



ASHOKA 

**EVALUATING
CHANGEMAKER EDUCATION:
A PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE**



CHAPTER 7

Evaluation for Semester in the City: Immersive Changemaker Education for Full Academic Credit

BY: C. SARA MINARD

Chief Academic Officer, College for Social Innovation

ERIC SCHWARZ

Co-Founder and CEO, College for Social Innovation

FIONA WILSON

DBA, Clinical Associate Professor, Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics and Executive Director of the Center for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship, University Of New Hampshire

“In an immersive program like ours, with students from all majors and ages, with varying degrees of knowledge of social innovation, all coming to develop their skills as changemakers, our evaluation methods have to capture a very dynamic process of transformation for the whole student. Because our program combines 30+ hours per week of internship in a social innovation organization, combined with evening and Friday classes, professional development and reflection, as well as living in a city (for many for the first time) there are many potential interaction effects between their professional development, design-driven classroom learning, and independent living in community.”

SARA MINARD

Chief Academic Officer

College for Social Innovation

While a great deal of educational innovation has occurred over the last decade, the questions of how we truly inspire and develop changemakers in a holistic manner, and how we measure their learning, remain central. These were the motivating questions posed by social innovator, Eric Schwarz, when we began our journey in 2015 to advance transformative experiential learning in higher education.

Eric's personal story included a life-changing internship when he was 19 years old, in many ways the inspiration for College for Social Innovation (CFSI) and its Semester in the City (SITC) program. Across 25 years as a social entrepreneur at City Year and Citizen Schools, Eric had witnessed the power of well-crafted evaluation tools to drive program improvement as well as philanthropic investments. On the flip side, Eric had also learned from painful experience how hard it is to design evaluation systems that are appropriate to the program model, methodologically rigorous, and meaningfully connected to field-wide themes, questions, and challenges.

This chapter lays out the efforts of Eric and team, including the co-authors, to develop a new way to educate and inspire social innovators while simultaneously crafting an evaluation system – now comprising nine different tools – that is true to the program model, rigorous, and hopefully useful to the larger field.

BACKGROUND: SEMESTER IN THE CITY THEORY OF CHANGE AND ENGAGEMENT MODEL

The College for Social Innovation's 15-week Semester in the City (SITC) program is designed to embed a rigorous immersive educational experience directly into the college curriculum, helping undergraduate college students from all backgrounds and majors develop a prioritized set of "twenty-first century skills" that can support future academic as well as career success. The program is open to all students but is particularly focused on those seeking careers as changemakers - addressing some of humanity's toughest challenges - whether in non-profits, government organizations, or mission-driven businesses. Students relocate to Boston for a semester to participate in a 400-hour supported internship in the social impact sector and take related classes on Wednesdays and Fridays, while earning a full semester of academic credit at their home college.

Founded in 2015 and working in collaboration with a growing consortium of 13 university and college partners, CFSI is a non-profit with a mission to *educate and inspire the next generation of problem solvers for humanity's tough challenges*. The model's theory of change was informed by research from education and labor economist Richard Murnane, published in *Teaching The New Basic Skills*, (1996); business literature on the skills employers are looking for (Kay, n.d.); the higher education sector's "high-impact learning" literature (Kuh, 2008; Kinzie, n.d.; and others); social psychology research on self-efficacy and planned choice (Bandura, 1992; and others); Gallup research on career outcomes for college graduates; and dozens of interviews with college and social sector leaders (Gallup & Strata Education Network; 2018).

SITC's model has several pedagogical assumptions, namely the importance of a competency-based curriculum that is credit-bearing; the power of internships to solidify a student's experiential learning

through practice; mentorship as a key component to effective learning from role models, getting reinforcement, and building professional networks; and regularized feedback and reflection, based on John Dewey's idea that only upon reflection does a student's experience become learning (1933).

