonym.

Confidentiality
The confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing electronic data on a password-protected computer and USB stick, with additional password protection on all files related to the research. Paper data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the research assistant's home office. If you wish to be sent a copy of the research results and include your email address for this purpose at the end of this form, your email address poses a risk to confidentiality. Your email address will be stored by the research assistant (Alexandra) on a locked file on her computer and will only be shared with the course instructor (Bruce) at the end of the project for the purpose of sending out the research results.

Your confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed due to the group environment in which focus groups occur. Therefore, your classmates may be able to identify your data in the final results of the research. In addition, the nature of focus groups means that information will be shared in a group setting. In order to mitigate the potential risks of this, we will work with the following ground rules for our two focus groups:
1) Participants may skip questions that do not wish to answer at any time with no repercussions;
2) Conversation is welcome but respectful discussion is expected;
3) All information discussed in the focus group should be kept within that group;

4) However, although we would ask that information is kept within the group, as it is a group activity, confidentiality from the group cannot be fully guaranteed and students should therefore only share things they are comfortable with sharing.

Dissemination of Results
It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: published journal article, presentations at scholarly meetings, Master's thesis (including the publication of the thesis online via UVicSpace), and a final grant report and materials created for use by the Community-Engaged Learning Office at UVic.

Disposal of Data
Data from this study will be disposed of by May 2023. All paper data will be shredded and electronic data will be erased.

Contacts
Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Dr. Bruce Ravelli and Alexandra Haupt.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in the two focus groups and in-class observations that comprise part of this research project.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

(Reminder: Consent to participate in the online anonymous surveys will be collected at the beginning of each online survey; you will give implied consent for the use of your reflection assignment(s) as data for the research if you submit a copy of your reflection assignment(s).)

Please initial here if you would like to be sent a copy of the results of this research project:
_____

If you would like to be emailed a copy of the research results at the conclusion of the study, please write your email address here: _____

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix C: Community Partner Survey Ethics Preamble

Before, During and After: A Case Study of Community Engagement

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Before, During, and After: A Case Study of Community Engagement that is being conducted by Dr. Bruce Ravelli and Alexandra Haupt.

Bruce Ravelli is a Teaching Professor in the department of Sociology at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by email at [removed]. Alexandra Haupt is a graduate student and research assistant in the department of Sociology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her by email at [removed].

As a graduate student, Alexandra is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Sociology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Bruce Ravelli, who you may contact with any questions at the email above.

This research is being funded by an Experiential Learning Fund grant from the University of Victoria's Community-Engaged Learning Office (Division of Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation).

Purpose and Objectives
The purpose of this research project is to explore, examine, and understand a community-engaged learning (CEL) experience throughout a two-semester course (Sociology 439A and 439B). This project will investigate the experiences of the 3 primary stakeholders in the course: the undergraduate students, the community partner organizations, and the course instructor.

Importance of this Research
Research of this type is important because we are not aware of any research following a CEL course experience from beginning to end for the students, community partners, and the instructor. This research will offer an important contribution to our understanding of the experiences of the three primary stakeholders in CEL courses. This research will inform CEL practice by documenting the real-world experiences across an entire, two-semester undergraduate sociology course.

Participants Selection
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a community partner who works at a local organization in Victoria who has agreed to mentor an undergraduate Sociology student who is enrolled in Sociology 439A and 439B: Applied Sociology: Community-Engaged Sociology I and II.

What is involved
If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will involve completion of the following survey. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Inconvenience

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including time for filling out each survey (approximately 15 minutes per survey).

Risks
There are no known or anticipated risks to you for participation in this study.

Benefits
The potential benefits of your participation in this research include the opportunity to reflect more deeply about the CEL experience. By undertaking this research, we may develop ways to improve the CEL experience. This may result in improving the quality of students' CEL projects for their community partners, in turn improving community partners' capacity (including improved services and/or improved understanding about the issues important to their work).

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time prior without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, data may or may not be possible to remove based on the data type: should you choose to withdraw from any survey before submitting your answers, the data from that survey will not be included in the research. If you submit the survey, survey data will be impossible to remove from the database due to the anonymous nature.

