Salt Lake Community College

Civic Literacy Student Learning Outcome Assessment
Final Report
Academic Year
2024-2025

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Executive Summary

The Engaged Learning Office at Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) conducts annual assessments focused on the Civic Literacy Student Learning Outcome (CLSLO). The assessments focus on how students in Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) courses demonstrate learning around this outcome and have occurred for over a decade. This report outlines findings from the 2024–2025 academic year. This college-wide outcome emphasizes the development of civic knowledge, critical thinking around social issues, working with others, and civic action.

The sample and method included 118 assignments assessed from 11 CEL courses that recently went through a formal CEL course review. A rubric based on national U.S. literature and resources around civic engagement was created operationalizing the SLCC CLSLO. Two teams of two faculty each scored the assignments using the rubric. Some of the students (36%) were involved in the Civically Engaged Scholars (CES) honors program, but the remaining students represent a variety of majors.

Staff and faculty from the college took part in the American Association of Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) Civic Evidence project in academic year 2021-2022 which informed assessment methods thereafter. The project lead adopted percentage-based analysis aligned with AAC&U VALUE rubric scoring practices based on this. Also, pulling from the advice from AAC&U, this report is primarily descriptive and qualitative in nature. The data provides evidence of a landscape of civic learning that is occurring in select CEL classes. And although this report provides only a snapshot of one year, one can look at the past decade of assessment to gain insight into the evolution of civic learning and community engagement at a community-college level.

The results show that the SLCC civic literacy student learning outcome assessment shows strong student engagement across most dimensions of the rubric, though scores largely fell in low to medium ranges, consistent with expectations for first and second-year students.

There is high evidence of learning in the areas of civic knowledge through a disciplinary lens, commitment to community engagement, reflection on values, attitudes, and beliefs, and breadth of community engagement experiences. There is less evidence in areas focused on awareness of the larger power structures related to privilege and oppression, and openness to working with diverse others. This shows that there is strong evidence that students are linking civic knowledge to academic content; students are showing a commitment to community, and engaging in critical reflection, and civic action/community service. But overall, students still struggle with gaining a systemic understanding of the power structures surrounding privilege and oppression, and/or systems thinking when trying to address a social issue.

Moving forward, we should focus on what students can do and how to build on their assets.
This data is not generalizable to the entire institution. The sample size of 118 may be too small to allow for broad generalizations about the CLSLO across the college. Some generalizations were made specifically about the CEL program.

Unsurprisingly, learning in CEL classes also aligns with the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Career Readiness skills. Given that outcomes such as critical thinking, career and self-development, professionalism, teamwork, communication, and leadership are essential for individual and professional growth and success, this is good news.

Our recommendations include:

- Continuing a formal CEL course review process to maintain the quality of the program.
- Emphasizing assignment design to deepen analysis of social structures and providing faculty professional development on rubric alignment and CEL pedagogy.
- Conduct future qualitative studies on CES for deeper insights.

These continued efforts are reinforced by evidence-based teaching practices including experiential learning, project-based learning, and community-based learning (Kolb, 2014).

Overall, civic learning and community engagement efforts are a major focus at SLCC as they are at most community colleges. Our community engagement efforts will likely continue to be strong in the future, and in fact, the health of our democracy is dependent on today's students and younger generations. Experiential learning strategies such as community-engaged learning continues to prove itself as essential to develop future students with real-world skills such as work-force readiness, critical thinking, demonstrating cultural humility, and becoming civically minded graduates.

Introductions

Purpose

Each year, the Engaged Learning Office seeks to determine how well select students in community-engaged learning classes (CEL) make gains with the college-wide civic literacy student learning outcome (CLSLO) at Salt Lake Community College (SLCC).

