

## **The Impact of COVID-19: Faculty Perspectives on Community-Based Learning**

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The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher education has been well-documented (e.g., see Contact North, 2021; Higher Education Data Sharing Consortium, 2021). Trends such as enrollment decreases, reduced budgets, and increased demand for support services are at the forefront of current discussions among higher education leaders (Zerbino, 2021). Students continue to balance the value of higher education with concerns over physical and mental health, technology (e.g., shifts to online learning), institutional support (e.g., infrastructure availability, networking opportunities, transparent communication), and financial needs (The Maps Project, 2021). Minority populations and those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have been the most impacted and least satisfied with institutional responses to COVID-19 (The Maps Project, 2021). Community organizations have been affected with extensive shifts in their operations, and higher education institutions (HEIs) have pivoted to offer a range of course delivery modalities.

Community-based learning (CBL), a mutually beneficial community-higher education partnership that provides students with the opportunity to apply academic concepts to real-life contexts and community organizations with the opportunity to gain insights from evidence-based theories and current research (Brown University, 2020), depends on many variables for its success. These include stakeholder roles, curriculum, training, coordination logistics, student acceptance,

### **ABSTRACT**

Community-based learning (CBL) is a mutually beneficial partnership involving higher education institutions (HEIs), students, faculty, and the community. It provides students with the opportunity to apply academic concepts to real-life situations and community organizations with the opportunity to gain insights from evidence-based theories and current research. Significant changes for HEIs and businesses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as online course delivery, business lockdowns, telecommuting, and physical distancing, suggest a large potential impact on CBL practice and increased challenges for faculty members who manage CBL processes. This study explores the faculty perspective on CBL practices with a specific focus on the impact of COVID-19. Findings indicate that both institutions and faculty within them found innovative solutions for overcoming disruptions caused by the pandemic. The findings also indicate a range of practices related to support and training for CBL and overwhelming indicate strong faculty commitment to pedagogical approaches that deepen student learning while also benefiting local communities.

administrative support, evaluation, and rewards (Appe et al., 2016; Davidson-Shivers et al., 2005; Furco & Moely, 2012; LeCrom et al., 2016; O'Meara, 2013). Significant changes for HEIs and businesses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as online course delivery, business lockdowns, telecommuting, and physical distancing, suggest a potentially large impact on CBL practice and increased challenges for faculty members who manage CBL processes. This study explores the faculty perspective on CBL practices with a specific focus on the impact of COVID-19. The results of this study will provide new insights into the faculty experience, innovations resulting from COVID-19, and needed areas for improvement.

## **Literature Review**

As a high impact educational practice, CBL gives students experience applying academic concepts to solve community problems and encourages greater depth of learning through reflection (Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013). In this review, the terms CBL and service-learning are used interchangeably. Professional accreditation standards in some disciplines, such as business, encourage pedagogical practice that "promotes and fosters innovation, experiential learning, and a lifelong learning mindset," has a "positive societal impact" (AACSB International, 2020, p. 37), and particularly, involves "learner engagement between faculty and the community of business practitioners" (p. 39).

The benefits of CBL have been extensively documented (Eyler & Giles, 2001, Farber, 2011; Novak et al., 2007; Olberding, 2012; Olberding & Hacker, 2016; Warren 2012); however, a limited number of students realize its benefits. In one report, 17% of respondents estimated that 10-25% of graduating students had taken a service-learning course (Campus Compact, 2016). As such, much work remains to make CBL "central to the mission, policies, and day-to-day activities of universities" (Taylor & Kahlke, 2017, p. 138).

## **Barriers and Enablers**

A critical element of successful CBL implementation is the faculty. Barriers to adoption of new pedagogical practices in general include the absence of rewards or recognition (Davidson-Shivers et al., 2005), increased workload and fear of student resistance (Boice, 1990), lack of needed skills (Eisen & Barlett, 2006), philosophical differences, such as differing beliefs regarding teaching and learning or concerns over academic freedom (Halasz et al., 2006; Koslowski, 2006; Rice, 2006), and preference for the status quo (Koslowski, 2006). The latter is attested to by findings that the lecture method prevails in HEIs despite efforts to encourage high impact practices and their underlying elements (e.g., see Kuh, 2008; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013; Kuh et al., 2017). Only 18% of STEM faculty in American and Canadian HEIs report using teamwork and discussion in class while 55% rely on lectures and 27% on lectures with some student interaction (Stains et al., 2018).

Specific to CBL, faculty resistance has been attributed to the time needed to implement it and the competing demand for discipline-based publications (Leigh & Kenworthy, 2018; Lewing, 2019; Pearce, 2016). However, with appropriate administrative encouragement and related changes to tenure and promotion

requirements, it can be positioned as a way to integrate teaching, scholarship, and service while also improving institutional visibility (Cooper, 2014). However, limited administrative support is often cited as a barrier to faculty acceptance of CBL (Furco & Moely, 2012; Heffernan, 2001) due to failure to recognize the need for reassigned time for course redesign, instructional design support, help with partner coordination and logistics, and rewards and recognition (Andrade, 2020).