Early on in the process of developing SITC, the four "C's" - Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, and Critical Thinking - were identified as core competency domains for all students, and particularly social changemakers and problem-solvers. Recognizing that our model, while intensive, was still only one semester, we worked to synthesize these broad competency domains. After months of participatory design and debate, we honed them into four core skill areas with related sub-skills:

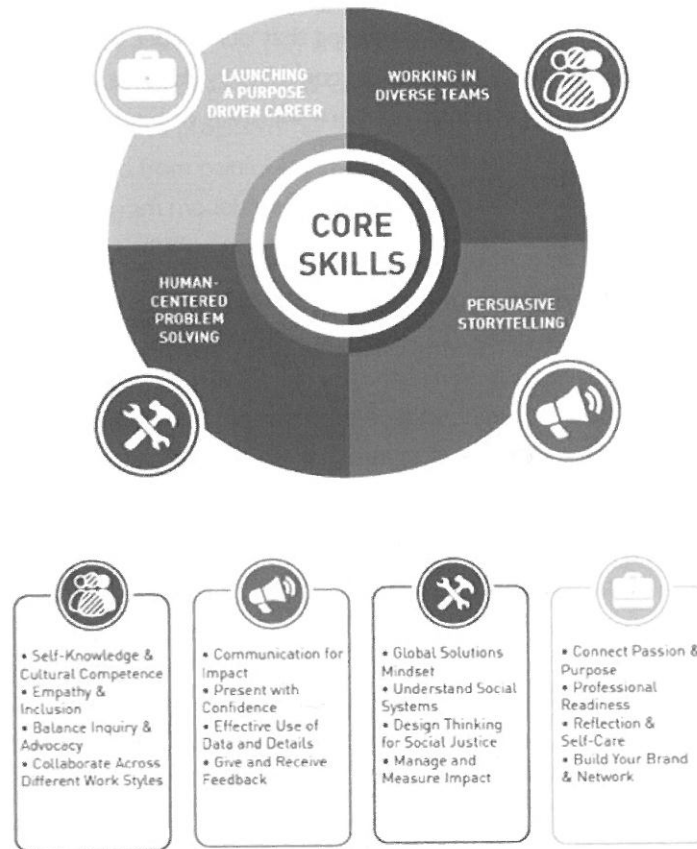
1. Launching a purpose-driven career;
2. Working in diverse teams,
3. Persuasive storytelling, and
4. Human-centered problem solving.

CFSI is now at the end of a three-year pilot with data from 142 participants collected through nine different assessment tools, each focusing on these core skills and sub-skills as detailed in the graphic below. In this article we share the methods of assessment, early results, and questions we are wrestling with as we look to grow the program as an essential component of a four-year degree.

FIGURE 7.1

CFSI Core Skills

STUDENTS AT CFSI LEARN:



DESIGNING OUR SYSTEM FOR EVALUATION

A key question from the beginning was not just what to teach (and how to teach it) but also how to evaluate student learning. To help answer this question, Eric Schwarz, the Co-Founder and CEO of CFSI sought evaluation guidance from Liz Reisner, former president of Policy Studies Associates, Lance Potter of New Profit, Inc., Tony Siesfeld from Deloitte, Lisa Jackson, Co-Founder of CFSI, and Len Schlesinger, CFSI Board Member and former President of Babson College, and others. The goal was to draft a robust evaluation strategy to guide internal learning while also contributing to the experiential learning field and the dialogue on high-impact learning, service learning, and changemaker education.

Before and during the three-year pilot, nine different evaluative tools were developed and used for at least four of the six semesters the program has been offered. The tools, which are designed to be mutually reinforcing, include student self-assessments as well as assessments conducted by program

faculty, mentors, and home college faculty. Their implementation ranges from the first week of program until six months after completion. We hope these tools, many of which can be found at collegeforsocialinnovation.org, will be useful for other programs in the field of social innovation education and/or related areas. The tools are:

1. **Pre- and Post-semester assessment** in which students rate their own confidence in their abilities/assets in 34 specific areas grouped in eight overall skill clusters. This data provides a pre-program comparison for the abilities and assets students report having at the end of the program. The full pre- and post-semester assessment can be found in Appendix B.
2. **Mid-semester qualitative assessment** in which students openly share and discuss feedback on each aspect of the program (housing, food, health, transportation, community life, internships, academic courses, recruitment, overall student support). This data, collected through an interactive two-hour participatory workshop in week seven of the semester, has invested students in the continuous improvement process and yielded insights that have informed immediate and long-term changes to the program.
3. **Graded Skill-Based Assignments** in which students work on graded assignments with embedded skill and competency requirements. As an example, students in the Wednesday evening seminar complete an impact analysis, which involves creating a data visualization artifact to demonstrate their ability to gather, interpret, and explain social impact data from their internship for a wider audience (see the CFSI website for more information). Students complete a draft with several rounds of feedback from peers and faculty, and students who receive a B+ or better on their final submission (based on a rubric) are considered to have reached or exceeded initial proficiency in this skill.
4. **Competency ratings** in 20 changemaking areas given to students by their mentors at the mid-point and end of the semester. Mentors can range in age and position (from CEO/Founder to Program Manager) at the different non-profit host organizations where our Fellows are placed, and all receive training and support from CFSI. Mentors select ratings based on a four-level rubric to provide an external assessment of student skills at the end of the program as well as growth over the course of the semester.

