

Instructor responses to CRPLAN 2110 S+GE Proposal Review, Thursday, October 17, 2013

REVIEWER 1

Overall score is a 3.

I am frankly a bit concerned about the ephemeral and short term nature of the partner contacts.

Partners in CRPLAN 2110 become long-term associates of the course over the years, creating a participatory institution. They appreciate and use the students for real-world needs, planning ahead and preparing meaningful assignments, and anticipating good ideas and solutions. Students love the variety, and it is nonetheless meaningful to both parties. Many students find their calling in this class as a direct result of the course's choreography.

The instructor speaks in a convincing way about the benefits of this, but provides limited arguments for why this would indeed be beneficial to the partners. I feel that there should be some more substantial evidence to go outside proven approaches for effective service learning. I don't mind experimenting and researching the effectiveness but I am not sure an S/GE course is the right place for such research.

Although the original application did not spell out all the benefits to the partners, all partners do benefit. For instance, in class six this semester, Amy Taylor, the COO of the Columbus Downtown Development Corporation, explained her heavy involvement in the planning and development of the Columbus Commons Park, the Scioto Mile and associated Bicentennial Fountain. While there, Ms. Taylor and staff explained a problem with which they are wrestling-- the downtown park space is not utilized in the off-season. They asked students to find innovative solutions to activate the park during cold months. As a result, the students are currently researching best practices from around the world (especially in the Scandinavian Countries) and will deliver their results in a programming charrette with Ms. Taylor and her staff to deliver solutions and ideas to meet their needs.

In another example, coming in early November, Heather Bowden, Director of COGO Bike Share in Columbus, wants to expand the bike share network from downtown to the OSU campus. She will employ the students to do research and field work to decide the most logical and useful places to put 30 more stations.

Similarly, every partner has up to 60 fresh minds to provide ideas and solutions to problems they want to solve. And each semester, they get help with these sorts of tasks.

Logistics around field trips are not articulated but are probably routine, given the longevity of the course.

Indeed, logistics is a big issue in the course when students need to get back to campus to take a class (or leave class to get to the field location.) This only affects a few students, but we have a system to make this run smoothly. Also, most of the visits are intentionally located near High Street so students can use their free Buck IDs on COTA. The majority of students do use the bus.

It is unclear who (instructor or partners) will introduce students to the issues and prepare them for service in the specific settings they will encounter. It seems from the current website that many assignments are student-led fieldtrips with limited partner contact or engagement.

Partners introduce the topic during class and the majority engage in the charrettes and design/idea-generating sessions. In addition, partners make themselves available via email and phone. I would counter that partner engagement goes far beyond limited engagement.

Looking at the responses to all three responses to 5a, b, and c, I get a feeling of a lopsided partnership where the benefits to the community partners are less clear than for students.

Partners get the benefits from the course being offered each semester, and engage in a long-term relation with the course, as described above.

Students are given ample opportunity through the course blog to provide reflections on their work. The prompt is good but I does not seem to provide scaffolding to help students achieve the skills required of the final assignment. I would recommend some of the blog assignments and prompts to specifically target the four questions that is the focus of the final assignment.

This is a great idea and I have been anticipating how to do this. If granted S+GE status, I will make sure to implement the four questions into the delivery of the curriculum for every assignment.

There are weekly readings that introduce the academic content around each focus area, but I find limited contextual information and activities to promote cultural competency.

I tend disagree with this. Cultural context is discussed and inherent in everything we do in this course. This response suggests that there may be a need to strengthen evidence for this in the syllabus. (Or in the proposal.) Which I will do by...

Some opportunity given in the last assignment. This could be improved by scaffolding in the blog assignments though.

The last assignment addresses cultural competency directly.

Evaluation of student learning is clear and appropriate

REVIEWER 2

My overall score for this course is a 5. It is well developed and should have a tremendous impact on student learning. I hope the community partners are in a position to implement some of the students' findings and recommendations. A fresh perspective from young minds with no employment ties could be refreshing and of benefit to the city!

Thank you!

REVIEWER 3

Overall score is a 4. This seems like a very well thought out experiential education opportunity. Given the number of different service activities and the quantity of community partners, it does seem that it will be difficult to provide students with background orientation and sensitivity training for all these communities in all these cases.

Yes, it is difficult. But the course is to make people fall in love with getting their hands dirty in city planning and learn at least some of the amazing possibilities associated with service related to city planning and development. One of the benefits for the larger number of partners is that students have to quickly learn to adapt to new situations. Every week students have to check their values systems, learn empathy, and act professionally—often in starkly different contexts. While this is vastly different than having only one or two main partners over the term, I believe this course whets students' appetites for doing more service activities and taking more service-learning courses. It also approximates planners' professional lives where they deal with many different constituencies in short time spans.

When I pursued the required readings, I didn't see any material that might stimulate a collective reflection on how one deals with issues of power and privilege in city planning. In other words, it seems that students might form a bridge between city planners and planning organizations and "ordinary" citizens, and that might have a social justice dimension, but students are also a privileged group relative to others within the city. I would encourage the faculty and TAs to consider hosting a conversation with students about issues of power: who gets to decide how the city develops? how can students work contribute to opening up a democratic space within city planning? The reflective essay at the end seems more solutions- than reflection-oriented. And there is a long history of professional "developers" providing solutions that have not been adequately vetted by target communities, so it would be nice if there were some mechanism in this service-learning course for opening up a conversation about that.

We do discuss social justice, power, and democracy. This reviewer's comments remind me of the importance of conversation. While feedback is strong in the course, I want to improve class-wide conversation opportunities. I'd like to thank the reviewer for these thoughtful comments and suggestions. (And thank the others, too.)

These comments are suggestions only, not meant to delay the approval process. Overall, this looks like an excellent offering.

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