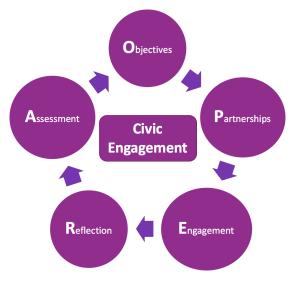# A Rubric for Civically Engaged Courses: O.P.E.R.A.

O.P.E.R.A. is a framework developed by Marshall Welch to help educators envision, plan, and implement civic engagement (also called service-learning) projects. This framework incorporates best practices in civic engagement pedagogy.

Objectives: Civically engaged courses must balance two sets of objectives: the learning objectives for students and the objectives or goals of community partners. These objectives should be mutually beneficial. A good fit sets the stage for projects that deeply reinforce academic content while building sustainable, prosperous partnerships.

Partnerships: Community organizations are equal collaborators and educators in a civic engagement course. During the course-design process faculty should meet with possible partners to create collaborative and reciprocal relationships. Creating a formal written agreement can help establish clear roles and expectations, including a timeline of activities. OCE can help with selecting, establishing, and maintaining partnerships.

Engagement: This is the activity your students will undertake together with a community organization. Engagement can take many forms and should always be led by the community partner's objectives. If possible, invite the community partner to give an orientation to students or lead a reflection to help situate the engagement within the organization.

Reflection: The students' engagement with the community is linked back to classroom learning through intentional reflections. Reflection should be built into every stage of the civic engagement experience and can take many forms (journals, dialogue, online discussions, artwork, interviews, etc.). These should push students to link their engagement to course content and objectives. The OCE has resources available to help you design and assess reflection activities that encourage student learning.

Assessment: The civic engagement loop is brought full circle when assessments are used to determine if the experience met the learning objectives and community partner's objectives established at the start. Assessment, like reflection, should be a continual process of observing progress and generating feedback that can be used to learn and adjust to better meet the goals.