Beyond incorporating ratings into student grades, the CFSI team had not otherwise utilized this data until recently. In May 2019 we reviewed evaluation results with faculty contacts at five partner colleges and they found us over-reliant on student self-assessments. When they learned we had evaluative ratings from mentors they implored us to make more use of the data, which we did starting the very next week.

5. **End-of-semester anonymous exit survey** asking students to assess their learning in various areas, such as growth in public speaking skills, networks, and confidence/self-efficacy. This provides a basic self-assessment of gains (if any) in priority areas and can be compared across semesters and with other assessments described here.

6. **End-of-semester ratings** of the Wednesday evening course (titled “Social Innovator’s Tool Box”) and the Friday course (titled “Becoming a Problem Solver”) and the internship (all syllabi are on the CFSI website). This mix of quantitative and qualitative feedback provides more balanced insights to the teaching team on how to improve our teaching methods of core skills and concepts.
7. **A net promoter survey** in which students are asked anonymously how likely they are on a 0-10 scale to recommend the program to a friend. Many leading businesses – and an increasing number of social impact organizations – rely on the Net Promoter Score as a leading indicator of customer satisfaction and an important part of a robust strategy for measuring organizational impact.
8. **An anonymous survey six months after graduation** from SITC in which students assess learning in various skill areas and other changes, such as growth in their network or sense of purpose and direction. With the benefit of time to reflect and to compare the learning experience at SITC with learning experiences before and after, this survey provides another important window into skill attainment and the perceived longer-term impact of the experience.
9. **Structured qualitative interviews of program graduates by advisers and faculty at their home colleges** the semester after they complete the program. In these interviews, college staff and faculty seek to better understand the long-term impact of the SITC experience on the student’s overall development.

Offered alone, each of these evaluation tools have significant limitations. Asking students to assess their own learning, for instance, is susceptible to bias. Assessments of students by mentors and program faculty, while providing useful outside perspective, lack a clear control group of students not participating in the program. That said, the power of our approach, we believe, is the weaving of the nine tools together, allowing us to examine clearly defined skills and learning goals from multiple perspectives and over time.

As an example, a key skill we are looking to build and to measure is networking. We hope to teach students how to network better and also to give students support to actually build a bigger network, widely known to be a key success factor for young professionals seeking their first (and subsequent) jobs. Given this goal, it is encouraging that 94 percent of students tell us in exit surveys that they have meaningfully built their networks during the program. Data from our follow up survey helps to us to understand longer term effects of such growth. In response to survey six months later, 88 percent of students tell us it is “true” or “very true” that “I have a larger network” because of the program. But what’s really revealing are the statistically significant increases in student self-assessment rating between the pre- and post-survey questions in response to statements like “I can explain the importance of two-way benefit in relationships. I seek opportunities to aid others. I say yes to requests for help when possible.” Further reinforcement comes from the fact that when mentors are asked to rate the ability of their student to “build and sustain their network,” the average “grade” given in this skill area is a 93 (A).

LEARNING FROM INITIAL OUTCOME DATA

The data we have collected so far is limited by the modest sample size of 142 students who participated in the pilot. Also we do not yet have meaningful data on career outcomes – a key long-term goal of the program. Nonetheless, data collected over the last six semesters, through the nine evaluation tools previously listed, provides strong initial evidence of the impact of a well-designed immersive learning program on student knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy. More than 90 percent of students say they have made meaningful gains in a range of areas, from “problem solving skills” (98 percent), to “persuasive storytelling” (97 percent), to “grew my network” (94 percent). Evidence of major gains is consistent in results from the different evaluation tools.