Should you wish to withdraw from the survey at any point before submitting your answers, you may simply close the survey window and your data will not be collected.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants
The lead researcher in this project (Bruce) is also the course instructor with whom you engage in work with. However, although Bruce has initiated this research, all data collection and analysis will be completed by the research assistant (Alexandra). The course instructor will have no knowledge of who is participating and choosing whether or not to participate (as well as anything you might share during the course of the research) will have no impact on your relationship with Bruce or UVic.

On-going Consent
To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will ask you to re-affirm your consent before beginning each survey.

Anonymity and Confidentiality
All data collected in this survey will be anonymous and confidential. In terms of protecting your anonymity, all participants will be anonymous in the dissemination of the results and will be assigned a pseudonym. The confidentiality of the data will be protected by storing electronic data on a password-protected computer and USB stick, with additional password protection on all files related to the research. Paper data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the research assistant's home office.

Dissemination of Results

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways: published journal article, presentations at scholarly meetings, Master's thesis, and a final grant report and materials created for use by the Community-Engaged Learning Office at UVic.

Disposal of Data
Data from this study will be disposed of by May 2023. All paper data will be shredded and electronic data will be erased.

Contacts
Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Dr. Bruce Ravelli and Alexandra Haupt.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

By clicking the button below, you indicate that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

Appendix D: Instructor Consent Form

University of Victoria

Participant Consent Form

Before, During and After: A Case Study of Community Engagement

You are invited to participate in a study entitled Before, During, and After: A Case Study of Community Engagement that is being conducted by Dr. Bruce Ravelli and Alexandra Haupt.

Bruce Ravelli is a Teaching Professor in the department of Sociology at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions by email at [removed]. Alexandra Haupt is a graduate student and research assistant in the department of Sociology at the University of Victoria and you may contact her by email at [removed].

As a graduate student, Alexandra is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Sociology. It is being conducted under the supervision of Bruce Ravelli, who you may contact with any questions at the email above.

This research is being funded by an Experiential Learning Fund grant from the University of Victoria's Community-Engaged Learning Office (Division of Learning and Teaching Support and Innovation).

Purpose and Objectives
The purpose of this research project is to explore, examine, and understand a community-engaged learning (CEL) experience throughout a two-semester course (Sociology 439A & 439B). This project will investigate the experiences of the 3 primary stakeholders in the course: the undergraduate students, the community partner organizations, and the course instructor.

Importance of this Research
Research of this type is important because we are not aware of any research following a CEL course experience from beginning to end for the students, community partners, and the instructor. This research will offer an important contribution to our understanding of the experiences of the three primary stakeholders in CEL courses. This research will inform CEL practice by documenting the real-world experiences across an entire, two-semester undergraduate sociology course.

Participants Selection
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are the course instructor teaching Sociology 439A and 439B: Applied Sociology: Community-Engaged Sociology I & II.

What is involved
If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include three interviews which will each last up to one hour. Interviews will take place in a convenient location of your choosing. The first interview will take place late August/early September 2021; the second will take place early January 2022; and the third will take place in May 2022.

Inconvenience
Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including the time required for each interview (total up to 3 hours).

Risks
There are no known or anticipated risks to you for participating in this research.

Benefits
The potential benefits of your participation in this research include the opportunity to reflect more deeply about the CEL experience. This research project will help inform how these courses are run in the future based on feedback from students. It may also benefit you by introducing ideas for changing/improving your teaching and/or approach to the courses. By undertaking this research, we may develop ways to improve the CEL experience. This may result in improving the quality of students' CEL projects for their community partners, in turn improving community partners' capacity (including improved services and/or improved understanding about the issues important to their work).

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time prior or during an interview without any consequences or any explanation. If you do withdraw from the study, you may choose to have your data withdrawn, or give permission for any information shared up to the point of withdrawal to be used in the research.

On-going Consent
To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will ask you to verbally re-affirm your consent to participate at the beginning of each interview.

Anonymity
In terms of protecting your anonymity, you will be assigned a pseudonym for the dissemination of research results.

Confidentiality
Your confidentiality will be limited due to your position. As the only instructor (to date) for Sociology 439A & 439B, you will be able to be identified through information publicly available on UVic's course calendar. As you are the only instructor participating in this research project, any reference to the course instructor in the dissemination of the results will be identifiable as you.

Dissemination of Results
It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with you and others in the following ways: published journal article, presentations at scholarly meetings, Master's thesis, and a final grant report and materials created for use by the Community-Engaged Learning Office at UVic.

