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Community-Initiated Student-Engaged Research: Expanding Undergraduate Teaching and Learning through Public Sociology

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Abstract

Drawing on a multiyear local research project on the affordable housing crisis, this article outlines a pedagogical approach we call Community-Initiated Student-Engaged Research, or CISER. The CISER model brings together three key groups of actors—undergraduate students, university researchers, and community organizations—drawing on and extending the powers of cooperative "dyads" between them. This model aims to improve pedagogical and sociological practice by constituting undergraduate students as both knowledge producers and an active public while at the same time creating meaningful partnerships between university researchers and community-based organizations. Based on assessments of the program from the vantage points of all three groups, our findings indicate that CISER is a powerful pedagogical tool and mode of community-engaged scholarship and that it offers both challenges and rewards to the involved students, faculty, and community organizations.

Keywords

undergraduate pedagogy, undergraduate research experience, public sociology, service sociology, community-engaged research

The 2017 report of the American Sociological Association's Task Force on Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major highlights the importance of updating pedagogical practice and course curricula to ensure the undergraduate sociology students of today are prepared for life after academia (Pike et al. 2017). This report coincides with distinct conversations taking shape among observers and practitioners of "public sociology"—which highlights faculty and community connections—and "service sociology"— which focuses on students and community engagement. We expand on these conventional approaches by putting forth a model that better integrates students, faculty, and community through course-based community-engaged research (Greenberg, London, and McKay 2019). In this article, we highlight the role of students and argue that this approach allows them to learn and practice research skills, meaningfully engage with community, and bring to sociological research their own cultural assets, including bilingualism and lived experience, and so contribute in unique ways to the knowledge production process. We also consider the ways that this pedagogical model affects faculty teaching and research as well as

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explore community perspectives on the impacts and efficacy of this approach.

Michael Burawoy reignited the debate on public sociology, calling for an "organic public sociology" that works collaboratively with "a visible, thick, active, local and often counterpublic" (Burawoy 2005:7–8). In so doing, Burawoy acknowledged the importance of undergraduates in sociology courses, even referring to them as academic sociology's "first public." In a recent recap of public sociology, Hartmann writes of the need for a "'next generation' framework for understanding and conceptualizing the relationships between sociology and its various publics" (Hartmann 2017:4–5), pushing beyond Burawoy by recognizing multiple publics, methodological pluralism, reciprocal knowledge production, and the blurring of public and policy sociology. However, while Burawoy, Hartmann, and other commentators almost always recognize students as one of these publics, it is a public usually defined as an audience: "*our students in our classrooms"* (Hartmann 2017:14; emphasis added). Even in its most recent iterations, proponents of public sociology commonly do not consider undergraduate students as active contributors to public sociological research. This is a striking omission and a missed opportunity.

During their years at the university, students become part of local communities in ways that relate to but also transcend their role in the classroom. While in school they spend time living, working, and recreating off campus and even vote in local elections. As members of "generation debt," students contend with issues and problems—from housing and food insecurity to environmental and health concerns—that both are distinct from their professors' and mirror those in surrounding communities (Broton and Goldrick-Rab 2018). This is especially the case for first-generation students and those from underrepresented backgrounds, including students of color. We therefore argue that students should be recognized as a unique public, serving as valuable collaborators in, and benefiting greatly from, publicly engaged sociological research, even while pursuing their undergraduate degrees (Greenberg et al. 2019).

Moreover, through internships, field placements, and service learning, many students independently address the issues they and/or surrounding communities face—volunteering at local nonprofits and with local employers or government and becoming members of local and regional grassroots coalitions. In this sense, students can be considered not only an essential public but also practitioners of what has come to be called "service sociology" (Treviño 2012). Falling between academic and public sociology, service sociology includes activities known as civic engagement, service learning, and engaged scholarship. It places students as central figures in the public domain (Karraker 2019). Whether formally organized through university courses or not, this experience can become its own kind of classroom, enhancing students' critical thinking and decision-making skills (Tarantino 2017). Notably, however, service learning has been criticized for its placement of privileged university students into surrounding low-income communities and communities of color, reinforcing existing power hierarchies (Marullo, Moayedi, and Cooke 2009). The literature has not considered the contributions of low-income students, students of color, and/or those with potentially relevant life experiences working in partnership to conduct community-based research. So, what might organic public sociology and service sociology that more centrally involves undergraduate students as *producers* of knowledge look like? How might such an approach also augment existing pedagogy in sociology, beyond considering students as an audience for sociology or as a volunteer corps in the university's neighboring communities?

This article, drawing on a multiyear local research project on the affordable housing crisis in Santa Cruz, California, outlines an approach we call Community-Initiated Student-Engaged Research, or CISER. This approach provides course-community-based research experiences for undergraduate students, many of whom are from low-income Latinx families and/or are the first in their families to attend college. The research project, which took place from 2015 to 2018, focused on the lived experiences of tenants facing the current housing affordability crisis and involved an interdisciplinary team of faculty, students, and four community organizations. It was carried out through a series of courses, both classroom- and field-based.