Data collected during the pilot, particularly qualitative feedback from students, has also informed continuous program improvement. As an example, the Wednesday evening seminar, The Social Innovator’s Tool Box, is now integrally connected to student internships based on feedback that the internship part of the program had previously been seen as too divorced from the classes. We are also looking to reduce the hours of homework connected to the classes, allowing rigor to emerge as students apply concepts covered in the classroom to the internship experience rather than adding more reading to what students already report is an intensive and challenging semester. Additionally, CFSI and its college partners have begun a learning community with a goal to transfer lessons learned from the CFSI research into teaching and learning strategies at the partner campuses.

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data collected through the nine evaluation tools, early evidence indicates students are making meaningful gains in three broad areas. With some tools such as the pre- and post-semester test of student competencies, we have assessed the statistical significance of findings using a “two-tailed t-test” and learned that on 32 of 34 questions gains are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level (College for Social Innovation, n.d.)

I. **Specific skills, including “Persuasive Storytelling” and “Human Centered Design”.**

At the end of the program, 97 percent of students reported meaningful gains in “storytelling for impact.” Mentors, when asked to rate students on their ability to “use stories to make messages memorable” and “to tell a compelling story and to deliver it confidently,” give an average grade of 91.2 percent at the end of the semester – up from an average grade of 89 percent at mid-semester. For more information on the storytelling curriculum, see the “Public Narrative Participant Guide” which was adapted from the works of Marshall Ganz of Harvard University and modified by Michele Rudy (n.d.).”

In the area of Human Centered Design, 91 percent of students said they made meaningful gains in design thinking skills while in the program, in part through a design challenge in which students work in teams to develop ideas that address social challenges they care about. CFSI’s pre- and post-semester competency assessment asked students to rate their own skills in four areas related to human-centered design, including creative confidence and the ability to frame a design challenge, create a project plan, and gather primary (end-user) and secondary (expert/literature) research to inform a new or improved social innovation (Willness & Bruni-Bossio,

2017). Students showed statistically significant gains (at a 95% confidence level) in each of the four competencies.

“Caitlin’s human centered design project made us realize that we needed to change our homelessness prevention strategy... What Caitlin learned and shared resulted in new partnerships with the Boston Public Schools, a new stream of funding, and the promise of better outcomes for kids.”

LARRY SEAMANS

Spring 2019 SITC Mentor; President, FamilyAid Boston;

- 2. Knowledge of the social impact sector and professional networks in the sector.** Six months after graduating from the program, 83 percent of students said it was “true” or “very true” that the program gave them “a better understanding of social problems” and an additional 15 percent said this was “somewhat true.” While in the program, mentors gave students an average grade of A (93%) on the criterion: “Fellow actively sought to increase their knowledge and understanding about social issues, particularly those addressed by the organization.” While students built their understanding of social change and the social impact sector in the program, they also built their networks and learned how to cultivate longer-term connections, with 94 percent in exit surveys saying they had meaningfully grown their networks. Looking back six months later, 88 percent of students said it was “true” or “very true” that “I have a larger network” because of the program and an additional 12 percent said it was “somewhat true.”

“SITC gave me the confidence to operate in a fast-paced, innovative business setting. I was introduced to immensely supportive and inspiring mentors who have helped to show me the extent of my abilities and a vast array of opportunities in the social sector.”

FALL 2017 FELLOW

- 3. Self-confidence, self-efficacy, and a clearer sense of purpose.** A variety of evaluation tools show growing student confidence and sense of purpose through the program, including statistically significant gains in student responses to a pre- and post-semester prompt: “I have clear goals for positive impact in the world. I know what steps I need to take in order to accomplish those goals.” Additionally, six months after graduating from the program, 87 percent of students say it is “true” or “very true” that “I have more self-confidence” because of the program and an additional 8 percent say it is “somewhat true.” Interviews with students indicate the program provides the exposure, independence, and experiences to develop a greater sense of direction and purpose. Structured interviews with more than 50 alumni of the program from University of New Hampshire indicate anecdotal evidence of the transformative nature of SITC,

particularly for students' growth in maturity and efficacy, self-knowledge, and more developed career goals and purpose.

“SITC has had an incredible impact on my ability to be assertive and take initiative in leadership roles! I am more confident in my skills, a better public speaker, and more comfortable with communicating my ideas.”

