

Northwestern



**BUFFETT INSTITUTE
FOR GLOBAL STUDIES**

Community-Engaged Scholarship
Working Group

Adopt the Principles of Ethical Practice for Community-Engaged Scholarship at Northwestern

A growing number of university departments, programs, and initiatives are beginning to articulate a commitment to a common set of principles for ethical practice in their community-engaged teaching, learning, research, and service. This document outlines the origin of these principles of practice, provides examples of how units are adopting and implementing them, and articulates a call to action for the principles to be widely adopted and implemented across the university to ensure the highest ethical standards in our community-engaged endeavors.

Background

The Community-Engaged Scholarship (CES) working group at the Buffett Institute for Global Studies is leveraging the strengths of a cross-sector community to work in a unified way towards common goals, and is using social change models to lead a process of institutional culture change that draws upon our strengths as a decentralized enterprise. By using methods grounded in collective impact and other asset-based community organizing approaches, the CES working group is changing the paradigm of our work from institutional silos to collective progress. This approach is not only changing what we can accomplish, but how we do our work.

Participants of the CES working group come from across the institution and are working together to advance a common commitment to community engaged forms of teaching, learning, research and service. The CES working Group has formed a community of practice that meets regularly to allow members to learn from one another and form connections that lead to cross-campus collaboration.

One of the working group's biggest achievements has been to articulate principles of ethical practice for CES that are being widely adopted by units across the university (see Appendix A: Principles of Ethical Practice). By producing these orienting principles, the CES Working Group has taken an important, initial step in articulating a shared vision for the role of Northwestern University in addressing the major challenges faced by today's societies while fostering a community of practice committed to ethical, equitable and effective scholarship as a vital form of public service.

Call to Action

Sign on or Adopt the Principles of Ethical Practice for Community-Engaged Learning, Research, and Service

As Northwestern continues to grow in its commitment to global and community engagement, it is incumbent upon NU faculty, staff, and students to operate at the highest levels of ethical standards. A common commitment to ethical and equitable approaches to community engaged learning, research, and service is necessary to ensure that Northwestern truly lives into the notion of higher education as a public good. By setting such aspirations and expectations clearly, and creating mechanisms for their enforcement, Northwestern can set a standard of excellence that will serve both as a motivating and educating force for students and as a model to other universities. Therefore, every community-engaged department and unit is encouraged to adopt or sign onto the **Principles of Ethical Practice for Community-Engaged Learning, Research and Service** (see Appendix B: Units that have adopted the Principles of Ethical Practice).

What it means to sign on/adopt the Principles of Ethical Practice:

By signing on or adopting these principles, you acknowledge your agreement to the following:

- 1) These principles adequately articulate/represent our aspirations for community-engaged learning, research and service and express the expectations and commitments of university-community partnerships pursued by our office/program/center/department. We embrace these principles as a standard of ethical practice in our shared work at Northwestern.
- 2) We will utilize these principles to inform adjustments to our programming and practice as it relates to community partnership.

- 3) We will seek opportunities to make these principles actionable in coordination with efforts to build a community of practice in this space. We will provide 1-2 examples of how we live out these principles in our work in order to generate and contribute to the sharing of examples of effective and ethical practice pursued at Northwestern. We will provide 1 – 2 aspirations or plans for implementing these principles beyond our current practice.

Appendix A: Principles of Ethical Practice

The CES Working Group has proposed the following, non-comprehensive list of key principles for ethical and equitable approaches to community engaged learning, research and service at Northwestern.

1. Above all else, do no harm. This encompasses:

- Ethical guidelines and their enforcement, e.g., via Institutional Review Board and other processes for vetting community-engaged learning, research and service projects
- Compliance with local laws and following safety and liability requirements of community partners
- Careful safety and risk assessment, and precautionary measures for the protection of all persons involved

The principle of do no harm -- a classic feature of biomedical ethics that has been adapted for a range of service and research professions and activities -- includes and moves beyond matters of safety and Institutional Review Board oversight of research proposals. “Do no harm” means adhering to meaningful guidelines and checks for protecting the communities where Northwestern faculty, staff, and/or students intend to work, as well as the various organizations that host us, from unintended consequences. As it relates to community partnerships, this means that serious efforts are made to balance student learning and community outcomes, with attention to joint planning and assessment, preparation coursework and shared orientation, reciprocal commitments and exchange, along with efforts to set mutually defined goals for community sustainability and resilience.