In the tradition of organic public sociology, the results of this research were possible only through a *collaborative research process*, which in turn helped construct more durable and meaningful ties between the university and the surrounding community. Through this collaborative process, undergraduate students alongside faculty co-constructed knowledge with community partners and at the same time gained valuable experience, important relationships, new skills, and a deeper understanding of course-based materials. Based on assessments of the program from the vantage points of all
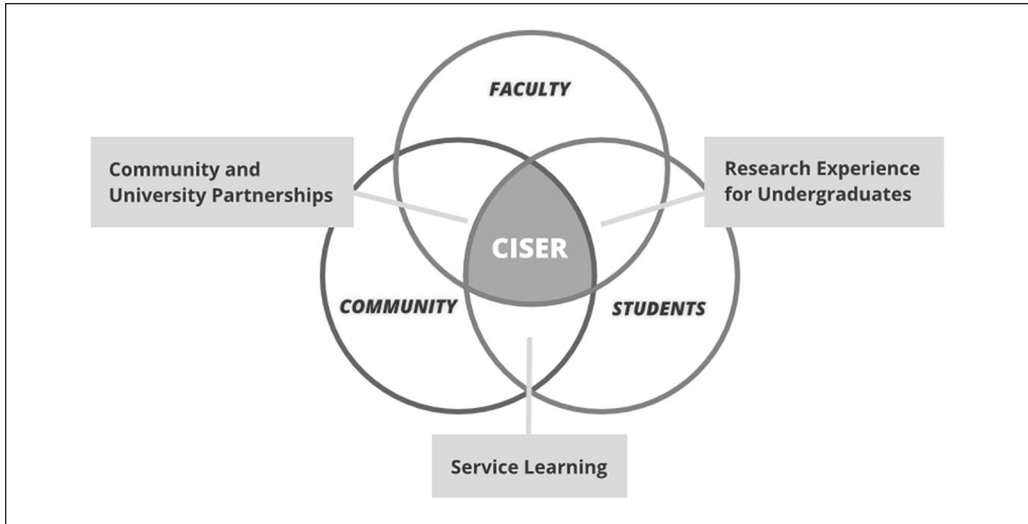
Figure 1. Community-Initiated Student-Engaged Research Model.

three groups, our findings indicate that CISER is a powerful pedagogical tool and mode of community-engaged scholarship, offering both challenges and rewards to the involved students, faculty, and community organizations.

THE CISER MODEL

The CISER model brought together a group of researchers, students, and community organizations—all based in Santa Cruz County. Faculty had experience in community-based action research and student engagement yet had run into some of the pedagogical limits of other forms of public and service sociology. The CISER model builds on and integrates approaches to public scholarship and service sociology, dynamically linking community engagement with hands-on research and campus–community partnerships. In so doing, it brings the assets of diverse students and the expertise of committed faculty to bear on exploring entrenched social problems that communities face. By embedding sociology undergraduate research experience, CISER also recognizes that such experience supports learning outcomes, improves persistence, and increases inclusivity among historically underrepresented groups (Bangera and Brownell 2014; Estrada, Hernandez, and Schultz 2018; Hanauer et al. 2017).

We have formalized these relationships in the dyad model outlined in Figure 1, which highlights relationships between researcher and student,

researcher and university, and researcher and public that different existing models emphasize. The dyad concept embeds within the research process an understanding that the key relationships necessary to conduct research depend on positionality within these contexts (Aldred 2008).

The first pillar of the CISER model is the dyad *campus–community partnerships*. While such partnerships can take many forms with different goals and degrees of collaboration, our approach draws on models of *community-based participatory action research* (CBPR): "a partnership approach that equitably involves . . . community members, organizational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the research process. The partners contribute 'unique strengths and shared responsibilities' to enhance understanding . . . and to integrate the knowledge gained with action to improve . . . the well-being of community members" (Minkler et al. 2008:48–49). In this respect, CBPR mirrors what Burawoy labeled organic public sociology. Such forms of collaborative research—in which community members become active participants in identifying issues for scientists to study—are essential for increasing the public relevance and reach of sociological research. For all its positive elements, however, due to the constraints of time, personnel, and resources, community-based participatory research often operates on a relatively small scale, involving only limited numbers of university researchers and members of community organizations (Minkler et al. 2008).

Typically, undergraduate students do not participate in such community–university research collaborations, or not in substantial numbers. Yet students do engage with community in other ways, as a second cooperative dyad through *service learning*, which involves individual students doing volunteer work with local schools, nonprofits, or community organizations. This approach has proliferated widely across many campuses as it can help students recognize the potential relevance of their training, helps them satisfy an expressed need to give back to their communities and society, and provides communities with needed resources, assistance, and expertise (O'Donnell et al. 2015). Yet, as some critics point out, individual-based service learning can follow conventional "charity-oriented" models that fail to provide an analysis of the structural roots of social problems, reinforce social and cultural stereotypes, lack meaningful student collaboration with community members, and lack attention to student heterogeneity (Boud, Cohen, and Sampson 2014; Clever and Miller 2019; Strand et al. 2003). CISER necessarily moves beyond a traditional service-learning approach by creating space for students to gain valuable research skills and participate more broadly in the community in which they live through research that answers questions posed by the community.