Methods

For the 2024-2025 academic year, the study selected a sample of students from CEL designated sections that underwent the formal course review process during the same period. There were 11 CEL classes reviewed out of 70 total. A formal course review process was implemented in 2021 because of a program review recommendation. A random sample of students was pulled from all the courses reviewed in the previous year, and 118 assignments were assessed. Assignments were reviewed directly from the ePortfolio. Assessment methods changed in the 2021-2022 academic year so that recently reviewed CEL courses were assessed (versus a random sample from all designated courses); other methods remained similar from previous years. In total, 36% of the sample were involved in the Civically Engaged Scholars (CES) Honors program. In this program, students engage more deeply in civic engagement efforts than a typical CEL student. In the CES program, students take multiple CEL courses, participate in significant community service, and reflect on the service. This could impact the scoring because these students may have more evidence of civic learning and engagement due to their participation in this program.

Two teams, composed of two faculty assessors each, evaluated the assignments. The teams met to calibrate rubric understanding to ensure consensus on grading norms before using the rubric. The teams met virtually to discuss each assignment and reach a consensus score. The assignments in a course received scores under the characteristic subcategories of each criterion. If a student uploaded multiple assignments within a single course, the assessors reviewed all assignments and assigned an overall score.

This year, the scoring analysis approach was updated after the lead assessor identified an inconsistency in the previous calculation method. In response, we implemented a refined process that evaluates the percentage of scores within each category. This analysis was applied across all categories with supporting evidence, as well as to overall totals comparing cases with and without evidence. Comparative scores between assessment years are not included due to differences in calculation processes.

This aligns with the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) methods for conducting national VALUE scoring. The lead author learned several lessons through involvement in the national 2022 AAC&U VALUE scoring collaborative, specifically through the civic engagement project. One lesson was focused on scoring percentages, as previously mentioned. We also learned from our involvement in the project that scores at the first two levels are appropriate for students who have completed most of their coursework for an associate degree. This said, AAC&U also assessed Civic Evidence with colleges across Utah, which ended Fall 2023. Most work sample scores at Milestone 2 or just above entry level. This is interesting since SLCC is a two-year community college, whereas all other institutions involved are four-year institutions. The Utah report did not contain data on the number of credit hours earned, so little analysis was made in this area. They indicated that these scores were appropriate, assuming the experiences were at the introductory or practicing levels versus higher levels of cognitive development. This said, there were lower percentages of high scores for the seven Utah schools that submitted work.

We also learned that a score of zero should not be wholly interpreted as a negative reflection on students, but rather as an indication of the absence of evidence (although it can also indicate a low score). Additionally, we did not attempt to average scores across all dimensions, in alignment with AAC&U guidance, which cautions that such averaging introduces inappropriate methodological assumptions when treating VALUE data as ordinal.

Also, using the advice from AAC&U, this report is primarily descriptive and qualitative in nature. The data provides evidence of a landscape of learning that is occurring in select CEL classes based on the CLSLO rubric, which operationalizes CEL and civic literacy and engagement at SLCC.

The CLSLO rubric (Appendix A) outlines each criterion and characteristic subcategory based on the SLCC Civic Literacy Student Learning Outcome.

SLCC's Civic Literacy Student Learning Outcome

Students develop civic literacy and the capacity to be community-engaged learners who act in mutually beneficial ways with community partners. *This includes producing learning artifacts indicating understanding of the political, historical, economic or sociological aspects of social change and continuity; thinking critically about—and weighing the evidence surrounding—issues important to local, national, or global communities; participating in a broad range of community-engagement and/or service-learning courses for community building and an enhanced academic experience.*

The scoring rubric has evolved over the years. A modified version of the Civic Engagement Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education (VALUE) rubric from the AAC&U was used from 2014-2017. Then, components of the Civic-Minded Graduate Rubric 2.0 from Indiana University Purdue University-Indianapolis were incorporated in the 2017-2018 academic year. The spirit of the rubric remains consistent with the AAC&U civic engagement of VALUE rubric. The rubric has mostly stayed consistent since 2018. All revisions aligned with the language from the SLCC CLSLO. The rubric uses a scoring system of 3-High, 2-Medium, 1-Low, and 0-no evidence ranking for each characteristic subcategory.

