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### Learning in Action: The Value of Community Based Learning

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# LEARNING IN ACTION: THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY BASED LEARNING



By Kai Cooper and  
Kelly Fortner

Every year, more than 1,000 HSU students take their learning out of the classroom and into the community through a variety of partnerships with off-campus organizations. These community-based learning courses include Service Learning, Academic Internships, clinical placements, student teaching, and practicums. What connects all of these experiences is the combination of off-campus learning with on-campus academic credit and support.

One student commented, “I would definitely recommend community-based learning to other students because it helps you get involved while doing something good for your career and the community.”

Community-based learning transcends the classroom by providing opportunities to deepen student understanding of curriculum by connecting academic concepts to real world scenarios. These practices foster student academic development as well as professional and personal growth. They not only enhance the classroom experience but also foster relationships between our students, campus, and the community. In many ways, these practices also strive to meet community needs. The American Association of Colleges and Universities designated community-based learning as a High Impact Practice (HIP). HIPs have shown to increase engagement and retention at institutions across the country.

Experience is valued in community-based learning. Cochran-Smith and Lytle<sup>1</sup> discuss three main types of teaching styles: knowledge-for-practice, knowledge-in-practice, and knowledge-of-practice. Community-based learning inhabits the “knowledge-in-practice” space, where knowledge is acquired through experience, reflection and discussion. Students are actively engaged in learning, both in and outside of the classroom. Applying knowledge learned in the classroom to their community experience and reflecting on those experiences reinforces the content and deepens student learning. All while gaining practical experience that enhances students’ marketability upon graduation.

“It is a way to learn outside of the classroom and shape you into a new person. I feel I learned a lot and engaged in the community in a positive way,” another student who took a community-based learning class said.

Humboldt State University offers a growing number of community-based learning classes that encompass a range of activities that meet community needs: from sorting food at the local food bank, to designing curriculum for a local school, to training to become a social worker, nurse or teacher at local organizations. The Center for Community Based Learning supports these practices to foster mutually beneficial relationships between students, community partners, and faculty. Community-based learning can happen within any discipline or across disciplines, providing hands-on experience in the field one wishes to pursue.

When asked what the single most important thing their community-based learning experience did for them, one student responded, “It is a great way to meet other students and get involved at HSU. It is a one of a kind learning opportunity and it prepares you for the real world.”

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1 Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. I. (1999). Relationships of knowledge and practice: Teacher learning in communities. *Review of Research in Education*, 24, 249–305.