The final cooperative dyad CISER builds on is the relations between university-based researchers and their "first public"—undergraduate students. One of the most effective ways to promote deeper learning is to facilitate closer student–educator relationships by involving students in hands-on research together with faculty, which is well documented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (Estrada et al. 2018; Hanauer et al. 2017; Russell, Hancock, and McCullough 2007). Successful programs, such as the National Science Foundation's Research Experience for Undergraduates, have been shown to attract and retain students (particularly from underrepresented groups), increase students' confidence, and increase their motivation to pursue research careers (Castillo and Estudillo 2015; Laursen et al. 2010; Lopatto 2009). Unfortunately, many undergraduate research programs are organized as independent research experiences between individual faculty and students, done primarily in a lab setting, and do not include a public or community component (Bangera and Brownell 2014). The research itself is experienced as separate from students' life experiences, culture, and concerns.

Students, particularly those from underrepresented groups, often express an anxiety that they have to choose between distinct cultures of home and school in order to succeed (Ovink and Veazey 2011). Thus, while involvement in faculty research remains a key goal for improving student learning, there is a clear need to move past previous models in order to constitute students as an active public. Meanwhile, sociology courses are ideal contexts for community-engaged research. Indeed, Broughton (2011) found that embedding real-life research into an undergraduate field methods course better motivated and directed student work. When community engagement is linked to course-based research experiences, students gain feelings of self-efficacy and research skills that can be applied in other settings (Mayer et al. 2019). The intention of CISER is to overcome the limitations and build on the strengths of these separate dyadic approaches through an integrated model.

THE CISER PROJECT: NO PLACE LIKE HOME

The elements of our model emerged organically out of an initial collaborative action research project in 2014–2015 involving three local community organizations, three university researchers, and over 100 undergraduate students. This project, Working for Dignity, focused on documenting the experiences of low-wage service workers in Santa Cruz County and helped build the initial trust between community organizations and researchers, a strong working relationship between parties, and a mutual interest and willingness to further experiment in coproducing and constructing knowledge around the local needs of community organizations and members (see https://workingfordignity.ucsc.edu for details). The initial project helped set the stage for implementing the full CISER model in our second collaborative project, called No Place Like Home, which addressed affordable housing.

No Place Like Home took place between 2015 and 2018 and focused on the lived experiences of tenants facing the current housing affordability crisis. It involved an interdisciplinary team of sociologists and humanists, 234 undergraduate students (primarily from underrepresented groups), and four community organizations. The mixed-methods, community-based research generated over 1,900 surveys and 80 in-depth interviews and became the basis for an ongoing campus and public discussion of renter experiences through the project and other media (interactive website, local newspapers, radio),

targeted workshops for particular publics (student renters, our community partners and their clients/members), and broad public forums cosponsored by public officials and attended by 25 community organizations and 1,000 community members. Research results and their public dissemination have informed and shaped local public debate and discourse on the affordable housing crisis, how it is experienced, and how best to address it.

Community Initiated

We use the term *community initiated* to reflect a core belief and practice of the model: that organic public sociology and action research must not simply be "community based" but should be "community driven." A central tenet of our model is to partner with community organizations to identify relevant and actionable research issues. Only when there is a confluence of interests between the researchers and the community organizations can a truly collaborative research agenda be set. CISER also goes beyond CBPR, as noted earlier, in that it focuses on training a large number of undergraduate students as field researchers, rather than training community organization staff or other community members (Minkler et al. 2008). The design and approach is based on the input from our community partners, who expressed a preference for a large-scale study and data but did not have the capacity to allow their staff to be directly involved in the data collection and felt their clients would be too constrained by full-time employment to participate fully given the project's time frame.

No Place Like Home emerged from partners' interest in tackling a key finding from Working for Dignity: the difficulties caused by the high cost and low availability of adequate housing for the county's working poor. Our four partners—a statewide nonprofit legal aid organization, the local chapter of a national public-sector labor union, the largest nonprofit antipoverty agency in the county, and the second largest antipoverty umbrella group in the county—all noted that their low-income clients and members were struggling with affordable housing and that this was becoming the leading issue they confronted across their programs.

Indeed, Santa Cruz County is the least affordable metropolitan area for renters in California, which overall is the third least affordable state in the United States (National Low Income Housing Coalition 2019). Yet, despite data on and recognition of an affordable housing crisis in the county, there was no systematic understanding of how

renters were experiencing this crisis or the impacts it was having on them. While we as sociologists were keen to better understand the character and extent of the local housing crisis, our community partners hoped to improve their knowledge of and services to low-income community members—the vast majority of whom were renters. They wanted to know what specific issues tenants in our community were concerned with and to share with a range of community members and clients, as well as local leadership, information about housing rights and responsibilities. Although they initiated these key questions, our community partners did not have the capacity to conduct the research and outreach themselves. Collectively, we developed our research goals and agenda: to collect baseline survey data on rents and living conditions from a vulnerable, hard-to-reach population that is often missed on standard surveys and thus ignored by public policy and regulatory discussions and to conduct outreach to low-wage renters about available services and housing rights. But there was also a key, humanistic element to our collective research, namely, a focus on both understanding and documenting the experiences of housing precarity: How do renters create a sense of "home" despite the housing crisis? What does it feel like to be housing insecure or extremely rent burdened? By jointly developing the research agenda and central research questions, we were able to decide on our research methods.