2. Reciprocity and sustainability through ethical, equitable relationships. This encompasses:

- A focus on sustainable relationships that outlast and grow beyond initial engagements
- Deliberate, concerted, and systematic efforts to ensure reciprocity and equity in all collaborative partnerships
- Ensuring that community partners are fully empowered as co-educators and/or co-researchers, and that the substance and benefits of the knowledge and projects produced accrue equitably to relevant stakeholders

Too often research and service projects are conducted *on* rather than *with* communities, reinforcing hierarchies of status, expertise, and power that serve institutions like Northwestern at the expense of those we claim to serve. True reciprocity and sustainability depend on a commitment to building long-term, equitable relationships of exchange, in which community partners are fully empowered as co-researchers, co-educators of students, and equal voices in the design and implementation of all collaborative efforts. Implementation of this principle will require a subset of clear guidelines and procedures for ethical and equitable partnerships, and may be guided by frameworks including Fair Trade Learning, Participatory Action Research, and critical service learning.

3. Cultural Humility. This encompasses:

- A serious engagement with the relevance of cultural and linguistic difference
- An emphasis on listening to and learning from community partners with respect for local knowledge and diverse forms of expertise
- Deep and ongoing learning, systematically integrated into program design and implementation, about the relevance of context and history to goals and methods of the project

Cultural humility – as opposed to its higher profile, conceptual cousin “cultural competence” – avoids the implication that sensitive and fair engagement with cultural difference is a technical skill that can be mastered, or that different cultures can be characterized and approached via reductive, stereotyped sets of qualities, traits, and traditions. Advocates of the principle of cultural humility aim to cultivate a deep recognition among scholars, students, and practitioners that no “expert” knows everything, that technical expertise does not necessarily trump local knowledge, and that no one—including representatives of elite global universities—has a monopoly on profound and potentially urgent insights about the challenges facing our societies. Northwestern faculty, staff, and students who have been supported in cultivating cultural humility will, for example, approach community partners as listeners, learners, and co-educators; recognize that rationality is plural, and that encounters with difference must be allowed to challenge our own frames of reference; approach unfamiliar practices and perspectives with nonjudgmental open-mindedness and empathy; eschew one-size-fits-all approaches that ignore crucial local, global, and historical

contexts; and take responsibility for educating themselves as deeply as possible about all aspects of context, history, politics, and culture relevant to the work at hand.

4. Attention to Diversity, Inclusion, and Inequality. This encompasses:

- Objectives and procedures for making projects and collaborations as meaningfully inclusive as possible
- Systematic consideration of the ways the project shapes and is shaped by social inequalities connected to (e.g.) race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, and nationality
- Regular opportunities for all participants to reflect and offer feedback on diversity issues in project design and implementation

To substantially consider and integrate diversity into community-engaged scholarship is *to address the role of social inequality* as an inescapable determinant, mediator, and object of the project. A true commitment to diversity and inclusion in the work of a university must go beyond the incremental tweaking of student demographics and surface-level transformations that fail to substantially address the history and persistence of deeply entrenched inequalities in knowledge production and scholarly authority, both in and beyond the contemporary academy. To value diversity in community-engaged scholarship is, at minimum, to engage all partners in deep reflection about how race, ethnicity, gender, class, culture, sexual orientation, age, education, and language differences—among other powerful social constructs and divisions—might shape and be shaped by the project. Attention to diversity and inequality must be an integral component of *all* community-engaged scholarship.

