

History of Community Engaged Learning at the U

Community Engagement at the U

The U's institution-wide commitment to community engagement is nationally recognized. Since 2010, the University of Utah has been consistently awarded the prestigious Carnegie Foundation's Elective Classification for Community Engagement. Demonstrating the leadership of the U in the field, its 2020 application was used as an example to emulate. To learn more about the Classification and the current re-designation cycle,

visit the [Carnegie Foundation website](#).

30 years of CEL Student Programs

The Community Engaged Learning (CEL) Student Programs at the University of Utah grew out of years of learning in the University of Utah's Lowell Bennion Community Service Center. When the University of Utah created the Bennion Center in 1987, Bennion Center staff and student leaders organized ways to help students maximize the learning available from their service experiences within Bennion Center programs. Integrating a reflective component into service projects, students became a "community of learners" and reflected together on their experiences, the impact of these experiences on their personal values, and the implications for broader social issues. The Bennion Center saw students begin to keep personal service journals and others seek classes that tied to their service. The next step was integrating service into the course work at the University.

In 1991, Andrew Cooley, a community service participant, and University of Utah Student Body President, sought a way to connect the campus community service program and the academic curriculum. Immediately after his election, a committee of three students from the Associated Students of the University of Utah and the Bennion Center developed a proposal for what they called a "Service Distinction at Graduation." Using a consensus-building and opinion-gathering approach, this three-student team began to secure institutional approval for their idea. They sought comments from all key campus administrators, student groups, and faculty committees. The students listened carefully for good ideas and integrated them into the draft proposal, gradually building support while refining and strengthening the proposal.

In 1992, the Academic Senate approved the Program, and the Board of Trustees enthusiastically finalized the approval the same month. From 1992 to 2024, the program went through various iterations, recognizing students for their community engagement through a transcript designation. Initially called Service-Learning Scholars, students in the program were subsequently known as Community Engaged Scholars from 2012 to 2017, Bennion Scholars from 2017 to 2024, and Bennion Community Engaged Scholars since 2024.

In 2021, the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center created an additional CEL Student program. The intent behind the Certificate in Community Engagement was to provide opportunities for students to build their civic agency; interpersonal, leadership and advocacy skills; as well as academic skills in critical analysis, appreciation for diversity, and an enhanced understanding of community issues and challenges. The Certificate could serve as a stand-alone professional credential, adding value to a student's academic experience at the U.

In 2024, the Bennion Community Engaged Scholars Program was updated to offer a progressive approach to students eager to commit to community engagement. The new requirements provide pathways across other Community Engaged programs, including the Bennion Center HIVE and the Community Engagement Certificate. Our goal is to make sure that each student has the opportunity to access a meaningful community engaged experience.

Throughout 30 years of history, the CEL Student Programs have benefited over 300 students, empowering them to be the change they want to see.