Student Engaged

Intensive research such as this does not often allow for undergraduate student participation, yet the CISER approach depends on collaboration with students, particularly those with relevant language skills, sociocultural backgrounds, and/or life experiences, who can help reach a vulnerable and hard-to-reach population and thus gather higher-quality data. At the same time, CISER is a rare opportunity for undergraduate students, particularly from underrepresented groups, to learn research skills and apply them beyond the classroom. From 2015 to 2018, eight independent courses were taught around the theme of affordable housing. We focus here on the six sociology courses more directly related to CISER, two of which were classroom-based and four field-based.

The classroom-based courses included an upper-division elective focused on the roots and ramifications of the housing crisis in social, historical, environmental, and policy terms on both a

local-regional and a national scale. Student research thus helped to contextualize the empirical data gathered by the field-based courses as well as to draw out its implications in terms of potential policy solutions. The course also had a small field component, with students conducting participant observation at community meetings and interviews with local experts and stakeholders. Ultimately, research from this course helped shape the "Issues," "Resources," and "Policy Tools" sections of the No Place Like Home website, was shared at public events, and informed the final report of the project.

Two other classroom-based courses also supported the project from a more humanistic perspective. One focused on the impact of the housing crisis on place-based identity, representation, and cultural and commercial practice, and the other used archival materials and interview transcripts to explore and reimagine the experience of the housing crisis in poetic form. Materials from these classes—including mini-documentaries, visual art, and creative writing—helped bring project issues and data to life at public events and on the website. Students from across these classroom-based courses also were strongly encouraged to participate in data collection through field-based courses, and many chose to do so, as we discuss next.

In the field-based courses, which were designed to be repeatable for credit, students participated in in-person surveying, data management and analysis, interviews, visual documentation, digital storytelling, and mapping. The course was also internally differentiated to account for those students who had prior experience with the project through the classroom-based housing courses or other means and those who were new to the project. Those in the first group were given new research roles and assignments and were encouraged to take peer leadership roles. During the first 3 weeks of the 10-week quarter, students were introduced to housing scholarship and to the project's goals and previous results, completed human subjects training and learned and practiced survey and interview techniques, and began working with community organizations. During this initial phase, classroom learning was paired with community visits, in which community organizations hosted students. When possible, students also participated in community service projects, such as neighborhood cleanups and after-school tutoring. During the field research phase of the course, weeks 4 through 10, bilingual student research teams traveled together to preassigned neighborhoods across the county at least once a week, going door-to-door with digital tablets to collect surveys while also providing all residents information from our community partners about housing rights and services. During this phase, students and faculty interacted primarily outside the classroom, with the instructor and graduate assistant organizing the field visits to specific neighborhoods and providing student teams with transportation, maps, materials, and field support.

In total, 234 students took some combination of these courses, and we focus on the 213 (unduplicated) sociology students for this analysis. As is shown in Table 1, in the 2015–2016 school year, 39 students took the classroom-based course in winter quarter and 43 took the field-based course in spring, with 20 taking both. In 2016–2017, 40 took the classroom-based course and 36 took the field-based course in winter, and 40 took the field-based course in spring, with a total of 9 taking both types. In 2017–2018, only the field-based course was offered, and 54 students took it, including one who had taken the classroom-based course the prior year. Students could take the field-based course multiple times, and 15 students did so (with 2 taking it three times).

Data Analysis and Communicating Results: Mobilizing Knowledge

Researchers, community organizations, and students played key roles in the next phase of the model—data analysis and mobilization. The goals were to produce a variety of "knowledge products" to reach multiple publics, bring people and communities together, share the research results with the widest audience, and begin dialogue about the issues and how to address them. The bilingual project website (https://noplacelikehome.ucsc.edu) served as a public platform, showcasing the survey data, narratives, and images of county tenants and providing resources and policy analysis for community members, organizations, scholars, and policy makers interested in the issues facing low-income renters.

Another key strategy to reach multiple publics was to hold large public events related to the project. We held two bilingual tenants' rights workshops on and off campus and a student-organized "Pathways to College" bilingual workshop in the community for local youth and their parents. We held two large bilingual public presentations and art exhibits, around which our community partners organized Affordable Housing Week in Santa Cruz in both 2016 and 2017. These events drew over 1,000 attendees, and the second, which was

Table 1. Student Enrollment in Classroom-Based and Field-Based Sociology Courses Supporting No Place Like Home.