Summary of Scores by Characteristic Subcategories

In most categories (excluding awareness of power structures and openness to working with others), most students had some type of evidence (between 66% and 89%) in each category. And of the students who had evidence in their ePortfolio, the majority fell into the low and medium categories. This was true for 75% in the Critical Thinking Around Social Issues dimension, 61% in the Working with Others dimension, and 70% in the Civic Action dimension. This is consistent with AAC&U data indicating that freshman and sophomore students are likely to be at these levels. There were only 48% of students scoring in the low to medium dimension of Developing Civic Literacy (the Awareness of Power Structures category pulled this percentage down because it was 29%). Upon further examination, 58% of participants scored low to medium in the Knowledge of Social Issues category, and 55% scored similarly in the Knowledge of Agencies that Address Social Issues category.

There is high evidence of learning in areas like:
- Civic knowledge through a disciplinary lens (105 students with evidence)
- Commitment to community engagement (99 students)
- Reflection of values, attitudes or beliefs (101 students)
- Breadth of community engagement (105 students)

Critical gaps remain in:
- Awareness of power structures, privilege, oppression or systems when trying to address social issues (35 students with evidence)
- Openness to working with others (63 students)

Figure 1 provides the full data set with numbers of students in each category with evidence and without as well as percentages in each area.

		High		Medium		Low		Total with evidence		Total with evidence versus no evidence			
		3		2		1		(3,2,1)		(3,2,1)			
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Develop civic literacy	Knowledge of a social issue	12	10.3%	25	21.4%	43	36.8%	80	100.0%	80	67.8%	37	31.4%
	Knowledge of agencies that address social issues	12	10.2%	18	15.2%	48	40.7%	78	100.0%	78	66.1%	40	33.9%
	Awareness of power structures, privilege, oppression or systems when trying to address social issues	1	0.9%	7	5.9%	27	22.9%	35	100.0%	35	29.7%	83	70.3%
Critical Thinking around social issues	Civic knowledge through a disciplinary lens	14	11.9%	27	22.9%	64	54.2%	105	100.0%	105	89.0%	13	11.0%
	Commitment to community engagement	13	11.1%	36	30.8%	50	42.7%	99	100.0%	99	83.9%	18	15.3%
	Reflection on values, attitudes, or beliefs	12	10.2%	44	37.3%	45	38.1%	101	100.0%	101	85.6%	17	14.4%
Working with Others	Perspective Taking	6	5.1%	33	28.0%	56	47.5%	95	100.0%	95	80.5%	23	19.5%
	Openness	7	5.9%	24	20.3%	32	27.1%	63	100.0%	63	53.4%	55	46.6%
Civic Action/ Acting in mutually beneficial ways	Breadth of community engagement	13	11.0%	15	12.7%	77	65.3%	105	100.0%	105	89.0%	13	11.0%
	Collaboration	13	11.0%	28	23.7%	47	39.8%	88	100.0%	88	74.6%	30	25.4%
	Mutually beneficial relationships with partners	18	15.3%	47	39.8%	37	31.4%	102	100.0%	102	86.4%	16	13.6%

Description of Subcategories

Civic Literacy Criteria

In the Civic Literacy/Knowledge category, students are evaluated on their knowledge of social issues and social change. For example, assessors determine if students discuss facts or topics such as civil rights, gender, race, disability, equity, law/order, fiscal responsibility, etc. Gaining knowledge of agencies and organizations that address these social issues is also a focus, as is increasing awareness of power structures, privilege, oppression, and systems when trying to address social issues.

Knowledge of social issues and awareness of agencies that address social issues is strong. The lowest scoring area in the rubric was awareness of power structures, privilege, oppression, or systems when trying to address social issues. This indicates that students are aware of social issues and agencies that address the issues but not as aware of the larger structures and systems that contribute and play a role in these social issues.

