

Community Based Learning in Communications

A range of service / community based learning modules are available at NUI Galway whereby students undertake accredited activity of specific relevance to their chosen subject for the benefit of the community

Teaching Context	
Subject	Cumarsáid na Gaeilge
Department	Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge
Participants	3 rd Year B.A. (Cumarsáid) students
Pedagogy	Community Based Learning Foghlaim Phobail Bhunaithe
Method	Classroom preparation followed by providing communication services to address a community need.
Participants	Offered to 20 students.
Hours	Fulltime
Credits	60 ECTS
Materials	Media content creation tools
Assessment	Reflection will be central to the assessment process and a wide range of methods will be used including portfolios, learning journals, presentations and reflective media content creation.
Length	Two semesters
Community Partners	TBC
Optional/Mandatory	Optional
First Piloted	2008/2009

Introduction

Students will be trained to meet the challenges of the new age of communications that is growing in Ireland. With a mixture of personal and practical skills we hope to guide students on the life-long learning path with an added awareness of social responsibility and their role in society. While learning and developing their skills for the benefit of the community, students will gain an understanding of their potential as agents of change in society.

Community Based Learning in Communications

This 60 ECTS module gives 3rd year B.A. (Cumarsáid) students the opportunity to improve their academic and professional skills by providing needed communication services to community partners. They will also improve their linguistic skills by being immersed in the Irish speaking environment of the Connemara Gaeltacht.

Academic Basis

The community based learning component is one of three choices available on the mandatory “year out” module of the BA (Cum) and accrues 60 ECTS over two semesters. Lectures will be integrated with workshops to draw together the learning of the first two years of the degree. These skills will be honed through the development of a communications ‘agency’ with the purpose of researching, and developing communication products or services that are needed by community partners. Each semester will deal with a different issue or set of partners. Following a needs assessment and project proposal stage in the community, students will learn from their experience in their first semester mini-projects and produce a publicity campaign to professional standards in the second semester.

Assessment

The learning outcomes are agreed on at the beginning of each semester, taking into account the academic level of the group, the personal goals of individual students and the requirements of the community partner. Reflection is a central part of the learning process and so will become a regular feature of the students’ weekly work. Methods of reflection will be varied to incorporate different learning styles and will include, written, oral, and creative reflection; it will be conducted alone, with peers and with tutors. Even though the product being provided to community partners must be of a professional standard, students will be graded on their learning not on their productivity. The reflection process will be a useful tool to evaluate the quality of academic learning as well as personal and professional development.

Student Benefit

The benefits for students of community based learning have been widely documented. They include an increased awareness of community, a deeper understanding of subject matter, integration of theory and practice, as well as personal and professional development with a social conscience. In this particular context students will grow to understand their ability to contribute in a constructive way to the Irish language community and to the media industry in Ireland. This is currently the only full time degree module using community based learning; therefore students will also be a part of the university's flagship example of campus/community engagement.

Community Benefit

In their provision of public-service broadcasting, the Irish language media community has for years welcomed students on work-experience. Now students will provide direct 'public-service' communications products to non-profit organisations whose mission involves community development. Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge is dedicated to the development of the Gaeltacht through the provision of higher education through its campus' in Connemara, Donegal and Kerry. By providing courses such as the BA (Cumarsáid) the Acadamh promotes the language, bolsters the sense of community and encourages sustainability of the Gaeltacht as a whole.

Academic Comment

The community partnerships between campus, student and agency is a long-term commitment of mutual benefit to all with the aim of promoting the students' learning, the agency's community development goals and the universities mission of civic engagement. Community based learning is a relatively new pedagogy to Irish Higher Education and requires a paradigm shift towards student-centred experiential learning. There are potentially many advantages for all the participants and the results can be very significant in the long term.