Quarter and Course	Number of Enrollments
2015–2016	
Winter classroom based	39
Spring field based	43
Both classroom and field based	20
2016–2017	
Winter classroom based	40
Winter field based	36
Spring field based	40
Both classroom and field based	9
2017–2018	
Spring field based	54
Both 2017 classroom and 2018 field based	1
Total number of students	213

cosponsored by the city government, drew over 25 community organizations tabling the event.

EXPLORING CISER'S PEDAGOGICAL POTENTIAL THROUGH STUDENT, FACULTY, AND COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES

As we were engaging students in No Place Like Home, we were simultaneously aware that it was important to explore how the CISER model affects student learning, the teaching and research processes, and the community collaboration aspects of the work. We therefore designed a tandem research project, approved by the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), Institutional Review Board, to document how this approach augments existing practices in undergraduate learning and research experiences.

University Context and Student Characteristics

UCSC is a public university with approximately 17,000 undergraduate students. It is designated as an Hispanic Serving Institution by the U.S. Department of Education and is also a R1 research university, a rare combination. Overall at UCSC, 90 percent of undergraduates originate from California, and one-third of each entering class is a transfer from the California community colleges. Forty percent of undergraduates are first-generation college students, 38 percent are eligible for Educational Opportunities Programs, and 30 percent are Latinx.

Even higher concentrations of the students involved in field-based courses associated with No Place Like Home came from underrepresented backgrounds, with the majority being first-generation college students (57 percent), eligible for Educational Opportunities Programs (57 percent), and Latinx (56 percent). These statistics resemble the population of UCSC sociology students overall. Many of these students were from communities in California that resembled the ones studied in the project—areas highly impacted by housing and economic inequality and precarity, with large concentrations of poor and working-class families, immigrant families, and large populations of bilingual and monolingual Spanish speakers. Many of these students themselves had lived precariously and could relate with their research subjects in ways that the faculty could not. Indeed, experience with housing precarity is common in the student population generally. No Place Like Home included 407 UCSC undergraduates in its door-to-door survey (none of whom was enrolled in project-related courses) and found that 78 percent were classified as rent burdened, 43 percent suffered an involuntary move, and 59 percent experienced a major housing problem.

Undergraduate researchers are rarely perceived as an asset in research, thus preventing their direct experience—in this case with precarity—from contributing to data gathering and analysis. Yet, their experiences can significantly contribute to the

research, which is precisely the reason why the CISER approach is important. Moreover, students from underrepresented backgrounds and who are first-generation college students often face a deficit paradigm and are seen by the university in terms of the skills and competencies they lack (Castro 2014). CISER operates in an asset rather than a deficit paradigm, recognizing that being bilingual, being Latinx, being from a working-class background, and/or having experienced precarity provided students with distinctive forms of social capital, opening access to vulnerable populations and helping them to relate to survey respondents. In particular, these assets allowed them to build trust with immigrant and Latinx community respondents, including those who were undocumented, ultimately providing them access to stories and experiences that added tremendous richness to the data collected. Crucially, these experiences, as well as those of precarious tenants generally, are often missed in standard surveys. Not all students had experienced precarity, however, or were from low-income Latinx backgrounds. We therefore paired students intentionally so that those who were bilingual or had a relevant background were matched with those who were or did not, again flipping the script on whose assets are valued in research.

Students' Experiences with CISER

The research on student experiences with CISER relies on data from two different anonymous surveys conducted with different student cohorts in the field-based courses as well as students' anonymous course evaluations for all six sociology courses over three years. The surveys included two different sets of closed-ended scales that measured different constructs associated with student research engagement and learning but the same set of open-ended questions asking students to describe what was rewarding and challenging about the course as well as how it affected their thoughts about their futures. In the universitywide course evaluations, we focus on the question that asks students to rate the course overall as a learning experience.

Through an open-coding process of the open-ended responses in 90 surveys across the four field-based courses (53 percent response rate overall), three major themes about the role of CISER emerged. First, students reported that *engaging with community*—a key goal of CISER and one of the dyads of the model—was among the most

challenging and rewarding parts of the project. Many students felt awed by learning about individuals' experience with housing insecurity. One student wrote that "getting to hear the stories of the hardships and struggles people are going through from all walks of life" was among the most rewarding aspects of the course. At the same time, this was also one of the most challenging aspects of the work, as described by another student: "The most challenging part of this class is having to hear sad stories of people's living situations and not being able to do anything about it."

Second, students reported experiencing *academic growth* by having the opportunity to engage in research as part of their curricular experience. They enjoyed "gaining experience in surveys" and "learning data analysis." But they also expressed appreciation for community-engaged research, saying that the class helped them "see how research can bring a positive impact to communities." One student noted, "I feel like most of the research opportunities are only available from STEM majors. I like the combination of academic rigor and at the same time doing something to help UCSC's immediate community." Another reported, "This class helped me realize that there is a possibility for me to conduct research to contribute to working class people but also contribute to academia. [It] inspired me to look into going to grad school in hopes to become a professor one day." In addition, connecting with faculty in a shared learning environment was important for some students, with one reporting, "Working alongside [professor] and students in this class has been a formative experience."