Critical Thinking/Capacity to Become a Community-Engaged Learner Criteria

Students apply critical thinking to their civic knowledge. Students identify issues through a disciplinary lens and then identify, explain, or analyze facts and theories from their academic field and their impact on society. This category also includes a commitment to community engagement, which evaluates students' participation in service and intent to serve. Students also reflect personal values, attitudes, or beliefs in relation to others.

This subcategory has the highest number of students with evidence out of all the subcategories. This category also has the highest percentages of students in the low and medium categories.

Working with Other Criteria

In this category, students are evaluated on their ability to work with others. Are students able to see beyond their perspective and identify the perspectives of others? Students' ability to interact with diverse others and discuss norms and attitudes is also a focus.

This category has the second highest number of students with evidence, and scores are only slightly lower than the Critical Thinking category.

Civic Action Criteria

In this category, community service is evaluated. Breadth and depth are assessed based on the frequency of service and the ability to identify multiple civic engagement activities. Students can participate in direct or indirect service, advocacy, activism, research, philanthropy, policy, governance, or corporate social responsibility projects (Stanford Haas Center for Public Service, 2020). Students in all CEL courses are required to participate in some type of service. How students collaborate with community partners, identify community needs, and mutually beneficial relationships are expressed.

This subcategory has about the same number of low scores as the critical thinking area. This subcategory also has the second highest number of medium scores and the highest number of high scores in all categories.

Analysis of Findings and Recommendations

Results

- **Student Submission of Signature Assignments to ePortfolios.** In previous years, a notable challenge has been the inconsistent submission of signature assignments to student ePortfolios. This trend continued in the current cycle, with only approximately 29% of the sampled students providing valid ePortfolio links. However, this issue is now largely irrelevant, as the SLCC ePortfolio initiative has mostly concluded. Moving forward, evidence collection will be facilitated through direct solicitation of assignments from faculty.
- **Knowledge of Social Structures, Power, and Privilege Category.** Given the current sociopolitical context in both the United States and Utah, this area may not receive increased emphasis in the immediate future. However, it is possible that interest in these topics will grow among Generation Z students. Currently, no formal recommendations are being made to faculty to expand focus in this category, in consideration of the prevailing political climate. For now, ensuring that students demonstrate a foundational understanding of key social issues and can engage with relevant community agencies may be a sufficient expectation—particularly for first- and second-year students. While some of these students participate in the Civically Engaged Scholars program, others do not, and expectations should reflect this diversity in engagement.
- **Critical Thinking Around Social Issues Category Analysis.** There are high engagement and evidence in the 'Reflection on Values, Attitudes, and Beliefs' category. These results highlight questions regarding the causation of these results when lower scores are presented in awareness of social issues. Assignment designs could be weak in prompting demonstrations of knowledge of social issues while simultaneously prompting student reflection. Ideal assignment design would scaffold demonstration of knowledge and reflection, which demonstrates a potential need for mentorship and support in assignment design.
- **Working with Other Category Analysis.** This area did not have significant evidence. Feedback from assessment faculty is that assignments lack formal prompting for demonstrating this criterion. This is an additional demonstration for the need for faculty mentorship in assignment design to facilitate strong prompting for student reflection within measured categories.
- **Civic Action Dimension Category Analysis.** There is evidence of strong engagement in the categories of 'breadth of community engagement' and 'mutually beneficial relationships with partners or the community'. It was anticipated that the highest percentage of low and medium scores show up in breadth of community engagement due to CEL course curriculum requiring participation in service.

Community Engagement and Durable Career-Ready Skills

There are significant, durable, career-readiness skills that are developed through involvement in the CEL program. The figure below outlines the overlap between the CLSLO criteria and the National Association of Colleges and Employers for career readiness competencies.