Faculty acceptance of CBL relies on institutions making their “intentions clear through mission statements, reward system criteria, and infrastructure support that either provides resources or helps create efficiencies of time” (Demb & Wade, 2012, pp. 362-363). Infrastructure support includes designated campus centers that enable faculty to establish community connections, prepare students for CBL, and manage the learning experience (Andrade, 2020). These units often provide professional development funding and assistance with curriculum redesign as well as faculty guidebooks, training, and stipends (Andrade, 2020). In fact, capacity for CBL is sometimes measured by increases in the number of units and extent of resources dedicated to CBL (e.g., see Campus Compact, 2014, 2015).

Another enabler for adopting CBL is training, which may be centralized or decentralized. Specific approaches to training may involve faculty learning communities that span disciplines (Furco & Moely, 2012; Robinson & Harkins, 2018) while others may focus on specific disciplinary needs for CBL and be offered through departments to encourage collaboration among faculty teaching similar content (Lewing, 2019). The identification of clear training goals, such as increasing faculty competencies, building awareness of available institutional support, or helping constituents recognize the potential for student and professional growth, is also an effective training strategy (Furco & Moely, 2012).

Dispositions also play a role in adoption of CBL. The nature of CBL may be uncomfortable for instructors accustomed to a controlled classroom environment as it involves relinquishing control, facilitating learning rather than lecturing, mentoring students, sharing decision making with external partners, resolving real-life problems, and accepting unpredictability (Andrade, 2020). It involves knowing that “theories which are taught as part of [a] course may be contradicted by the challenges that students experience on the ground” (University of Bristol, 2017, para. 2).

In addition to comfort with uncertainty, research has identified specific skill domains that enable CBL adoption, specifically, communication, empathy, and reflection (Johnson et al., 2010). Communication entails the ability to communicate with different audiences, listen, respond to, and value the contributions of others, and build on others’ knowledge; empathy involves sensitivity to diversity and inclusion issues, respect for differences, and relationship-building capacity; reflection encompasses welcoming feedback, reflecting on practice, self-evaluation, and seeking advice when needed. These skill domains can be enhanced through training and encourage with a more flexible approach to teaching and learning to address fears of relinquishing control.

## **Impact and Outcome Measures**

Different approaches to measuring the impact of CBL are evident in the literature. One is the extent to which CBL has been institutionalized on a campus. This involves determining if CBL is reflected in the mission, has appropriate levels of funding (e.g., for professional development and released time), is promoted by a formal core team of advocates, and if the institution provides a staff liaison between faculty members and community partners (Morton & Troppe, 1996). Although these determinants were identified quite some time ago, they are still relevant. In fact, Campus Compact surveys examine institutional support for CBL using measures such as by increases in the number of units and extent of resources, and particularly human resources, dedicated to CBL (Campus Compact, 2014, 2015).

Another approach to measuring impact is examining stakeholder experiences. Widely adopted by Campus Compact members, Gelmon et al.'s (2001) matrix identifies criteria for measuring student, faculty, community partner, and institutional outcomes. Specific to the faculty, it focuses on the following: 1) the motivation of faculty members to participate in service-learning – why they use it and what they gain from it, 2) the professional development needs of faculty members and how these are addressed through institutional support, 3) the impact/influence of CBL on teaching and how faculty members use it to engage students with the community, 4) the impact/influence on scholarship and the extent to which CBL introduces faculty members to new possibilities for research, 5) other areas of personal/professional impact such as increased faculty volunteerism, mentoring of students, or the adoption of new campus, community and classroom roles, 6) barriers to adoption such as workload, and facilitators that address the barriers, and 7) faculty member satisfaction with the CBL experience as evidenced by student learning, or new insights gained into teaching and learning.

A review of 174 surveys administered by Campus Compact members determined ways in which campus assessments reflected the Gelmon et al. matrix and in which they differed (Waters & Anderson-Lain, 2014). Relevant to faculty practice, concepts not represented in the matrix but included in various campus assessments comprised course/project description, impact/influence on the community partner, and faculty commitment to CBL. These variations suggest that CBL practice continues to evolve, and as such, assessments much change accordingly, as in the current study, where the faculty experience related to COVID-19 is examined. Assessment must be context-specific and reflect institutional or research goals for CBL with the goal of using results to improve practice.

## **COVID-19 Disruptions**

The COVID-19 pandemic required rapid course delivery changes as well as faculty training and retooling (Andrade et al., 2021). A U.S.-based HEI survey found that 56% of faculty members needed new teaching methods due to delivery modality changes (Seaman, 2020). A global study of 424 HEIs in 109 countries and two administrative regions identified that 67% of respondent institutions had shifted to distance learning and experienced challenges with technical infrastructure, distance

learning competencies, and meeting disciplinary teaching needs using non-traditional delivery modalities (Marinoni et al., 2020).

As expected, COVID-19 also impacted university-community partnerships and engagement with the community. In the global study cited earlier, 64% of institutions reported an impact in community partnerships with 51% indicating that partnerships were weakened and 18% that they were strengthened (Marinoni et al., 2020). However, 31% indicated that the pandemic brought new partnership opportunities, which involved virtual mobility and shared resources. Regional variations occurred. For example, 44% of respondents in Asia and the Pacific and 34% in Europe reported new partnership opportunities while 13% and 19% respectively reporting strengthened partnerships. In comparison, 32% of HEIs in the Americas reported new opportunities and 27% indicated strengthened partnerships during the pandemic. These findings indicate that the pandemic brought new opportunities.