Finally, students reported experiencing *personal growth* through the process of conducting research in the course. Some felt they got "out of my comfort zone" to conduct the surveys, which "gave me confidence for future endeavors" and supported students to grow in their interpersonal skills. Peer relationships that developed through the project helped students to "connect with my fellow classmates" and "showed me what a group of dedicated students can achieve." This was in contrast to other academic classes, according to one student, which did not directly support the creation of these peer connections.

We attempted to align these concepts to existing student success constructs in the results the 2017–2018 survey. In this iteration of the instrument, we adapted validated scales for self-efficacy in community-engaged scholarship (Reeb et al. 1998), social integration with students (Davidson, Beck,

Table 2. Students' Experiences with CISER, Responses to Closed-Ended Scales (2017–2018).

Scale	Mean (Standard Deviation)
Student–Faculty Interactions (five questions)	4.72 (0.38)
Self-Efficacy in Community-Engaged Research (five questions)	4.23 (0.75)
Research Skills (nine questions)	4.15 (0.64)
Social Integration (seven questions)	3.98 (0.70)
N	32

Note: All questions use a 5-point scale where 5 indicates the strongest level of agreement and 1 is the lowest. Reported means are the average across the questions within the scale. CISER = Community-Initiated Student-Engaged Research.

and Milligan 2009), student–faculty interactions (Micari and Pazos 2012), and research skills acquired (UCLA Higher Education Research Institute 2018). In 2017–2018, when these scales were used, there were 54 students enrolled in the field-based course and 32 students who completed the survey, a response rate of 59 percent. This is eight points higher than the response rate for course evaluations aggregated across the six courses and six points higher than the survey response rate aggregated across the four field-based courses. Results are meant not to show causal relationships between course participation and student outcomes but rather to describe the ways that students perceive their experiences in CISER as part of their course work. This study is among the first efforts to understand how this particular model of integrated public and service sociology affects undergraduate experiences and learning; findings can be instructive about how to continue to understand the impact of the CISER model.

Table 2 reports the results from these scales, each with a range of 1 (low) to 5 (high). The scale with the highest average score is student–faculty interactions, which asked students questions such as whether they saw the professor as a role model, their comfort in asking questions, and whether the professor respected them personally. An average response of 4.72 on this scale indicates that students felt highly engaged with the professor teaching this course. This is an important part of the CISER model because students at a large public university often do not have the opportunity to connect with faculty outside of the classroom in an ongoing way. Students also rated highly their experiences in terms of feelings of efficacy in community-engaged research specifically (4.23 mean) as well as their research skills overall (4.15 mean). Efficacy in community-engaged research

included statements about students' confidence in their ability to conduct research and to interact with community members in their research project. Research skills focused more generally on social science methods, such as conducting surveys or interviews, developing research questions, and using the academic literature to guide their work. The lowest mean score was for the scale on social integration in the course, which is focused mainly on student relationships with their peers (3.98 mean), although still above the median.

The third set of evidence we use to triangulate the efficacy of CISER as a sociological pedagogy is the anonymous course evaluation offered at the end of the quarter. The majority of students who completed course evaluations reported that the classroom-based and field-based courses were positive learning experiences for them. Across all six courses, 51 percent of students completed a course evaluation, and of these, 87 percent rated the courses either a 4 or a 5 on a scale of 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest agreement) and 82 percent rated them a 5. The field-based courses in particular were rated extremely highly, with 96 percent of students rating the course with a 4 or 5. One student in the field-based course summed up the perspective that many shared:

> As a senior in their final quarter of undergrad, I feel that this is one of the most important courses I have taken in my college career. The opportunity to engage with the local community while applying a sociological perspective I have developed over the last four years was an honoring and comforting way to practically use what I have learned in a real world situation, and has gotten me closer to understanding what I may want to do in the future more than any other course

has. I feel that an opportunity to apply our sociology training to social issues our communities face should be made available, and maybe even a requirement, to all sociology students.

Faculty Experiences with CISER

We explore the ways that faculty experienced CISER through personal reflection, as the two faculty members responsible for the classroom- and field-based courses are coauthors of this article. Although we believe strongly in the CISER model, we recognize some challenges. First, teaching the field-based course was more time-consuming than would be a standard classroom-based course, requiring multiple planning sessions with community partner organizations and fellow researchers, coordinating community visits for all students, mapping field-based data collection, and field supervision. Faculty members also spent significant time consulting with students outside of class to help them craft, develop, and finalize their many projects, with group meetings conducted much like graduate-level office hours in terms of their length and the degree of independence on the part of these upper-division undergraduates. Second, the field-based course required additional resources—to hire a teaching/research assistant, for student transportation, and for survey and interview incentives. These costs were partially covered by a research grant that helped underwrite direct research expenses as well as provided for a course release for the instructor to dedicate time to the course and the project during the quarter of the field-based class.