CLSLO Rubric Area	Aligned NACE Competencies	Alignment Explanation
Develop Civic Literacy/Knowledge	Equity and Inclusion, Critical Thinking, Career and Self Development	Analyzing systems of power and privilege, engaging with social issues, and understanding community partners.
Critical Thinking/Community Engagement Capacity	Critical Thinking, Career and Self-Development, Professionalism	Applying disciplinary knowledge to social issues, reflecting values, and demonstrating self-awareness.
Working with Others	Teamwork, Equity and Inclusion, Communication	Perspective taking, respect for diversity, and attention to reciprocal relationships.
Civic Action/Mutal Benefit	Leadership, Teamwork, Professionalism	Demonstrating initiative, the ability to collaborate and understand the needs of others.

Recommendations

There are several additional recommendations based on the data in this report:

- **Continuation of the formal CEL course review process.** A formal review of CEL courses was implemented in the fall of 2021. This process appears to be working as intended and will continue. The process is helping faculty improve the quality of the learning occurring in their courses and is recommended to continue to ensure quality of learning outcomes.
- **Offer targeted instructional support.** More intentional assignment design may be needed to help students better analyze the larger social and political systems. This report will be sent (anonymized) to the CEL faculty who participated in the CEL review process this past year. Intended outcomes are for faculty to better understand strengths and weaknesses of assignment design and which areas could benefit from additional attention. Targeted faculty mentorship from the Engaged Learning Office as well as members of the CEL committee is recommended to support curriculum development, ensuring learning outcomes, and strengthening assessment scores in critical gap areas including:
  - o Awareness of power structures, privilege, oppression, or systems when trying to address social issues.
  - o Openness to working with others.
- **Offer additional faculty professional development.** The AAC&U final report for Utah indicated that assignment design and assignment alignment with the VALUE rubric for Civic Engagement matter greatly. When the assignment was closely aligned with the rubric criteria, higher scores on the rubric were evident. They also stated that nationally professional learning for faculty around assignment design and engagement in rubrics is lacking. They conclude by stating that faculty and staff professional learning is needed to "help translate their excellent community and civically engaged efforts into an accessible demonstration of students' civic abilities. Professional

development opportunities focused on improving civically engaged learning outcomes through evidence-based teaching practices can be offered in partnership with the Faculty Teaching and Learning Department at SLCC based on this recommendation.

- **The Need:** Further strengthening assessment design to incorporate more quantitative data to demonstrate statistical significance of civic literacy learning outcomes. Partnering with the SLCC Data Science and Analytics department to ensure accurate outcome measurements will facilitate further data-driven decision making for the Engaged Learning Office in alignment with the SLCC Vision Matrix goals. High quality evidence-based results can then be confidently applied to additional courses and programming. Recalculation of previous years' scores to provide consistent calculations between annual assessments will further demonstrate evidence of CEL program effectiveness.
- **Future study:** A small qualitative study in Sept 2025 focused on CES students who take multiple CEL courses told us that these students reported that community engagement helped them connect their learning with real-world practice, gave them space to connect with their peers, and helped them connect with SLCC. Additional assessment of students participating in the CES program is recommended to differentiate from the learning outcomes of students participating in individual CEL courses. This will assist in demonstrating the quality and effectiveness of the CES program in benefiting participating students.

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Appendix A: <u>Civic Literacy Student Learning Outcome Assessment Rubric</u>

