

ACE Course Assistant Guide



About ACE

The Academic Civic Engagement (ACE) office, a part of the Smith Center for Global Engagement, is excited to welcome you to the team as a Course Assistant! We value your skills which will enable ACE courses to continue to build ethical community partnerships. ACE at St. Olaf is guided by the five C's: Civic Identity, Community Knowledge, Cultural Humility & Curiosity, Connectedness and Changemaking. This guide will help you effectively work with your class to create a lasting relationship with a community partner that benefits the partner, the students and yourself.



	1
About ACE	0
Your Role	1
Reading Materials	2
Anthony Ogdan, View From the Veranda	3
Tania Mitchell, Traditional vs Critical Service Learning	3
Wick and Willis, How International Education Can Help Advance Social Justice	3
Faculty Relationship	3
How to Build a Strong Relationship	4
Navigating Confidentiality and Reflection Sessions	5
What Confidentiality Can Look Like	5
What Confidentiality is Not	6
Relationship with Students	6
Introducing Yourself	7
Communication During the Course	8
Navigating Student Frustration	8
The Smith Center	9
Resources	10
Planning and Leading Reflections	10
Logistics	11
Case Studies	11
Music 345: Somali Music and Dance- Spring 2022	11
Course Timeline	11
Reflections Used	14
Course Assistant Takeaways From Experience	15
Somali Music and Dance- Spring 2023	16
Course Timeline	16
Reflections Used	21
Takeaways From Experience	21

Your Role

As an ACE Course Assistant your role will depend on the course you are involved with. In the past, Course Assistants have done some or all of the following:

- Organized and recorded class materials, notes, and data
- Communicated directly with community partners
- Listened to student feedback and helped with any issues in the course or with community partners
- Met regularly with faculty to help plan and organize the course
- Planned and lead in-class reflection sessions
- Reminded students of deadlines and expectations for community engagement work
- Coordinated events, transportation, or other accommodations related to the course
- Worked closely with faculty to provide feedback and resources related to ethical community engagement
- Worked with the Smith Center and other student workers to help cultivate community engagement across campus



Please refer to your Job Description or ask your faculty or ACE staff if you have any questions about your particular role. Being an ACE Course Assistant often requires flexibility and a willingness to plunge into difficult work. It is important to cultivate a relationship with the faculty member you are working with, the students in your class, and the Smith Center. These relationships will empower you to ask any questions you may have.


Reading Materials

Reflection is a critical piece of a good ACE experience, and you may be asked, as an ACE Course Assistant role, to help facilitate student reflection as they work with a community partner through an ACE course. This section provides

reading materials that will help you understand the philosophy guiding ACE and why reflection is an integral part of community engagement.


Each section will include the article title, a link to the article, and a link to a reading guide created by a former course assistant.


Anthony Ogden, *View From the Veranda*

Article Link-  Anthony Ogden View from the Veranda.pdf

Reading Guide-  Anthony Ogden View from the Veranda Notes

Tania Mitchell, *Traditional vs Critical Service Learning*

Article Link-  Tania Mitchell Traditional vs. Critical Service Learning (2008)....

Reading Guide-  Tania Mitchell Traditional vs Critical Service-Learning Notes



Wick and Willis, *How International Education Can Help Advance Social Justice*

Article Link-

 How International Education Can Help Advance Social Justice _ NAFSA (2...

Reading Guide-

 Wick and Willis How International Education Can Help Advance Social Ju...

Faculty Relationship

Creating a strong relationship with the faculty member you will be working with will enable you to succeed as an ACE Course Assistant. A strong

relationship is built by effective communication, transparency, and clear expectations.

How to Build a Strong Relationship

- Meet regularly with your faculty member
- Ask clarifying questions about course content and what the faculty member's goals for the course are
- Maintain professional communication (such as addressing them by their title, Professor or Doctor) unless the faculty member tells you they are comfortable with something else
- Set clear expectations with faculty about your role and what the faculty member expects from you
- Make sure that you come to class prepared (if you are expected to attend a class) and are always aware of what material the class is engaging with on that day
- Utilize reading materials and resources to grow your understanding of Academic Civic Engagement so you can work with the faculty through any issues that arise
- Act as a partner and resource for your faculty member as you engage with this important, and often messy, work

Academic civic engagement is not easy. It is important that as you grow in your relationship with your faculty member that you reflect with them on the messiness of this work. There are often no easy answers and transparency, communication, and--most importantly--trust will enable you and your faculty member to parse out solutions together. In doing so, the work you and the class are undertaking will have a positive impact on communities within and outside of St. Olaf.