The impact of COVID-19 on community engagement was largely positive with 56% of HEIs in the Americas reporting an increase and 23% a decrease; 46% of European HEI respondents reported an increase and 26% a decrease (Marinoni et al., 2020). More than half of all HEIs responding to the survey continued to carry out community engagement activities during COVID-19. Once again, this evidence suggests that innovations occurred to not only continue CBL activities but to approach community engagement in new ways. Certainly, this must have required collaboration among administrators, faculty, students, and community partners.

Early in the pandemic, Campus Compact (2020) made several recommendations for working with community partners. These recommendations were based on an earlier survey of community organization staff, which identified five key components for successful partnerships (Trebil-Smith & Shields, 2018). These were as follows: *successful partnerships require a solid foundation* – take time to build relationships, explore possibilities, and create long-term strategies; *effectively managing student experiences is vital* – ensure that needed structures are in place to maximize learning outcomes; *investing time and capacity is difficult* – recognize the time investment required for both community partners and HEIs; *partnerships exist between individuals* – understand the need for meaningful, individual relationships to enable success; *CBOs (community-based organizations) have difficulty navigating the complexity of HED (higher education)* – the complexity of higher education institutions is a barrier to sustainable partnerships and must be minimized.

Based on this study, the first recommendation for working with community partners during the pandemic is *focus on quality over quantity*. This involves scaling back, and simplifying, such as considering smaller organizations as partners, identifying those most in need of support, and being flexible during changing circumstances. The second is to *move from reciprocity to co-creation*. This entails involving partners in project design and resource allocation. The third suggestion is to *establish and sustain organizational infrastructure* by offering partners greater support for coordinating CBL activities. The fourth recommendation is to *strengthen student preparation and accountability* with better structures and preparation. The fifth guideline is to *build individual capacity for partnership* by seeking those who have not been previously involved. The last recommendation is to *explore other forms of partnerships* such as those within the campus community or through online engagement.

While these recommendations do not focus on the faculty specifically, they do have implications for faculty practice and illustrate the types of changes that faculty and their sponsoring institutions likely needed to make to continue CBL activities during the pandemic. No information is currently available regarding if these strategies have been used or how they were implemented or modified. The global study cited in this section suggests that strategies similar to these may have been implemented but the study had only two open-ended questions, both of which were optional and focused on future anticipated challenges and opportunities in higher education (Marinoni et al., 2020). Responses primarily reinforced the information gathered in the survey but identified two additional concerns—financial challenges due to the economic impact of the pandemic and the need to improve crisis management approaches. The current study addresses these gaps by gathering in-depth qualitative data to gain greater understanding into responses to COVID-19 from a faculty member perspective.

The need for higher education transformation is on-going. The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed HEI institutions forward, but it remains to be seen to what extent resulting innovations will be retained or abandoned. Policies, practices, and outcomes related to the changes will continue to be explored in the years to come. The literature has focused on faculty issues related to CBL adoption to some extent, but greater understanding is needed and can be addressed through research focused on specific aspects of the faculty experience as well as strategies for managing change due to external events, which is the focus of the current study. Still relevant in higher education is UNESCO's (1998) call for student-centered "in-depth [HEI] reforms" including "contents, methods, practices and means of delivery, based on new types of links and partnerships with the community and with the broadest sectors of society" (p. 6). Research helps HEIs create these new links.

## **Methods**

The survey for this study gathered information about faculty perspectives on CBL generally, and specifically related to the impact of COVID-19. Invitations to participate were distributed to national service-learning listservs, connections at Campus Compact (the national service-learning organization), CBL faculty at the authors' institution, and at other institutions in the state. The study met all requirements for research involving human subjects as determined by the institutional research board at the authors' institution. The survey was administered in Qualtrics. Distribution data indicates that 95 surveys were started and 57 completed for an 60% completion rate. The data provides helpful insights regarding faculty perspectives on CBL implementation and practices upon which future research can be based. In particular, the in-depth exploration of the impact of COVID-19 on CBL is a new contribution.

The survey instrument included 48 questions, 12 of which were open ended. The open-ended questions were critical in obtaining insights on topics not previously explored in the literature, specifically the faculty perspective on challenges related to COVID-19 and how they were addressed. The survey was informed by established matrices for CBL assessment (e.g., see Gelmon et al., 2001; Waters & Anderson-Lain, 2014) as well as a previous study of CBL in schools of business (e.g., see Andrade et al., 2021).

Survey topics focused on rationale, course design (the nature of projects), workload, institutional support (location, types, and effectiveness), challenges and successes, COVID-19 (challenges, continued use, facilitation of CBL, partner relations, support levels, approaches, learning outcomes), quality measures (certification), training (requirements, topics, delivery), recognition, and institutionalization (reflection in mission, strategic planning, acceptance of, reciprocity). Demographic questions collected information on academic rank, gender, work status, college/school, and institutional type and size. See the appendix for the questions.

This is a mixed methods study in the sense that the survey results had both quantitative and qualitative components. The qualitative aspect was particularly critical as understanding of new phenomena was needed. The qualitative findings were examined using the Campus Compact (2020) COVID-19 recommendations as a framework to determine to the extent to which these may have been implemented as institutions and faculty within them sought to meet the challenges presented.