Disposal of Data
Data from this study will be disposed of by May 2023. All paper data will be shredded and electronic data will be erased.

Contacts
Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Dr. Bruce Ravelli and Alexandra Haupt.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria.

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix E: Introduction Email from Sociology Department Secretary Introducing Researcher and Recruiting Students

Hi everyone,

As you prepare for Sociology 439A to begin in September, I wanted to let you know about a research project that is happening this year. Your instructor, Bruce Ravelli, has received some funding from UVic's CEL office to take a look at the CEL experience of both the Sociology 439A & 439B students and community partners next year. The purpose of the research is to better understand what students and community partners experience before, during and after the course.

The data collection and analysis will be done by Bruce's research assistant (RA), Alexandra Haupt. You will meet her in September, as she will be attending the 439A & 439B weekly seminars. Alexandra is also a graduate student (whom Bruce is supervising) in the Sociology department and the data collected through this research will be used for her thesis. She will be responsible for the day-to-day processes for this research. As students are the central focus of this project, your participation and sharing of your thoughts and experiences is highly valued. To be clear, the RA will manage this process and Bruce nor I will have no knowledge of who decides to participate and who does not – therefore, there is no potential for this to impact your grades for Sociology 439A or 439B.

Please see the attached *Invitation to Participate* and *Consent Form* for more detailed information about the project. Please feel free to email me, Bruce, or Alexandra if you have any questions about the project.
If you would like to participate, please sign and return the consent form to Alexandra by email as soon as possible. (Please note that you do not need to sign this consent form to participate in the survey below, as the survey has separate consent information at the outset.)

The first opportunity for data collection is an anonymous online survey that will assess some of your views before the course begins. Completing the survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. If you would like to complete the survey, please click this link: [link removed]. Password: watermelon
The survey needs to be completed by September 13, 2021.

Sincerely,
Zoe

Appendix F: Research Invitation Email from Researcher to Community Partners

Good morning,

My name is Alexandra Haupt and I am currently working as a research assistant for Bruce Ravelli. Some of you may recognize my name as I also work in the Community-Engaged Learning Office at UVic!

I am emailing you this morning as you are currently working with one of Bruce's Sociology 439 students to shepherd the student through a community-engaged learning experience/project over the course of the next several months. As I believe Bruce has mentioned in a previous email to you, I am currently running a research project around the course experience for the students, Bruce as the instructor, and hopefully you all as community partners! This project is also forming the basis of my thesis research as I work to complete my Master of Arts in Sociology.

I am currently collecting data from community partners before the CEL project gets going in earnest.
If you would like to participate, please follow this link to the first survey: [link removed]
Password: orange

It should take no more than 10 or 15 minutes and is completely anonymous. I will also be sending out 2 more surveys over the course of the experience which you may also, of course, opt in or out of (and doing one survey does not mean you are obligated to do all of them!). If possible, **please complete the survey by October 22nd.**

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to get in touch with me or Bruce.

Wishing you a lovely day,

Alexandra Haupt[5]

[5] I got married in the time between writing this email and completing this thesis. Haupt is my maiden name.

Appendix G: Student Survey Questions

Survey for Students #1 (distributed August 2021)

1. What year are you in?
    a. 3rd year
    b. 4th year
    c. 5th year
    d. Other: please explain
2. Do you plan to graduate in Spring 2022?
    a. Yes
    b. No
    c. Unsure
3. Why did you decide to take this class? (Check all that apply)
    a. Reputation of course
    b. Reputation of instructor
    c. Interest in helping the community
    d. Interest in topic of applied sociology
    e. Course is a good timetable fit
    f. Just need to get a 400-level credit
    g. Other: please explain
4. How would you define community-engaged learning (CEL)?
5. Do you currently, or have you ever, volunteered for a community organization?
    a. Yes.
    b. No.
    c. If yes, please tell us about your volunteer experience.
6. What are you excited about/looking forward to in this course?
7. What are you concerned about/nervous about for this course?
8. Do you currently use any reflection activities in your day-to-day life? (for example, journaling, meditation, etc.) Please explain.

Survey for Students #2 (distributed November 2021)

1. So far, is this class meeting your expectations?
2. What, if anything, are you enjoying about the course?
3. What, if anything, has been challenging about the course?
4. What, if anything, are you concerned about going forward with both Sociology 439A & 439B?
5. Are there any changes you think should be made to (Sociology 439A ONLY)?
6. Do you think the assessment structure for this course is reasonable? Please explain why or why not.
7. How well do you think this course has prepared you (so far) to undertake CEL? Please explain.