Navigating Confidentiality and Reflection Sessions

A core strength of the ACE Course Assistant role is the positionality you have as a fellow student. As a peer to your students, the traditional instructor-learner power dynamic is removed from the classroom. This helps students feel comfortable being honest and open in their dialogue without feeling any pressure to perform academically for a grade or say anything that will impact their relationship with the faculty member leading the course. In order to support this strength, it is important that you maintain a level of confidentiality regarding what is said during reflection. It is important to get on the same page as your faculty member regarding how much confidentiality should be maintained.

What Confidentiality Can Look Like



- Having post-reflection check ins with your faculty member
- Using general terms to identify student feedback such as “a student mentioned” or “students were feeling”
- Refraining from using any specific student names unless the student has consented prior to sharing with the faculty member
- Using anonymous student feedback such as “delta-plus” or anonymous google forms
- Asking the students during reflection whether they are comfortable having you share what was said during reflection with the faculty member
- Sharing and seeking feedback on reflection questions and intended outcomes with the faculty member prior to the reflection happening

What Confidentiality is Not

- Making the faculty member feel like they are out of the loop regarding what occurs during reflection sessions
- Failing to give the faculty member any sense of what kind of questions and outcomes are intended from reflection
- Failing to give any feedback or information to the faculty member upon their request
- Failing to report any severe incidents or disagreements that may affect the class going forward
- Failing to report anything that may be against the college's policy regarding discrimination, sexual harassment, threats of violence, or other misconduct



You will be engaged in complicated work and the discussions you may have with students may be personal and difficult to navigate. Make sure to lean on the resources you have available to you. It is imperative that you form a strong relationship with your faculty member and create enough trust to navigate any difficult situations that may arise. If you have any questions about how to create a successful environment for your students and faculty members do not hesitate to reach out to the ACE staff.

Relationship with Students

Your relationship with the students in the course is essential to your success as an ACE Course Assistant. One of the goals of the ACE Course Assistant position is to use your positionality as a fellow student to enhance the course's community engagement portion. Students will likely speak to you informally

and create a relationship with you that is different from the one that they have with their professor. It is important that you foster a friendly and comfortable relationship with the students in your class in order to create a trusting environment.

Introducing Yourself

Your introduction to the class serves as the first step in forming a strong relationship with your students. Some tips for your introduction are:

- Introducing yourself as a student first which means sharing your name, class year, pronouns, major, and any hobbies or interests
- Introducing yourself as a Course Assistant second and sharing your excitement for the role
- Outlining your role in the course, how it is different from SI Leaders or course assistants students may have worked with in the past, and what you see as the benefits of being a peer with the students in the course
- Inviting the students to reach out to you if they have any questions and how they can contact you

Your introduction should clearly communicate that you are a fellow student and that your role is different from a traditional SI leader or course assistant. You should aim for students to see you as their peer and understand that you are not involved in any evaluation of their performance in the course. You are a resource to enhance their ACE experience and help guide them through civic engagement-- not a student grader.



Communication During the Course

Throughout the course you should maintain a friendly and helpful relationship with your students. If you are attending class regularly, try to learn the names of your students and greet them in passing. If you are leading in class reflection sessions it is vital that students feel comfortable sharing with you. Act as a resource for questions students may have about the ACE component of the course and answer any questions about engaging with their community partner. Periodically check in with your faculty member about your relationship with the students in the course and your sense about how the students are feeling about the course.