## **Results**

### ***Descriptive Results***

Respondents reported that 60% of their courses incorporate CBL activities or projects. Additionally, respondents listed the following primary reasons they use CBL activities and projects. The lower average score indicates the higher each item was on the respondents' rank order. As can be seen in Table 1 below, the highest-ranking reason is "Deepen student learning", followed by "Provide practical, applied learning opportunities". The lowest ranking reasons for our respondents are "Improve the school's reputation" and "Support the school/college strategic objectives".

**Table 1**

Primary Reasons for Using CBL Activities or Projects (Ranked Ordered Averages)

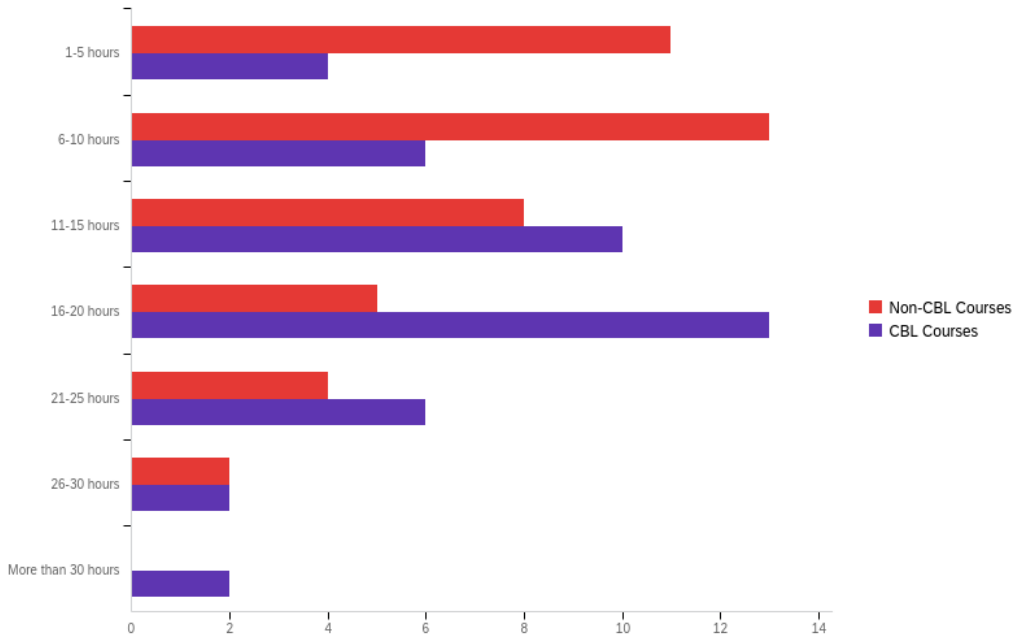
Impact/influence on community	4.42
Develop socially-responsible world citizens	4.98
Deepen student learning	2.47
Support the school/college/university mission	7.16
Support the school/college strategic objectives	7.81
Increase employability for students	6.00
Develop students' soft skills	5.65
Support local economic development	9.21
Provide practical, applied learning opportunities	3.40
Improve the school's reputation	9.91
Broaden the student experience	5.33

We asked instructors how much time per week they spend managing or delivering their courses, and as can be seen in Figure 1 below, instructors report that their CBL courses require significantly more time than their non-CBL courses. Most respondents reported that they received the most support in managing and delivering their CBL courses from their department, followed by institutional supports. Figure 2 shows the common types of support that instructors receive in delivering their courses. While “Instructional Design” and “Pedagogical Training” are the highest forms of support for both CBL and non-CBL courses, “Stipends for Innovation”, “Mentoring”, and “Release Time” are more common forms of support for CBL courses. Overall, faculty report receiving significantly higher levels of support for non-CBL courses than their CBL courses.



