

Sustainability Tracking Assessment & Ratings System (STARS)

Attn: STARS Innovation Credit

Esteemed committee members:

When it came time for Santa Clara University to revise its Undergraduate Core Curriculum, university administrators and faculty considered the long-term mission of Santa Clara to cultivate competence, conscience, and compassion within every student. This mission, stated explicitly since the mid-1990s, lead directly to the establishment of the Experiential Learning for Social Justice (ELSJ) component of the new Undergraduate Core Curriculum, implemented in Fall Quarter of 2009. This innovative and dynamic requirement is distinctly Jesuit in character, and was designed to meet the call articulated by Father Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, then Superior General of the Society of Jesus, in his address at Santa Clara in 2000 in which he expressed the need “to educate the whole person of solidarity in the real world.”¹

The ELSJ requirement, which must be completed by every undergraduate student at the university as part of their Core Curriculum, maintains that all students across disciplines must take a course that includes service learning in order to learn about social justice, civic life, perspective, and civic engagement. To meet the rigors of this transformative pedagogy, the service learning engagements must include substantial direct, face-to-face contact with members of underrepresented and underserved communities. Appropriate service learning engagements may be designed around a weekly engagement program at a local non-profit organization, a structured immersion trip, or a project-based community engagement, among other options.

To further institutionalize the university’s mission, new courses and programs are being established in departments all over campus. In addition to the development of academic service learning courses, the university demonstrates its commitment to service learning curriculum through its support of Arrupe Partnerships for Community-based Learning (a department of the Ignatian Center for Jesuit Education at SCU.) For the past 23 years, the Arrupe Partnerships program has grown and built solid partnerships with over 50 non-profit community organizations in Santa Clara County—including homeless shelters, multilingual/ESL educational programs, immigrant service centers, preschools, church parishes, and health care agencies. This allows over 1200 students per year to engage in service learning with communities in need that is specifically focused on social justice and civic engagement. Moreover, Arrupe Partnerships endeavors not only to provide meaningful education to Santa Clara students, but also to build sustainable relationships with faculty and community partners that can grow beyond the scope of an academic quarter.

The ELSJ requirement clearly demonstrates Santa Clara’s commitment to sustainability. It encourages community-building through the careful cultivation of meaningful and sustainable partnerships between the university and community partners. Through the transformative service learning pedagogies supported by the ELSJ requirement, Santa Clara strives to institutionalize and practice its mission to promote social equity and to examine the root causes of existing inequities. ELSJ represents one of the ways that Santa Clara educates the “whole person”² for a deeper understanding of the benefits of civic engagement and responsible citizenship. Furthermore, Santa Clara endeavors with this requirement to equip students to make vocational choices with an intellectually sophisticated yet compassionate understanding of the world. These are the lasting transformations that we want every student to experience. In essence, the goal of the ELSJ requirement is to promote a lifetime awareness of and commitment to social justice as a sustainable value.

Most sincerely,
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¹ Rev. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American, Jesuit Higher Education,” address at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California, October 6, 2000.

² Ibid.