Navigating Student Frustration



As a peer, students will likely voice their opinions about the course to you. They may be feeling frustrated over the workload, expectations, or the course's ACE component. Navigating these frustrations can be difficult. Here are some strategies for handling student frustrations:

- Affirm that as a student you understand how courses can be frustrating and overwhelming at times
- Remind them that academic civic engagement is challenging and often messy and that it is ok to feel uncomfortable. They are not failing or letting anyone down by feeling overwhelmed
- Emphasize that by taking this course, students are directly engaging in work that matters and work that does not necessarily integrate well with the typical academic course model. It is perfectly reasonable to feel how they are feeling

- Ask them if there are any ways you can help them feel less overwhelmed
- Ask them if they have talked to their professor about their frustrations and encourage them to do so if they have not
- Ask them if they would be comfortable if you shared their frustrations with the course professor either in a specific or general way
- Continue to ask follow up questions regarding how they are feeling and act as an active listener as you unpack how they are feeling
- Attempt to reflect on what the student finds valuable about the course and gently ease frustrations while weighing what the student finds valuable about the course

After the conversation concludes, make sure to follow up with your professor in a timely manner if the student has consented to you to do so. Make note of the student's frustrations and reflect on ways that you can help the student feel more comfortable in any aspects that relate to the ACE component of the course. If the frustrations stem from a community partnership, alert faculty member and ACE staff at your discretion and work to ease any tensions in the partnership. As the course progresses, observe the student and follow up with them in a few weeks to see how things are progressing. Remember that being the student's peer is a strength in your role as an ACE Course Assistant. Do not be afraid to lean into your own experiences and help the student by being relatable.



The Smith Center

The Smith Center for Global Engagement is the hub for Academic Civic Engagement and Study Abroad/Away programs at St. Olaf. As an ACE Course

Assistant, you have access to the Smith Center offices located in **Tomson Hall 380**. As a shared space, it is important to maintain a friendly relationship with those working in both the Academic Civic Engagement program and the Study Abroad/Away program. The space is used by both student workers and full-time staff. The space is also an awesome opportunity for collaboration with other ACE student workers who can act as an additional resource as you undertake this position. ACE staff may have an onboarding process for you to acquaint yourself with Smith Center procedures and resources.

Resources

Planning and Leading Reflections

Read through the [Planning a Reflection](#) document. Review how other students planned and led peer reflections in [NEH Peer Reflection Case Studies](#).

Consider using reflection questions and other materials from the [Ethical Community Engagement Modules](#).

1. [Identity](#)
2. [Reciprocity](#)
3. [Communication](#)
4. [Solidarity and the Common Good](#)

Here are some reflection examples designed for an ACE Course and led by an ACE Course Assistant. The documents include notes on how the reflection went.

- [Communication Reflection](#)

- [Reciprocity Reflection](#)
- [Post First Community Partner Visit Reflection](#)
- [Outcomes Reflection](#)
- [Mid-Term Check In Reflection](#)

Logistics

The tutorials below are to help you manage various logistics that you may be asked to assist with during your time as an ACE course assistant.

- [Reserving a Van](#)
- [25LivePro](#) (room reservation system)
- [Tightrope](#) (TV communication system)



Case Studies

Music 345: Somali Music and Dance- Spring 2022

ACE Course Assistant: Gerald Wood '23

Faculty Member: Rehanna Kheshgi, kheshgi@stolaf.edu

Community Partners: The Somali Museum of Minnesota, Faribault High School, and Waano

Course Timeline

- 2/8 First Day of Class

- 2/10 **1st Reflection Session:** Focused on defining “Community Engagement” and reflecting on past experiences with “Community Engagement”
- 2/15 & 2/17 Classwork focused on Community Engaged Research and Applied Ethnomusicology
- 2/17 Administered “Delta/Plus” feedback form to students to collect feedback on first reflection session
- 2/24 **1st Whole Class Community Event:** Somali Weaving and Song Workshop with Grandmothers Amina, Halwo, Hawa and Ardo at the Somali Museum of Minnesota
- 3/1 **2nd Reflection Session:** Focused on reflecting on visit to Somali Museum of Minnesota and Self-Identity
- 3/3 Classwork focused on Somali Diaspora experiences in Rural Midwest US
- 3/8 **3rd Reflection Session:** Focused on relationship between research and community partnerships
- 3/10 Students begin work on Team Community Engagement Project where three student groups work with the three community partners
- 3/15 **2nd Whole Class Community Event:** Somali Musical Performance at Eden Wood with Hamline University Students
- 3/17 **ACE Session:** Presentation and reflection led by Alyssa Melby to teach the students relationship building strategies and resources
- 3/22 & 3/24 Team Project work begins. Teams focus on partnership history
- 4/5 Teams share out with whole class about how their projects are going