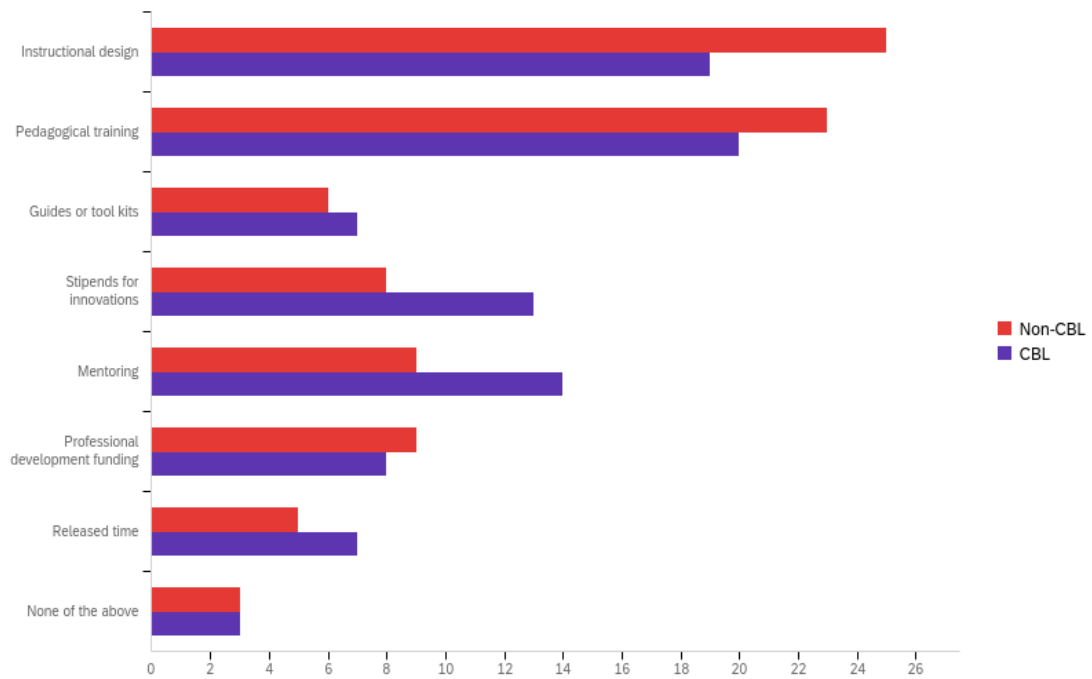
**Figure 1**

Time Spent in Course Management and Delivery



**Figure 2**

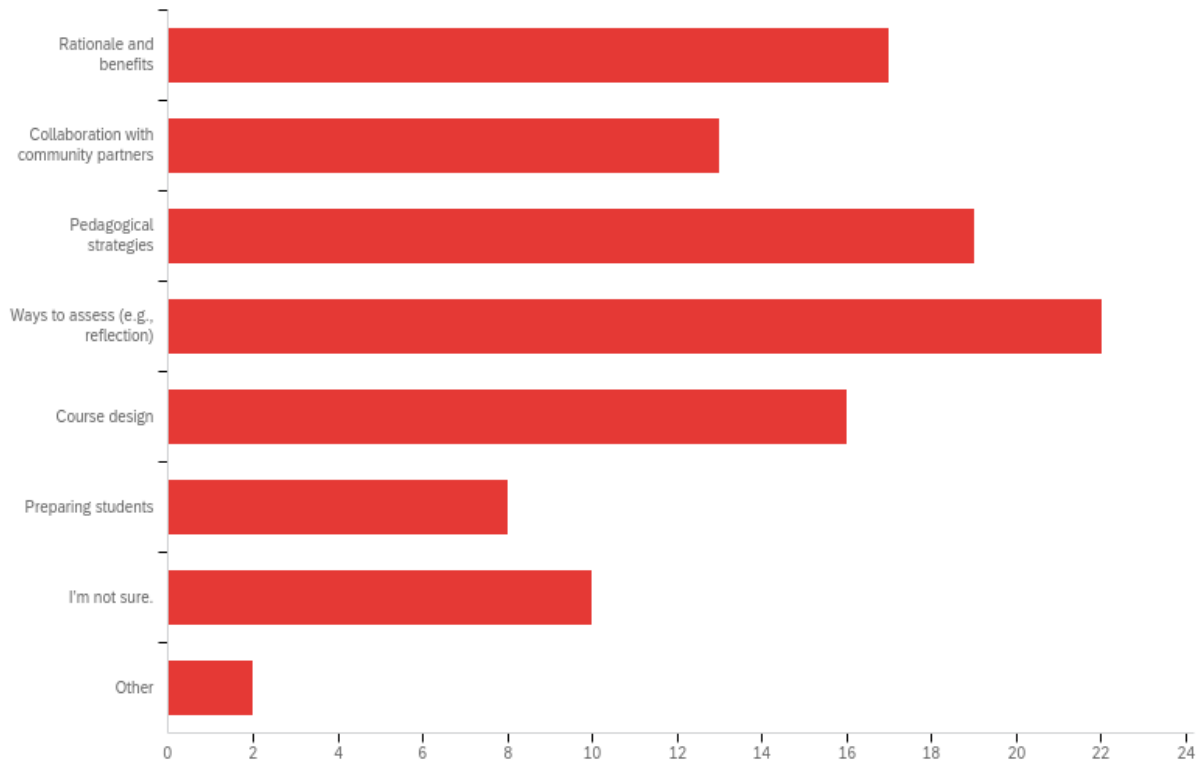
Types of Support Received in Designing and Teaching Courses



46% of respondents reported that their institution requires official training before a CBL course can be designated as such, 31% said their institution does not have any such requirement, and 23% said they didn't know. Figure 3 below shows the various types of optional or required trainings for CBL courses provided at the respondents' institutions.

**Figure 3**

Types of Training Offered, Optional or Required



***CBL Challenges and Support During COVID***

Faculty face many challenges in successfully implementing CBL in their courses. Table 2 below shows these common challenges, with lower average score indicating the higher each item was on the respondents' rank order list. As can be seen in Table 2 below, the highest-ranking reason is "Finding Community Partners", "Coordinating Projects with Community Partners", "Motivating Students", and "Finding time to complete projects within a semester". The lowest ranking challenges are "Aligning projects with course content", "Relationship maintenance with community partners", "Lack of incentive to participate", and "Lack of community-based experience".