5. Commitment to collaborative critical thinking and inquiry. This encompasses

- Procedures for reflecting carefully on the values, interests, and priorities served by the collaboration, and what is at stake for vulnerable individuals or communities
- Procedures for critical analysis of project design and implementation at each stage, as well as processes for being responsive to critique in real time
- Careful attention to potential and actual unintended consequences of the work, along with appropriate measures of accountability and remediation when necessary

In our rush to address pressing, morally and existentially urgent global and local challenges, we run the risk of developing “solutions” that can cause as many problems as they address. Processes for promoting regular critical reflection, and for integrating the results of critique as the work unfolds, are important to developing partnerships that are flexible and responsive to community needs and issues in real time. Such critical reflection carries an ethical value and resolve, insofar as it serves as a mechanism of accountability to all stakeholders and presents openings for mitigating problematic or unexpected developments in the work.

Indeed, the value of CES is the emphasis it places on collaborative research and learning that combines academic expertise with local knowledge, drawing on the assets, resources and intellectual contributions of academic and non-academic practitioners alike. In this way, community engaged scholarship is able to uncover the sometimes-unseen complexities of social reality and illuminate practical possibilities for social change. This is often done through long-term partnerships and relationship building that shifts the focus of scholarship to be “carried out with and in the community, and not just on the community.”¹

¹ Stanton, T., Connolly, B., Howard, J. & Litvak, L. (2013). *Research university engaged scholarship toolkit; fourth edition*. Boston: Campus Compact /initiatives/trucen/trucen-toolkit/.

Appendix B: Units that have adopted the Principles

Units across the institution have already begun to adopt the Principles of Ethical Practice and use them to assess, inform, and guide community-engaged work. The principles are being adapted to fit the particular needs of a program or department, and are being used to support the work of a wide range of stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students. While these principles are in line with those being developed by peer institutions, we hope that they can evolve, improve, and become progressively more effective through (1) ongoing processes of consultation and feedback with key community partners both at home and abroad, (2) the development of specific procedures for adapting and putting them into practice in the full range of relevant work by Northwestern faculty, staff, and students.

Office of Undergraduate Research

- Advisors who coach and mentor undergraduates through the process of developing a research proposal use the Principles of Ethical Practice to guide conversation and ask critical questions throughout the students' proposal process. In awarding research grants, the Principles are used as an additional rubric to ensure that only proposals meeting the ethical standards are funded.

The Pre-K – 20+ Working Group

- In an effort to be more strategic, thoughtful, and effective in Northwestern's engagement in the PreK-20+ education space, the Working Group is using the Principles of Ethical Practice to frame conversations about our shared values and goals.

The Buffett Institute for Global Studies

- The Buffett Institute is utilizing the Principles of Ethical Practice as a companion to the Fair Trade Learning standards in order to shape a more community-driven praxis in our global service learning and community-based research programs. In April 2018, the Buffett Institute will host a community partner forum with 20 of our international partners to build community, strengthen and innovate our joint programming and set mutually identified and beneficial goals in our co-educational partnerships over the next five years. The Principles will also be used as a teaching tool in our pre-departure seminar and other course-based and co-curricular student preparation (CBR, student group advising, etc.)

The Office of Community Education Partnerships in the School of Education and Social Policy

- OCEP holds data partnership agreements with the Chicago Public Schools, and Districts 65 & 202 in Evanston. Faculty who wish to use these data or enter into partnerships via OCEP must meet the standards set by the Principles of Ethical Practice. The OCEP staff is working with Dean Figlio to engage all SESP faculty in conversation about the Principles through workshops and trainings in the coming year.

Neighborhood and Community Relations

- As the most outwardly facing unit in Evanston, Alan Anderson, Executive Director, is using the Principles of Ethical Practice as a way to talk about how Northwestern wishes to engage in our community. The Principles provide clarity and transparency about our intentions, standards of practice, and aspirations for engagement, and serve as a lens for communications about potential partnerships.

Leadership Development & Community Engagement

- In this Student Affairs unit, the Principles of Ethical Practice are being used as a lens, rubric, and standard for the development of all community partnership work. Additionally, the principles will be used in the training and support of undergraduate registered student organizations that have a community-engaged mission. Student leaders of these organizations will be introduced to the principles and guided through a process to assess the practices of their organizations, develop goals to improve their practices, and foster a culture of commitment to the principles among their members. The Principles will also be used as a rubric for the awarding of grants supporting the activities of community-engaged student organizations.