- **4/7 1st Waano and Faribault High School (FHS) Community Partner**

Visits:

- Waano team helps with after school tutoring
- FHS visits sociology class and talks to students about college experience

- **4/12 2nd Waano Community Partner Visit:** Team project work during class

- **4/14 3rd Waano Community Partner Visit & 2nd FHS Visit:** Team project work during class

- **4/18 3rd FHS Community Partner Visit:** FHS Team meets with Jason Engbrecht, a former member of the FHS school board. Here is a link to the conversation: [Link](#)

- **4/19 4th FHS Community Partner Visit:** Prof K and FHS Team meet with Pajai Vue, a senior St. Olaf student teaching an EL program at FHS. Vue shared her perspective on how to approach conversations regarding recruiting FHS students of color to come to St. Olaf.

4th Waano Community Partner Visit

- **4/21 4th Reflection Session:** Focused on individual teams and how their community partnership is going

5th Waano Community Partner Visit: Waano Team meets with Mahwa at the Cage

1st Museum Team Community Partner Visit: Museum team meets with Osman, the director of the museum.

- **4/26** Teams debrief with Prof K about community interactions. Teams begin drafting their proposals and presentations about their community engagement and the future of the partnership



- **4/28 2nd Museum Team Community Partner Visit:** Prof K and Museum Team meet with Alyssa Melby and Jane Becker Nelson
- **5th FHS Community Partner Visit:** Prof K and FHS team meet with Abdimutalib Abdullahi at FHS in the afternoon and FHS sociology class in the morning
- **5/3 5th Reflection Session:** Focused on wrapping up community partnership,, what “success” looks like, and the process of beginning a new partnership
- **5/5 Presentation #1:** FHS Team presents their project proposal, recaps experience working with Faribault High School and proposes next steps for the program.
- **6th FHS Community Partner Visit:** FHS Team hosts closing session at Faribault High School. Students bring food and talk with class about Ramadan
- **5/10 Presentation #2:** Museum team presents their project proposal. They suggest taking a step back in the partnership as the goals of the Museum and the goals of the class do not align
- **5/12 Presentation #3:** Waano Team presents their project proposal. They suggest continuing to grow partnership with Waano by sending St. Olaf student volunteers to tutor. They also put together a collection of games tutors can play with Waano students.
- **5/17 Last Day of Class:** Students work on final Self-Evaluation Letter
- **6th Reflection Session:** Focused on takeaways from experience and how the class may impact students future work

Reflections Used

- **Past Experience with Reflection and Community Engagement**

- Self-Identity Reflection
- Research and Community Partnerships Reflection
- Individual Team Reflection
- Closing Reflection

Course Assistant Takeaways From Experience



I have really enjoyed my time as an ACE course assistant over this semester. In total, I led six reflection sessions. Each of them was valuable in its own way. The first session really consisted of an introduction to ACE and what ACE is. I think the first session helped lay a solid foundation for future sessions. The second session came right after the class took a field trip to the Somali museum. This session was important because it helped student's unpack their first experience with a community partner. The third session was really a breakthrough session. It came right before students began working in small groups with their community partner. The students were frustrated with the fact that they had been doing all of this learning and reflecting without direct engagement. This session helped them unpack this frustration and see the value of taking a step back from expectations and taking the time to understand a community partner before engaging. The fourth session happened late in the semester after groups had begun engaging with their partner. This session was tailored more towards each individual group and helped them reflect on their project and their relationship with their community partner. The final session hasn't happened yet but it's a closing session on the last day of class. This session will be focused on sustainability and what the students envision taking forward from the class.

The course assistant role is an awesome way for students in ACE courses to reflect in a more direct way. I also spent an hour a week working

with Professor Kheshgi on planning the course. This time was incredibly valuable to both of us as I was able to stay connected to her goals for the course while also giving her feedback on what I thought and access to the resources ACE has given me in regards to ethical community engagement. For the future of the position, I encourage future course assistants to really get to know their professors and work with them to understand the ultimate goals of the course. I also think it could be possible for professors to share ACE course assistants as there were times in the school year when it wasn't necessary for me to be attending every class session and engaging with the course everyday. I believe that course assistants could definitely bounce between 2-3 different classes without losing the familiarity that makes the position so special.