**Table 2**

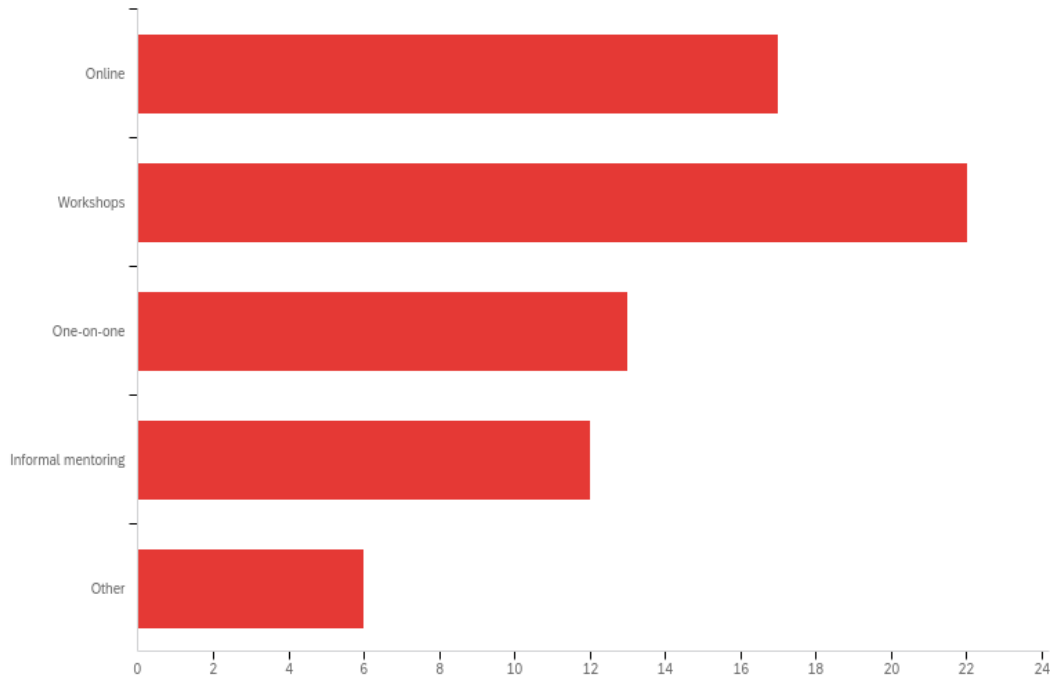
## Greatest Challenges to Implementing CBL in Courses

Finding time to complete projects within a semester	6.16
Motivating students	6.05
Student ownership	6.59
Finding community partners	5.27
Coordinating projects with community partners	5.19
Aligning projects with course content	9.24
Resource needs	8.51
Measuring effectiveness	8.57
Record-keeping	9.7
Administrative support	9.08
Increased workload	6.92
Lack of community-based experience	12.08
Lack of incentive to participate	10.95
Relationship maintenance with community partners	9.24
Student schedules	6.46

Over the past 18+ months, faculty have experienced an extra level of challenges in implementing CBL and service-learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. 73% of respondents indicated that they continued to use CBL in their courses during the pandemic, and only 42% said they received any additional support to continue their CBL courses during the pandemic. Of the support received, Figure 4 below shows the method by which the training was delivered, with 73% of respondents rating the quality of that support as either “Good” or “Excellent”, 20% rating it as “Average”, and 7% rating it as “Poor”.

**Figure 4**

**CBL Training Delivery**



**Qualitative Results**

Qualitative data in this multi-method study were analyzed employing the qualitative research tradition of phenomenology. This tradition describes the meaning of lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon by individuals, with the purpose of reducing individual lived experiences with a phenomenon to a description of a “universal essence.” After collecting data from respondents who have experienced the phenomenon, researchers develop a composite description of the essence of the experience, consisting of “what” they experienced and “how,” (Creswell 1998). Following this tradition, our goal in the qualitative portion of this study was to examine the lived experiences of faculty pertaining to the impact of COVID-19 on their CBL practices and operations. High frequency data themes under the CBL operational data themes were recorded and analyzed using NVIVO software.

Qualitative data were collected using open ended survey questions centered around CBL operational themes of the greatest challenges, the greatest successes, and the most important learning outcomes realized among students, faculty and community partners during the COVID-19 pandemic. Data categories and subthemes were coded and counted within the sample of 57 completed surveys employing NVIVO software. Those data themes with the highest frequencies (minimum of 5) under each of the CBL operational categories and subthemes are presented in Table 1. While data frequencies are of interest, the most important value of the qualitative tradition of phenomenology is the richness that emerges through respondent comments as faculty

describe their lived experiences related to managing CBL during the COVID-19 pandemic. Table 2 provides a selection of memorable and representative faculty quotations related to this experience and a discussion follows. (Note: faculty quotations have not been edited.)