Survey for Students #3 (distributed May 2022)

1. Given your entire course experience from September 2021 to April 2022, what were the best things about Sociology 439?
2. What, if anything, was challenging about Sociology 439? (thinking about the entire 8 months of being in the course and doing CEL)

3. What, if anything, could Sociology 439 have included that might have helped you complete your project?
4. To what extent has your CEL experience helped you better understand sociology, if at all?
5. Do you feel more prepared for post-graduation because of your CEL experience? Why or why not?
6. Could Bruce include anything else in Sociology 439A & 439B to help you prepare for your career and/or life after graduation?
7. What are your key takeaways (good and/or bad) from this CEL experience?

Appendix H: Student Focus Group Questions

Student Focus Group #1 (October 26, 2021)

1. What is going well so far with the course and/or CEL experience, if anything?
2. What challenges, if any, are you experiencing?
3. What kind of preparation would you like to see in 439A to help you in your CEL project?
4. What, if anything, are you looking forward to in the course and/or the CEL experience?
5. What are three words you feel summarize your experience in this course/CEL experience so far?

Student Focus Group #2 (March 8, 2022)

1. Going around the room—please rate on a scale of 1-10 how your project is going. Why?
2. Is this course helping you learn about sociology? How?
3. *Raise your hand* did you see yourself as a sociologist prior to this course? And now, since having been in this course?
4. Is this course shaping your identity as a sociologist? If so, how?
5. What role has the sense of community built in class played in how you are experiencing the course?
6. Some of you have had an easier time than others building relationships with your community partner. Whether it has gone well or poorly, what factors do you think impacted building the relationship?
7. Which elements (if any) of the class this semester have you enjoyed or found useful?
8. What elements would you add or did you feel were missing?
9. Has this class given you any more clarity on what you want to do after graduation? (career-wise or other)

Appendix I: Community Partner Survey Questions

Survey for Community Partners #1 (distributed August 2021)

1. How many times have you worked with Bruce and his Sociology students?
    a. 0 times (this is my first time)
    b. Once
    c. Twice
    d. Three times
2. Have you participated in other Community-Engaged Learning experiences with other courses, students, or instructors at UVic? If so, please explain briefly what the experience(s) was/were.
3. What, if anything, are you excited about when working with the students?
4. What, if anything, are you nervous/concerned about when working with the students?
5. Is there anything Bruce can do to help alleviate any concerns you have?

Survey for Community Partners #2 (distributed January 2022)

1. How do you feel your students did with developing the project for your organization? Provide any feedback you feel would be helpful.
2. Is the student project something your organization would have done anyway (i.e., without the student's help)? Please explain.
3. What has been going well with the student(s) up to this point?
4. What could be improved (about the student's work or the CEL process more generally) moving forward?
5. Is there anything else you would like us to know?

Survey for Community Partners #3 (distributed May 2022)

1. Are you satisfied with the work the student(s) did for your organization? Why or why not?
2. What did the student(s) do well?
3. What could the student(s) have improved upon?
4. How would you summarize the year working with the students?
5. How would you summarize the year working with Bruce?
6. Given your experience, what could be improved when the next time Sociology 439A & 439B is offered?

Appendix J: Instructor Interview Questions

Instructor Interview #1 Questions (September 2021)

1. What, if anything, are you looking forward to with Sociology 439A & 439B?
2. What, if anything, are you worried/concerned about?
3. How do you think the CEL experience will be different in a two-semester format (as compared to the previous 1-semester format)?

Instructor Interview #2 Questions (January 2022)

1. How did the first semester (i.e., Sociology 439A) go?
2. What do you think went well?
3. What are you concerned about moving into the second half of the CEL experience (i.e., Sociology 439B)?
4. Are you satisfied with the quality of students' reflections? Why or why not?
5. What, if anything, would you change about Sociology 439A?

Instructor Interview #3 Questions (May 2022)

1. How did Sociology 439B go?
2. What do you think went well in Sociology 439B?
3. What, if anything, do you think didn't go well?
4. Were you satisfied with the students' projects? Please elaborate/explain.
5. What overall reflections do you have on the past year in regard to both courses?
6. What would you change (if anything) about Sociology 439B?