Another challenge for faculty was training new students each time the field-based course was offered, because although some had experience from the previous courses, others had to be introduced to affordable housing scholarship and trained to conduct the research in the first three to four weeks of the course. To address this challenge, as noted earlier, the instructors differentiated and expanded roles for students who enrolled in multiple project courses or repeated the field-based course for credit. For these students, the faculty created expanded leadership, training, and data analysis opportunities so "veteran" students could take on additional roles and more responsibility as "peer mentors." These students also took on new research roles, conducted research in new areas, and completed different assignments to earn course credit. Thus, the advanced undergraduates both

deepened their experience as well as assisted the instructors in on-boarding new students.

Although not all students took both the classroom- and field-based courses, a strength of including both was an effective division of labor. The instructor handling the field-based courses was able to supplement the empirical focus of his course with historical, theoretical, and policy-oriented material and research conducted in the courses taught by the instructor of the class-based courses. She, in turn, was able to integrate findings from field-based research into her contextual teaching and have it inform the questions asked in expert interviews. Pedagogically, we found that students benefited most when they took combinations of the two types of courses, and we would recommend a tighter sequencing if departmental scheduling allows. Even if not all students take the course sequence, however, both types of courses were beneficial on their own and allowed students to contribute to the project in a variety of ways.

Having two lead faculty members involved was beneficial to the project on many levels. Both classroom- and field-based pedagogy and content were an essential part of the CISER experience and also very demanding on their own, requiring both time and distinct areas of expertise. Thus having faculty members who could cover these different elements—from large-scale data collection on the one hand to the historical roots of the issue and relevant policy analysis on other—enabled the project to be cohesive and comprehensive. Similarly, large-scale public events involving presentations by students, community members, and faculty are significant undertakings and much more effectively managed with two faculty leads.

The CISER model also addresses concerns regarding faculty evaluation and merit review. The incentive structure built into most research universities tends to reward scholarship over community engagement and theory building over applied knowledge, and has difficulty seeing the link between these realms (Firestone and Fisler 2002; Jaeger and Thornton 2006; Nelson, London, and Strobel 2016). It can be challenging to use the standard research/service/teaching rubric to evaluate public-facing, community-based research projects, with faculty often facing the dilemma of "which box" to put them in (McCall et al. 2016). We found CISER to be a clearer way to integrate these three criteria as well as detail our distinct contributions made to each. In describing the contribution of No Place Like Home in our periodic faculty reviews, we have been able to include CISER's innovative

pedagogical approach under our "teaching" contributions, the impacts of the project for community partners under "service," and under "research," our public and professional scholarship made possible through the project.

Community Experiences with CISER

Our key community partners reflected on their experiences with CISER, including both the research project itself and its involvement of undergraduates, in several major public forums. We rely on partners' public speeches and notes for those speeches from three different community agencies to explore their views of the CISER approach. Four main themes emerged. First, this different kind of collaboration helped partners to expand their outreach, as each wanted to share information about its services to the broad and geographically dispersed population they served. For partners, this outreach was equally important as data collection, and door-to-door surveying provided an excellent opportunity. As one collaborator explained,

> Working with university partners enables us to greatly expand our reach. [Organization] has only four legal advocates to serve two counties. The large number of students working on these projects and their deep engagement allows us to get far more information into the hands of our client base than our capacity would otherwise allow.

Second, the research results helped shape and expand organizations' services and advocacy. The director of one of our larger partner organizations, which negotiates on behalf of a coalition of local nonprofits with state and county funders, noted that "having the university engaged in community work provided a level of legitimacy for advocacy for our social issues.... The work has led to additional project funding that has allowed community organizations to fill the gap." Similarly, another partner noted that its involvement and the data helped to "develop and support policy initiatives" and expand its work through grant writing. Strategically, having locally relevant, high-quality research allowed partners to make more informed planning decisions as well gave them a stronger basis for making additional resource claims to continue and expand services.

Third, the training provided to undergraduates offered community partners a potential future workforce. Our two largest partner organizations expressed an ongoing struggle with the high turnover of nonprofit workers, especially given the unaffordability of housing. They have benefited from having interns as well as exposure to students interested in community empowerment. As the CEO of a large antipoverty nonprofit in the area noted, the collaborations

> provided a platform for students to learn and explore the local work that is being performed to change the status quo.... We have seen board members arise and it has allowed us to recruit and hire dedicated staff members that contribute to the community through their service at local organizations.

Indeed, at least six students who participated in the projects obtained jobs with one of the community partners after graduation, while many more have gone on to positions in other nonprofit organizations across the region and state.

Finally, partner organizations stressed both the importance and benefits of mutual trust and respect built through longer-term relationships beyond a single research project. As one collaborator reflected,

> The work and outcome of these projects resonate beyond the primary product and allows for development of additional partnerships and opportunities for the university to engage locally.... [It] has allowed a continued discussion that with continued investment by the community could lead to systemic changes.

However, partners also cautioned that successful collaboration is predicated on the fundamental need for transparency and trust and for university-based researchers to respect community stakeholders as *equal* partners, a point that is echoed in the literature (Daly and Finnigan 2012; Jagosh et al. 2015; Nelson et al. 2015). In addressing university-based researchers, this partner noted,

> The greatest outcome of partnership opportunities arise when there is a mutual interest identified by the researcher and the organization.... I would suggest that [the researchers] ensure that equal respect and priority is given to organizations, and that organizations' needs are fully understood to then find mutual ground.