**Table 1**

Data Coding

Data Category	Data Subthemes & Number of Responses
<b>Greatest Challenges: Covid Restrictions</b>	Businesses were closed/fewer projects 15 Lost sense of community/No face to face 13 Students unprepared to manage change 6 Students, Faculty & Clients reluctant to engage 5 Maintaining student safety 5
<b>Greatest Successes</b>	<u>Students:</u> Improved: Learning/Application 9 Jobs/Placements 7 Clarified career path 6 Engagement 6 Creativity 5 Community relationships 5 <u>Faculty</u> Teaching rewards 6 Community relationships 5 <u>Community Partners</u> Value creation by students 7
<b>COVID-19 Learning Outcomes</b>	Need to be flexible/improvise 19 Need to be creative 18 Keep practicing/mastering technology 13 Build strong community relationships 7 Build strong colleague relationships 5 Distance no longer a barrier 5

**Table 2**

## Memorable Responses

<b>Data Category &amp; Subtheme Coding</b>	<b>Memorable Responses</b>
<b>Greatest Challenges:</b> <b>Restrictions from COVID-19:</b> Businesses were closed/fewer projects	<p>“The students all wished that we could have had more interaction with the physical sites where the plants will be planted and more interaction with community partners. Also, if we weren't in covid, I would have taken students to visit each of the unique ecosystems that we were tasked with recreating... Our inability to visit these sites in person somewhat robbed students of the experience of meeting plants in real life.”</p>
Lost sense of community/No face to face	<p>“Not meeting in person was extremely challenging. That sense of community seems necessary for this type of project.”</p>
Students unprepared to manage change	<p>“It was challenging to get students to understand the importance of doing revised projects or different projects during COVID.”</p>
Students, Faculty & Clients reluctant to engage	<p>“ It wasn't as much a learning experience, and we lost the team component as many students just stopped participating.”</p> <p>“Lack of time and resources to convert in-person activities into meaningful Covid 19 safe learning activities”</p> <p>“Could not do in-PERSON projects.”</p> <p>“Not being able to complete projects in person and shifting to virtual. We found it hard to engage clientele at partner sites with virtual programs.”</p>
Maintaining student safety	<p>“ ...Students were fearful of going into homes.”</p>
<b>Greatest Successes: Students</b> Improved Learning/Application	<p>“...one student’s saying in his final SL reflection essay “Reflection leads to a deeper understanding of the things I have learned, and it allows me to learn more about myself, and apply what I have learned into the daily activities I participate in.” Another student wrote in</p>

	<p>an anonymous survey: "I felt that this reflection activity was an effective method for me to connect my service activity to the academic content of the class."</p> <p>"Students making a clear connection between the course and the CBL experience."</p>
Jobs/Placements	"Employment has resulted in several instances partly because of CBL."
Clarified career path	"Student's having impactful experiences that cause them to rethink career trajectory or future community engagement efforts."
Engagement	"Student ownership and impact have been the most impactful. Students tend to create lasting relationships as well."
Creativity	"Creativity: some students were able to do more "traditional" service-learning projects through being creative with how they accomplished their goals and work with community partners."
Community relationships	"My students left a lasting impact that may stand for decades, with Vineyard City residents and visitors able to enjoy the native greenspaces and learning opportunities they offer for years to come. One student wrote on an anonymous survey: 'I personally thought this service-learning project was very interesting and made me excited for the future of Vineyard. It was awesome to know that I can visit the site in a few years where my class helped choose the plants and be able to tell my loved ones "hey I helped design this!'"
<b>Greatest Successes: Faculty Teaching Rewards</b>	<p>"I've seen true changes in students and their attitudes towards both the community and people in the community. I've also seen students continue their service projects beyond the class and really be motivated to be involved in the community for as long as possible."</p> <p>"My students are very self-motivated. When Covid hit, we had the challenge of</p>

	not being able to complete service-learning projects in person. My students stepped up to the plate and developed a web page that provided education for parents of children with autism. Students are so creative, and they find extremely better ways to do things.”
Community Relationships	“Lasting connections for students, deepening town/gown relationships”
<b>Greatest Successes: Community Partners</b> Value creation by students	<p>“Several sustainable projects in the sense that the community partners continue to use pieces of the projects, and many have hired students they worked with or brought them on as interns.”</p> <p>“ improvements within the organizations of the community partners.”</p> <p>“Too many to detail. All student projects make a huge impact in the community in strengthening homes, business, and family relationships. They help families in crisis, assisting them to find and access resources and learn skills to be healthy individuals and positive contributing citizens. “</p>
<b>COVID-19 Learning Outcomes</b> Need to be flexible/improvise	<p>“We had to find socially distanced and virtual learning experiences, which depended more on simulation than experience in the community.”</p> <p>“We had to improvise. It wasn't as much a learning experience, and we lost the team component as many students just stopped participating.”</p>
Need to be creative	<p>“Willingness to try something new”</p> <p>“Co-creating programs and activities with community partners. It took me reaching out and brainstorming options that would benefit their mission and be impactful for students.”</p>
Practicing & mastering technology	“I found our online class taught through MS teams to actually be helpful for learning. For example, in the past, when students were put into their small groups, they would often lose half or more of the



	<p>time allotted to chatting and socializing whereas I felt the groups worked really more focused in their MS Teams breakout rooms. And I could easily jump in and out of the breakout rooms to work with each small group.”</p> <p>“A lot of good came out of the pandemic and our flexible delivery methods. We will continue to have a virtual platform as an option moving forward.”</p>
Build strong community relationships	<p>“Long-term personal relationships with key people in community agencies were key in maintaining even limited presence in their systems and returning to in-person collaboration as soon as possible.”</p> <p>“The pandemic has highlighted the increased need. we are being more direct, more supportive, and more receptive to our community's needs.”</p>
Build Strong colleague relationships	<p>“Existing relationships and personal community engagements. Collaboration with colleagues.”</p>
Distance is no longer a barrier	<p>“I can see how distance does not have to be a barrier anymore. I will continue to employ virtual meeting spaces even after the pandemic is over (...and we are not post-pandemic yet...).”</p>
Uncertainty/Future is unknown	<p>“I'm not sure yet.”</p>

**Discussion**

Table 2 contains memorable respondents comments representative of the major data categories and subthemes coded in this study. A discussion of each follows.