Somali Music and Dance- Spring 2023



ACE Course Assistant: Gerald Wood '23

Faculty Member: Rehanna Kheshgi, kheshgi@stolaf.edu

Community Partners: Waano

Course Timeline

- 2/7 First Day of Class
- 2/9 **ACE Session:** Presentation on Community Engagement led by Alyssa Melby
- 2/14 **1st Reflection Session:** Reflection built using NEH Identity Module and the Social Identity Wheel
- 2/20 **1st Whole Class Community Event:** Mandatory Welcoming Event at Waano where students were introduced to Program Director, James Whelan, and Community Liaison, Sabah Omar.

- **2/21 2nd Reflection Session:** Reflection unpacking first Waano visit and communication during the experience

Piper Center Presentation: Presentation connecting class work to individual vocation led by Meghan McMillan, Associate Director, Ole Career Director, Fine Arts and Innovation (Piper Center)

Team Selection: Students discussed which community partner team they would like to work with. The team options were:

- Student Team- Students visit Waano once a week and work as tutors
 - Parent Team- Students research Somali music and work to create community listening session with Somali parents
 - Grant Team- Students work with Waano leadership to research and apply for grants
- **2/23 - 3/2** Students continue course work on Somali religious practices and oral poetry and song

Team Project Work this week

- **Student Team:** Met with Prof. Kheshgi for 30 mins
 - **Parent Team:** Met outside of class for 1 hour to discuss goals and proposed division of labor; met with Prof. Kheshgi for 30 mins
 - **Grant Team:** Met outside of class for 1 hour to discuss goals and proposed division of labor; met with Prof. Kheshgi for 30 mins
- **3/4 2nd Whole Class Community Event:** Somali Kebed Finger Weaving and Song Workshop at Somali Museum (Minneapolis)
Lunch at Karmel Somali Market, and meeting with two women who were Buraanbur poetry performers

*****ACE Course Assistant helped with transportation*****



- **3/7 3rd Reflection Session:** Reflection focused on communication between students and community partners using a case study from the NEH Communication Module

Professor was present and participated during this reflection

Class debrief from Community Event and Teams share how their work is going

Presentation from Velang Cha, Director of Government, Foundation and Corporate Relations at St. Olaf about grant research and writing

Team Project Work this week:

- **Student Team:** Volunteered at Waano for 2 hours
- **Parent Team:** Met outside of class for 1 hour; met with Prof. Kheshgi for 30 mins
- **Grant Team:** Met outside of class for 1 hour; met with Prof. Kheshgi for 30 mins

- **3/9** Presentation by St. Olaf Director of Learning, Research and Technology, Ben Gottfried about Digital Storytelling – drawing from Elevator song database to create public-facing WordPress site
- **3/14 4th Reflection Session:** focused on Reciprocity and Cultural humility. Reflection was built using the Ethical Community Engagement Reciprocity module. Students discussed how the act of making Somali culture the topic of a course can affect communities within and outside of St. Olaf. The ACE Course Assistant then led individual reflections with each of the three teams.

Professor was present and participated during this reflection

Team Project Work this week:

- **Student Team:** Volunteered at Waano for 2 hours
- **Parent Team:** Met outside of class for 1 hour; met with Prof K for 30 mins



- **Grant Team:** Met outside of class for 1 hour; Met with Prof K for 30 mins
 - **3/16 3rd Whole Class Community Event:** Visit to Faribault Masjid (Abubakar As-Saddique Islamic Center). Students toured the Mosque and learned about The Five Pillars of Islam, Ramadan, and the Faribault Somali Muslim community from Bashir Omar.
 - **3/21 5th Reflection Session:** Reflection focused on checking in on how the students are feeling about their community engagement so far. We focused on anxieties and goals for our work.
- Whole class discussion unpacking the visit to the Islamic Center

Team Project Work this week:

- **Student Team:** Volunteered at Waano for 2 hours
- **Parent Team:** Met outside of class for 1 hour; met with Prof K for 30 mins
- **Grant Team:** Met outside of class for 1 hour; Met with Prof K for 30 mins
- **3/23** General Coursework on Harvard Somali Songs Archive project
- **3/24-4/2** Spring Break
- **4/4** Team Check-Ins about community engagement so far. Students began thinking about how each teams work impacts and can help the other teams
- **4/6** Students are introduced to Team Final Community Engagement Report and Presentation Guidelines
- **4/11 6th Reflection Session:** Reflection focused on intended outcomes from our community engagement. This reflection was a follow up to the Mid-Term Check In reflection where students expressed many of their anxieties about how the course was progressing. This reflection was









much more optimistic as students felt like they were making an impact even if it was hard to sometimes see.

- 4/13 Classes Canceled for Campus Wide Community Reflection and Healing day
 - 4/18 & 4/20 Team Check Ins during class to discuss progress and plan to incorporate scholarship into their final reports. **Begin Planning Final Event with Waano**
 - 4/25 **7th Reflection Session:** General reflection on how students are feeling about their work, any lingering anxieties and how they feel about the conclusion of their relationship with Waano
 - 4/27 & 5/2 In class work time on final presentation and proposal
 - 5/4 **Presentation #1:** Grant Team presents and they detail their work and plan to apply for an Otto Bremer Trust to help Waano with some of their utility costs
 - 5/9 **Presentation #2:** Parent Team
 - 5/11 **Presentation #3** Student Team presents and suggests continuing to work with Waano as tutors and getting more student organizations involved to help with tutoring
 - 5/16 Class discussion on closing relationships led by Alyssa Melby Associate Director, Ole Career Director, Fine Arts and Innovation (Piper Center) Meghan McMillan led a discussion on how work in the class connects to students future career choices
- 8th Reflection Session:** Final reflection session focused on reflecting on the community engagement work, unexpected experiences, rewarding experiences, and how students imagine it shaping their lives going forward




- **5/17 Culminating Event at Waano:** Students visit Waano for a final time and celebrate the partnership and work that has been done through this partnership

Reflections Used

- [Social Identity Wheel](#)
-  Post Waano Visit (First Visit)
-  Communication Reflection
-  Individual Team Reflection- Reciprocity
-  Mid-Term Check In
-  Outcomes Reflection
-  Closing Reflection


Takeaways From Experience



This semester has been an awesome experience watching this course and community partnership grow. Having worked with Professor Kheshgi and this class for two years, I had the unique experience of being able to compare and contrast this year to last. This year I felt like the course was much more streamlined. Focusing on one community partner really helped deepen the relationship between the class and the community partner. I was also able to really dig into students' experiences in ACE courses through our reflection sessions. I think this year really cemented how important peer reflection is in an ACE Course.

ACE courses can be incredibly confusing for students as they are unlike any other course students have taken and there can be an overwhelming sense of ambiguity. Students struggle with seeing the bigger picture, especially during the middle of the course. During this course, students felt

incredibly overwhelmed around our mid-term check in. They felt like they were not accomplishing anything in their partnership and they felt like the course did not dedicate the amount of time they were expecting to music. They felt like the course would be better served in a different department. However, through reflection certain students pushed back against these ideas. These students argued that the work we were undertaking was important and that this class was at the beginning of creating a lasting relationship which meant that the students had to focus on building trust. Building trust requires patience. Slowly, the class began to reflect on the impact they were actually making. While they weren't engaging directly with music, they were engaging with the community where the music comes from. They began to realize that the fruit of their labor may not bloom during the course but it will continue to grow and will eventually bloom in future courses. They adopted a pass the baton mentality and they realized that if they wanted to study Somali music ethically they had to walk a more difficult path which required respecting and engaging with the community first.



ACE Courses can be really difficult to create and navigate. It is not easy work but ultimately it has been the most rewarding experience I have undertaken during my time at St. Olaf. I hope that future ACE Course Assistants remember that it is ok to feel overwhelmed, that there are no easy answers, and if the work was easy everyone would do it. Transformation is difficult, that is what makes it transformative. I see this course as transformative as it dedicates the time, effort, and ethics to not only learn about Somali culture but engage with the Somali community.