SPRING 2017 FELLOW

Looking Ahead

As CFSI and a growing network of college and university partners expand the SITC program, we seek to continuously improve the program through thoughtful reflections on the data we are collecting. And we are exploring new ways to evolve our evaluation methods, including more mixed-methods assessments that get behind the numbers into some of the qualitative descriptions. At the same time, we also aim to contribute to the dialogue in higher education and beyond on the impact of new and innovative models of experiential changemaker education, especially as our sample size grows exponentially over the next few years.

Some areas for future research include:

- The data above represent students from sophomore to senior year. While the current sample size does not allow reliable analysis by class standing, we are seeing very interesting anecdotal evidence of varied learning outcomes for these different student groups. While our founding assumption was that students would participate as upper classmen, approximately 40 percent of students have been sophomores. In some ways, many of these younger students have experienced a more profound transformative experience, especially in helping accelerate their confidence, skills, and sense of purpose earlier in their college careers. We plan to explore this dynamic with future research and larger sample sizes.
- On the belief that this type of experiential learning should be available to students regardless of income or background, CFSI has set (and exceeded) a target of 60 percent of participating students being students of color, low income, and/or first generation. While the sample size has not yet enabled analysis by these demographic groups, we are committed to ensure that SITC is fully inclusive of under-represented students and creates productive learning outcomes for all demographic groups who participate.
- Established literature in social psychology on planned behavior suggests that “perceived feasibility” (self-efficacy) and perceived desirability in a specific domain are key antecedents to a certain path (e.g. a career as a changemaker) (Bandura, 1993). We are interested in developing more sophisticated pre-post measures of these concepts and exploring the relationship with changemaker “intentions” – the likelihood that someone will, or does, pursue a career as a changemaker.
- Social innovation and systems change literature invites us to explore the idea of civic engagement and civic learning as a measure of social innovation education, testing the connection

- between a student's knowledge of methods for collective action and the likelihood they engage in the public square, as a complement to the more individual-as-social-change-agent focus of social entrepreneurship literature (The National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012).

Additionally, our evaluation to date has also suggested some future program considerations:

- Further exploration of the transition into SITC and then back to a more traditional academic experience at the student's home college. How can students best be prepared to make the most of this intense immersive semester-long experience (significantly more demanding than a traditional on-campus academic semester) and how can they be supported in successfully transitioning back to campus and, ultimately, to work? In pursuing this line of inquiry, we need to recognize that one area where student gains are relatively modest according to our surveys is in impact of the program on later academic success. Six months after graduating from the program, 56 percent of respondents answer "true" or "very true" when asked if they are a better student because of their experience with SITC. An additional 35 percent said the statement was "somewhat true" and 10 percent said it was "not at all true". By comparison, 82 percent said it was "true" or "very true" that they were "better prepared to tackle humanity's tough challenges" while 17 percent said that was "somewhat true" and 1 percent said it was "not at all true". There is more work to do to support alumni of the program and to better design the process of re-entry from SITC back into a more traditional academic environment, including thinking about how alumni share their experiences with students and faculty.
- In a world where colleges are under increasing pressure to deliver post-college career results without saddling students with more debt – and without undermining broader purposes of higher education – how can CFSI demonstrate that its program can help colleges deliver high-impact learning and career outcomes at an affordable cost? Further, how can CFSI and its partners show the value of an intensive semester of experiential education as a powerful complement to a liberal arts or business education?

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

We are eager to partner with the broader Ashoka U community and the larger community of experiential education practitioners and evaluators to harvest the most learning possible from our results to date (and results to come) and share our tools and insights however they may be helpful to others. While our evaluation tools are specific to our particular program, and the skills and competencies we prioritize, the general approach is broadly replicable. The tools described in the chapter have so far been used to assess the experiences of just 142 students in our initial pilot, but we believe they can also be used at a much larger scale and adapted by others.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

A few resources that we would recommend are:

- High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter by George D. Kuh (2008)
- *Public Narrative, Collective Action and Power* by Marshall Ganz (2011)
- *Public Narrative Participant Guide*, adapted from works by Marshall Ganz of Harvard University and modified by Michele Rudy (n.d.)
- *The Curriculum Innovation Canvas: A Design Thinking Framework for the Engaged Educational Entrepreneur* by Chelsea Willness and Vincent Bruni-Bossio (2017)