**Greatest Challenges**

Faculty described their greatest challenges experienced in managing the CBL process during COVID-19 under a general data category of “restrictions.” These restrictions to normal operations included data subthemes of businesses being closed and inaccessible, a reluctance of students, faculty and clients to engage during the pandemic, students being unprepared to manage the scope of change required by the increased contextual uncertainty of the pandemic and maintaining student safety. It is interesting to note that while most respondents in this study described how they quickly

adjusted their CBL curriculum to be able to continue managing through COVID-19, there were still a few faculty members who completely disengaged believing it was no longer possible to conduct CBL under pandemic restrictions and constraints.

## **Greatest Successes**

The greatest successes experienced by CBL faculty during COVID-19 included three data subgroups of successes related to students, faculty and community clients. For student successes, faculty described improved “big picture” learning and application of course material, professional student placements and resulting jobs, a keener sense of career paths envisioned by students, a higher level of student engagement, increased student creativity, and strong community client relationships realized between students and clients.

The major data themes described as faculty successes include teaching rewards of enhanced fulfillment and pride and resulting improvement in community client relationships. Comments related to faculty feeling a profound sense of accomplishment from having successfully managed their CBL projects during the pandemic constraints, as well as how much stronger they had built relationships with community clients as they worked together with shared focus through difficult pandemic constraints. The highest frequency data subtheme for community client success experienced was the heightened awareness they had of student value creation benefiting their organizations. While many of the CBL successes for each of the three subgroups in this study parallel successes realized and described by faculty during non-pandemic times in the literature, it is heartening that many of the same significant rewards of employing CBL pedagogy evidenced sustainability even when tested by serious pandemic constraints.

## **What Did COVID-19 Teach Us?**

The highest frequency data themes in this area include CBL faculty recognizing that we need to remain flexible, ready to manage significant change in our daily routines and be able to improvise when restrictions and constraints to normal business occur. Faculty emphasized the need to be creative, and the need to keep practicing and honing technology skills to make physical distance no longer an obstacle were additional data subthemes of high frequency. The importance of building and nurturing strong community client relationships, as well as relationships with colleagues were also frequently highlighted in the data as critical to sustaining CBL operations, especially when constraints may become extreme, such as during a pandemic.

## **Conclusion**

This study has evidenced that even during the extreme constraints of a pandemic, CBL remains a feasible and valuable pedagogy delivering on many of its usual valued positive outcomes across diverse constituents of students, faculty, schools and colleges, universities and the greater business community (see examples in Tables 1-2). Qualitative data in this study, in fact, strongly suggest that learning outcomes from CBL during the pandemic produced even higher quality and levels of learning for all

constituents, as compared to other pedagogical methods, because the restrictions were so severe, and we all had to work harder as a team with focus and shared vision to produce valued results. COVID-19 has also taught us anew the importance of honing critical skill sets such as flexibility, creativity, and improvisation; being prepared to manage change under worst case scenarios was tested by us all.

Previous studies on the impact of COVID-19 on CBL are largely quantitative (e.g., Marinoni et al., 2020) and do not capture nuances of the lived experiences of individuals. A major contribution of this study was gleaning the lived experiences of faculty through their own words as they were challenged to manage under extreme constraints placed on them by the pandemic. Our learning deeply about their lived experiences via their own words has yielded a rich quality of knowledge that likely could not have been attained through a quantitative survey instrument.

What has COVID-19 taught us? As business managers and educators, we must be prepared for worst-case scenarios and diligently keep practicing those skills that were most useful and critical to sustaining operations during a pandemic, because we all learned that worst case scenarios will happen. Flexibility, creativity and improvisation must be honed and well-practiced to keep our thinking sharp just as regular physical exercise keeps our bodies well-tuned and healthy.

In addition, as business educators, we must be well prepared to keep our classes and students functioning and learning through even extraordinary constraints. We must be creative to be able to quickly develop win-win-win solutions, rather than becoming disengaged, as a few of the students, faculty and community clients in our study seemed to do. We must teach students the soft skills of flexibility and creativity and make them practice so that they are well-rehearsed for the marketplace and any possible future difficult scenarios. We also must build and nurture strong relationships with community clients, as well as with colleagues, so that when constraints become unusually difficult, we are comfortable moving forward in partnership, accepting additional risk as a strong and trusted team. Finally, we must keep learning and practicing leveraging technology for value creation today and into the future. Were it not for quickly embracing new technology during the pandemic, most business managers and educators alike would have remained frozen in a nonproductive pandemic time.

Yet, most of us are thriving today and moving forward with new knowledge and wisdom derived from a pandemic that makes us stronger, better prepared and smarter for the future. CBL is also alive and very well. And, for many of us, we are convinced even more today of its value to keep us richly learning, growing and striving to improve.

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