Criteria	Characteristic	0-No evidence	1-Low	2-Medium	3-High
Develop civic literacy/ knowledge	Knowledge of a social issue	No evidence.	**Identifies** some social issues or states basic details of a political, historical, economic, or sociological aspect of social change.	**Explains** social problem(s) or the political, historical, economic, sociological aspects of social change-or lack of change based on research with a social issue.	**Analyzes** different perspectives and/or ideas detailing social problems or the political, historical, economic, sociological aspects of social change.
	Knowledge of agencies/ organizations that address social issues.	No evidence.	**Identify** agency/ organization(s) focused on addressing social issues.	**Describes** surface level characteristics of organization(s) responsible for addressing social issues.	**Analyzes** relevant agency/organization (s) by **explaining** in depth how they address a social issue.
	Awareness of power structures, privilege/ oppression and/or systems when trying to address a social issue.	No evidence.	**Describes** a few actions or processes (e.g., advocating, voting, boycotting, contacting elected officials, protesting) that can be taken to address social issues. Or **little to no mention** of the role of power, privilege/oppressi on, or systems (e.g., economic, administrative, social).	**Compare and contrast** the multiple actions or processes (e.g., advocating, voting, boycotting, contacting elected officials, protesting) that can be taken to address social issues. Or **describes** current or different power, privilege/oppression, or structures and systems (e.g., economic, administrative, social).	**Creates a plan** that involves multiple actions or processes (e.g., advocating, voting, boycotting, contacting elected officials, protesting) that can be taken to address social issues. Or **analyzes** current or different power structures, privilege/oppression, or systems (e.g., economic, administrative, social) in depth.

Criteria	Characteristic	0-No evidence	1-Low	2-Medium	3-High
Critical thinking surrounding social issues/ Capacity to become community-engaged learner	Civic knowledge through a disciplinary lens	No evidence.	**Identify** issues (facts, theories, etc.) from one's own academic study/field/ discipline to civic engagement or its impact on society.	**Explains** own perspective and may also identify with one other perspective on issues (facts, theories, etc.) from one's academic study/field/ discipline making relevant connections/ implications to civic engagement or its impact on society.	**Analyzes multiple perspectives** on issues (facts, theories, etc.) from one's academic study/field/ discipline to civic engagement or impact on society.
	Commitment to community engagement	No evidence.	Mentions that they are required to do service for a class or as a part of a group. There are **few statements of responsibility** to commit time, talent, or resources to make a difference.	Mentions that they are required to do service for a class or as part of a group and expresses value in it. Student states that **a responsibility to serve is derived from external norms**, authority, or expectations from others.	Mentions that they want to participate in community engagement to support the community or society at large. Source of **responsibility is from internal motivations**.
	Reflection on values, attitudes, and/or beliefs	No evidence.	**Reflects minimally on personal values**, attitudes, and beliefs.	**Reflects sufficiently on personal values**, attitudes, and beliefs.	**Critically examines personal values,** attitudes, and beliefs.
Working with others	Perspective-taking	No evidence.	**States** own perspective (i.e., cultural, disciplinary, and ethical).	**Explains** own perspectives and identifies perspectives of others.	**Analyses** multiple perspectives for points of commonalties and differences.
	Openness	No evidence.	**Expresses willingness** to interact with **diverse others**.	**Demonstrates a willingness** to interact with diverse others and discusses norms and perspectives of themselves and/or others.	**Actively seeks out interactions with diverse others** and expresses the value of other perspectives or explains how their perspective has shifted.

Criteria	Characteristic	0-No evidence	1-Low	2-Medium	3-High
Civic Action/ Students act in mutually beneficial ways	Breadth or depth of community engagement (e.g., direct, indirect, advocacy, activism, research, philanthropy, policy and governance, social responsibility)	No evidence.	Participated in **one type** of community-engaged activity. Or completed minimum hours without any mention of continuation.	Participated in **at least one type of community engagement and identifies one additional type(s)** of community-engaged activities. Or completed additional hours or multiple types of projects.	Participated in **at least one type of community engagement activity and explains two or more types** of community engaged activities. Or describes plans for continued civic engagement.
	Collaboration	No evidence.	Talks about the partner or community need from a **personal perspective**.	**Cites information about the partner(s)** or community need collected from a third-party or web research.	**Describes personal communication with the partner** or the community where they learned about a community need.
	Mutually beneficial relationship with partners or the community	No evidence.	**Focuses on personal benefit** of service activity and/or is only doing it because it is required.	**Expresses limited value for themselves AND can express limited value for the community** partner/community.	**Expresses in sophisticated terms how the experience influenced them AND impacted the partner** and/or community on a larger level.