
To: Jessica Mercerhill
Fr: Julie Graber
Re: Professional Pathways in Civic Engagement
Dt: 10/1/2008

Attached is the updated syllabus for the proposed Professional Pathways course in civic engagement. We are submitting the course for consideration as a Pathways course based on our experience with a pilot version of the course offered during Spring Quarter 2008. We believe that the pilot was an effective demonstration of the course's ability to meet the goals of the Professional Pathways program in the following ways.

Introducing students to current professional issues in the field

Students who participated in the Spring 2008 civic engagement pilot attended forums on a diverse set of topics, reflecting the range of issues that challenge communities. These forums also exposed the students to the types of organizations that emerge from a community's need to address those issues. Organizations and issues represented in the forums during the pilot quarter included:

- The **Greater Columbus Arts Council**, which serves as the advocate for the arts in the central Ohio community, and the **Columbus Partnership**, an economic development organization with a vested interest in the health of the arts and their contribution to a community's quality of life, in a forum focused on the state of funding for the arts (*Is Funding for the Arts Becoming Unfashionable?*).
- The **Columbus Chamber of Commerce**, the **Columbus 2012 Commission**, which has been charged by the mayor of Columbus to create set of goals for the city's upcoming bicentennial, and the **Columbus Foundation**, one of the country's largest community foundations, participating in a forum regarding efforts among community leaders to develop strategies to engage and retain a higher percentage the area's university and college graduates (*An Overlooked Asset: 100,000 College Students*).
- **KIDS Ohio**, a statewide research and advocacy organization, in a forum on efforts to improve the performance of schools within the Columbus City Schools system (*Creating a Portfolio of High Performing Schools*).
- The **American Petroleum Institute**, an advocacy organization for the petroleum industry, in a forum on the future for the U.S. petroleum industry (*Fuel Consumption: By Plan or By Proxy*).

Providing an overview of professional opportunities to all students, including non-majors

The pilot course on civic engagement also demonstrated its effectiveness in exposing students to the range of possibilities that exist to pursue careers where they can exercise good civic skills and be actively involved in their community. The students interacted with and observed community leaders who work in civic organizations as well as business professionals who work in a diversity of fields and who consider active engagement among their responsibilities to build a better community in which to live and work. These individuals included:

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- Chancellor Eric Fingerhut of the Ohio Board of Regents, who introduced Ohio’s plan for enhancing higher education in the state.
 - Denny Griffith, President, Columbus College of Art & Design, who talked about the leadership challenges he faces as the chief executive of an urban design college.
 - Nancy Kramer, CEO of Resource Interactive, who co-chairs the committee looking for ways to retain more college graduates in the central Ohio area, and
 - Brian Knicely, who serves as the chief executive of the Greater Columbus Arts Council, who participated in the forum on funding for the arts.
 - Abigail Wexner, chair of the board, KIDS Ohio, who reported on the latest efforts to build excellence within the Columbus Public School System.

Note: The students in the pilot also had the opportunity to interact directly with the forum attendees who sat at their table during lunch (the students were asked not to all sit at the same table during the forums but to seek out opportunities to meet new people at each meeting).

Providing students the opportunity to explore professional career paths and helping students understand the relationship between professional pathway preparation and degree planning

In order to strengthen the course’s ability to address the other two goals of the Professional Pathways program (related to career paths and degree preparation), several changes have been made to the syllabus from the pilot.

- The writing assignments during the quarter have been changed from three forum critiques to two critiques and two informational interviews reports. This change provides more opportunity for students to learn more about the types of skills, jobs, and experiences that lead to or prepare someone for a role (formal or informal) in civic engagement.
- A second class meeting has been added to the week to provide an opportunity for the students and instructor to meet to debrief on the previous week’s forum and to prepare for the upcoming forum. This second meeting will also provide an opportunity for students reflect on the forum discussions and contacts they are making, and the impact these conversations have on their thoughts about their professional interests.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics expects job prospects in civic organizations to continue to grow over the next 8 years, outpacing overall job growth rate by two percentage points, due in part to baby boomer retirements and in part in new job creation (US BLS, 2008). In addition, workforce development discussions in many arenas have begun to suggest that “employers are looking for workers who also see themselves as citizens,” arguing that a “civically engaged workforce is possible and necessary in all employment sectors and across all sizes of organizations” (Minnesota Compass Compact, 2006). William Sullivan has written extensively on the need for workers who are skilled at “civic professionalism” in addition to their technical expertise, describing it as a “social reciprocity,” and “active participation and public concern on the part of the citizens served” (Benner & Sullivan, 2005.)

The evaluations from the students who participated in the pilot reinforce the course's ability to address these themes as well as the goals of the Professional Pathways program. The following comments are just a sampling of the feedback we received from the students for the Spring 2008 pilot.

- *“Attending the CMC’s weekly forums allowed me an inspiring glimpse of what this open community conversation might look like. Because I aspire to a career in nonprofit leadership, I found it personally interesting to get another glimpse of how community leaders often wear so many different hats.”*
- *“...I purchased my first suit and took that first step to actual adulthood...I interacted with a diverse array of nonprofit and business leaders and now have a better appreciation for the time and dedication they put into their works and community. I was able to network with the biggest names of Columbus...”*
- *“Every forum I sat at a table with someone who was able to help me along in my goals. There were each happy to talk with me and share their contact information....Civic engagement is full of generally passionate people, who want to contribute in some small way to something bigger than themselves and their own industry. I made more contacts and shared greater enthusiasm in one quarter than I could have done in the two years I have left at Ohio State.”*
- *“The idea of civic engagement was a foreign idea to me in terms of what exactly it meant and this class helped open up my eyes to the importance for it in the twenty-first century. I can define civic engagement as an ongoing dialogue between the leaders of nonprofit and business organizations as they strive to improve their individual pursuits while also benefiting the overall community in the process.”*
- *“My experience in [this course] was a very informative time and an absolute blast... it taught me so much about the ways to interact with difference people and the importance of have a dialogue between the civic and business sectors of a city in order to address the important issues of the day in a direct way.”*

The Columbus Metropolitan Club has expressed enthusiastic support for the program and is committed to continuing to offer the experience through Ohio State (as well as expanding it to other area educational institutions). We've discussed offering the program two times each academic year, Winter and Spring Quarters for 2008-2008 and Fall and Spring in subsequent academic years.

References:

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Quotes taken with permission from evaluations and final papers submitted by students in the Spring Quarter 2008 Civic Engagement Pilot.