

University Studies Program

GENERAL EDUCATION FOR THE 21st CENTURY

Quest III and the Community Experience Component

(Excerpted from the Faculty Senate-approved USP Proposal)

Quest III is a disciplinary course that integrates content related to one of the three *Signature Questions* (SQs) and includes a community engagement project. Students take this third course in the QUEST sequence in either the first or second semester of the sophomore year. The **Quest III** course is not paired with another course and enrollment is capped at 50 students. The community engagement project encompasses 14 to 20 hours of campus or community experiential learning related to the *Signature Question* of the course. In order to identify as **Quest III**, courses must include the following characteristics, in addition to their disciplinary content.

Liberal Education and Essential Learning Outcomes

Through the community engagement project, the course stresses to students that a Liberal Education addresses real-world challenges through active engagement with the communities in which they live. The **Quest III** project is also connected to the “Ethical Action” component of the **Essential Learning Outcome** “Ethical Reasoning and Action,” which the AAC&U describes as “anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges.” The purpose of the community engagement project is thus to connect all students to the community, on or off campus, early in their college career to enhance their civic knowledge and provide them with an introductory experience in civic engagement.

Signature Questions

- Students select a **Quest III** course with whichever *Signature Question* they did not take in their first academic year.
- The **Quest III** course is expected to include “significant engagement” with the *Signature Question* linked to it. “Significant engagement” is defined as an apparent focus and/or integration of the content into a minimum of 30 to 50 percent of the course. (The minimum SQ content in **Quest I** remains 25 percent; this percentage is lower than **Quest II and III** because **Quest I** courses must also incorporate the First Year Experience elements.) Evidence of significant engagement with the *Signature Question* content includes relevant student learning outcomes and graded assignments and is intended to be apparent in the course syllabus.
- The community engagement project must be connected to the *Signature Question*.
- If the **Quest III** course focuses upon the *Intercultural Knowledge Signature Question*, that class will be designated as either an Ethnic Studies or Non-Western Culture

course (whichever is appropriate), supporting another USP goal of developing students' global learning and their responsibility as citizens of an increasingly diverse world.

- **Quest** instructors (**I, II, and III**) are supported by collaborative and ongoing professional development to assist with the curricular modification necessary to integrate *Signature Question* content into their courses (if such content is not already present in the proposed course).

Overview of the Community Engagement Project: Community Partnerships

Community-based (or service) learning is a high-impact practice, demonstrated to affect student retention and academic success. Though students may have more substantive civic engagement experiences in their major coursework (e.g. internships), the **Quest III** project will introduce students to civic action, community partners, and real-world challenges.

Types of Community Partnerships

Quest III students can partner with businesses; non-profit organizations; civic associations; public schools, colleges and universities; health and human service organizations; government organizations, or UW Oshkosh campus organizations. On an ongoing basis, options for types of projects are collaboratively constructed, connections with campus and community groups (and mechanisms for interaction between them) are established, and logistical support is provided for **Quest III**.

Project Organization

To ensure maximum flexibility for instructors in **Quest III**, the community engagement project can be organized in a variety of ways, including:

- one project for the entire class with either one community partner or multiple partners;
- multiple projects with small groups of students, with one or multiple community partner(s);
- individual student projects determined by students, with instructor pre-approval and documentation;
- a participant-observational research project with some direct action.

During the course design, the instructor can decide the organization of the project. The form of the project as well as the community partner can be determined either by the instructor or student, depending on the instructor's preference. The project might be supervised or unsupervised, depending on the preference of the instructor. For example, the instructor and the students might participate together in a whole class project organized in advance by the instructor or the instructor might provide a list of appropriate options for students' individual projects, requiring documentation of service and a structured learning outcome (e.g. paper or speech).

Alumni Mentors

All **Quest III** courses are assigned an alumni mentor (or mentors) for the community engagement portion of the course. These mentors enhance students' connection to the community through on- and off-campus outreach projects and service opportunities. Mentors facilitate connections with community service agencies and/or supplement faculty supervision of community engagement projects. Alumni mentors undergo a training program and are appropriately matched with **Quest III** courses based upon skill set, disciplinary background and community connections.

Project Support

To assist with community engagement projects, instructors are provided with the support of a *Community Engagement Project Coordinator*. In addition, ongoing professional development for **Quest III** instructors is available to support project ideas.

Assessment

In order to facilitate assessment, the community engagement project has a clear connection to course content. The instructor assesses learning through students' ability to connect the course content with the action and practice involved in the community engagement experience. This assessment can happen in multiple ways; for example, student blogs, media presentations, journal writing, speeches, or research papers. A central component of such assessment often includes students' reflection on their community engagement experience. Learning artifacts from these projects are appropriate for inclusion in the students' **ePortfolios**.

Outcomes

1. Students will develop further connections to the university and/or the local community through a community-engagement project.
2. Students will engage in action with immediate benefits and develop the ability to discern the applicability of academic knowledge in real-world settings.
3. Students will be able to reflect on the relationship between their educational experiences and their actions within communities.
4. Through interaction, students will develop empathy for community members.
5. Students will expand their personal responsibility for their intellectual development by archiving learning artifacts in the ePortfolio.

Resources

For instructional support, see the USP Teaching Resources webpage on the CETL website (www.uwosh.edu/grants/cetl).

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