For community partners, working within the CISER model is not always easy. One particular challenge is the divergent time frames between university research and community-based action and services. Community partners were often frustrated by both the pace of the university bureaucracy and the time-consuming nature of the research process itself, a problem also identified in the literature (Collins et al. 2018; Nelson et al. 2015). As one community partner explained, "A challenge to working with the university was the slow approval process for the project which we had started with [another group], but then had to be put on hold while the survey instrument was refined and went through a lengthy approval process." While community partners clearly valued both the collaboration and participation in shaping high-quality data collection, such partnerships could eat up scarce time and staff energies and did not always meet their short-term needs.

Overall, the mutual respect, aligned values, and cooperative planning helped create a strong collaborative framework and a productive division of labor that led to clear mutual benefits. The executive director of one of our longest-time partners that serves some of the most vulnerable populations in the region summed up the experience with CISER:

> The partnership is rooted on the alignment of [organization] values and UCSC Principles of Community including embracing diversity, being purposeful and focusing on issues of equity. UCSC provides [organization] the opportunity for quality data gathering including access to research, support with project design, and project implementation and analysis. [Organization] helps UCSC connect to the community… by providing meaningful opportunities and access to the community impacted by poverty. This partnership brings together theory and practice that informs and strengthens the work that each of us do that ultimately helps and creates paths for our community to thrive.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on a multiyear local research project on the affordable housing crisis in Santa Cruz, California, we have outlined a new model, CISER, that builds on and expands the strengths of public and service sociology. This project brought together three key groups of actors—undergraduate students, university researchers, and community organizations—drawing on and extending the powers of previous cooperative "dyads" between them. CISER improves pedagogical and sociological practice by constituting undergraduate students as knowledge producers and as an active public while at the same time creating meaningful partnerships between university researchers and community-based organizations. The model embeds concerns for ethical and action-oriented research that can make a real difference in people's lives, along with an appreciation of the potential of students as assets in research, the importance of building students' funds of knowledge through experiential learning, and of the social scientific value of collaborative knowledge production within and beyond the academy.

We find substantial benefits of this approach for all stakeholders. CISER aligns with the American Sociological Association Task Force on Liberal Learning and the Sociology Major, which endorses research-embedded and community-engaged approaches to teaching and learning (Pike et al. 2017). Results demonstrate the pedagogical potential of an approach in which students are central to both community engagement and the research enterprise. Students report through surveys and course evaluations that participating in field-based courses helped them to grow academically, personally, and in their ability to engage with community. These courses greatly enhanced their research and communication skills, and their connections to faculty and peers through the process were seen as extremely valuable and rewarding. For faculty, CISER requires a different set of preparedness, including coordinating among students and community for all aspects of the project, from data collection to reporting and public events. It also, however, offers a unique opportunity to integrate teaching, research, and service activities into one venture. Community partners expressed their gratitude for CISER and its various data collections, noting the importance of this information for their ongoing operations. Unlike other research projects, the large scale of this work allowed them to share information with a pool of community residents whom they might not have otherwise reached and also to highlight their work in public forums attended by residents, academics, and local government officials.

Moving forward, we see great potential for the CISER model both on our campus and beyond. At UCSC, motivated by the valuable findings and pedagogical impacts of our first two CISER projects and deepening connection with community

partners, we are currently expanding the model with a new research initiative. And although our experience is in many ways unique, drawn from two locally based projects at a large public research university and Hispanic Serving Institution, we believe the CISER model could be adapted and applied to different social issues, in different locales, and at different types of academic institutions.

For faculty interested, we recommend two preliminary steps: one aiming toward *community initiation* of the research and another toward *student engagement* in the project. The first would entail convening potential community partners to assess their research needs and the degree to which these are in sync with faculty interests and areas of expertise. The second step would then entail an assessment of the student populations that might be involved in the research and the degree to which their backgrounds, life experiences, and competencies—cultural, technological, creative, or linguistic—might be relevant to and an asset for the project. This latter step might involve some creativity, for example, grouping students in research teams (such as the bilingual teams we created for our project) or partnering with faculty and students at another college whose students' experience better matches research needs. Once the project is designed, with partners in place, another key step involves advance planning with home departments. We recommend designing a mandatory sequence between field- and classroom-based courses, with students exposed to relevant literature on the background and broader implications of the issues being addressed in classroom-based courses prior to or concurrently with their engagement in the hands-on, field research phase.

Findings presented in this article speak to the importance of designing community-engaged, research-based learning experiences for sociology undergraduates. Students themselves are owners and creators of knowledge that add to both the quality of sociological research and their educational experiences. Expanding the role of students in public and service sociology, as is suggested by the CISER model, requires consideration of students in their dyadic relationships with their professor, the university, and the community. In committing to CISER in the No Place Like Home project, we have demonstrated the potential impacts of student engagement in community-engaged research on students' academic and personal growth, on student commitment to prioritize community work in the future, and on expanding public sociology by better integrating its multiple publics.

EDITOR'S NOTE

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