Syllabus: PA 414 Fall 2012
Civic Engagement: The Role of Social Institutions

Contact Information
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Course Description

The Civic Leadership Minor

PA 414 is part of a cluster of courses that make up an undergraduate minor in Civic Leadership offered by Portland State University. Students must take 34 credit hours drawn from a choice of 20 different courses offered across campus. PA 414 is one of those courses. The overall goal of the minor is to provide students with a curricular opportunity to pursue their interests in community and public service while completing the requirements for their chosen major course of study. The minor can be complementary to any field of study.

Overview of PA 414: what we hope to accomplish

In this course I hope you will practice approaches to exploring a public issue while seeking to probe more deeply into your own motivations and interests and working out ways to use your knowledge and skills in support of a livable future through the experiences you have with civic learning.

The goals of this course are to expand your awareness of life in the community, practice skills that you can use to contribute to the quality of life in the communities with which you have an affiliation and interest and build a deep commitment to taking an active role in changing society for the better which displaying integrity, honesty and ethical reasoning in doing so.

The course goals are shaped by an understanding that the meaning of an education is changing as we go deeper into the 21st century. Among the expectations that have emerged are (a) integration across fields---what does this mean and how can we do this? (b) the importance of learning more deeply---what does that concept mean and how can we foster that kind of learning? (c) the importance of bringing together how we think and act (knowledge and skills) with what we know about ourselves (values and
motivation) and how we relate to other people in the community, both in this class and within the Portland Metro area. The reason for seeking to bring these three elements together is to support learning that has more meaningful consequences for both you and for the people affected by how you apply your knowledge and skills to understanding and responding to pressing world problems. The framework from which I drew these ideas is posted on D2L and labeled Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP). The DQP is accompanied by a set of measures called the VALUE Rubric. The elements of the Rubric, which has been developed by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, are designed to show the development of greater depth and competency on a number of measures that relate to the four core elements of a quality education---Knowledge, Intellectual Skills, Civic Learning and Applied Learning.

**Goals for this course and assessments of learning**

Your accomplishments will be assessed using portions of the VALUE Rubric. I have drawn measures from this package of Rubrics that address intellectual skills applied to a community-based problem identified in cooperation with a community partner, civic learning in the context of the Portland Metro area and applied learning during the process of defining a problem and proposing a workable solution or the gathering of some much-needed information that can be used to inform solution-finding by the community partner. The Rubric is posted in the toolkit section of our course D2L site. The evidence that we will use to evaluate your progress will be your culminating assignment e-portfolio (see explanation on page 4 of the syllabus.)

**Questions that this course will address**

1. How do you get to know a community? What do you notice? What do you care about? How do you usually make sense of your experiences?

2. What do other people care about in your community and who speaks for the community?

- Who identifies and describes problems in the community? Who is asking questions and why are they asking?
- Who gathers evidence and interprets the findings? Can you discern an underlying set of assumptions or an agenda that shape the information collected and the conclusions reached?
- Who acts on the findings of these studies and reports and what use do they make of the findings? How do different social organizations and
interest groups define their focus and the problem they want to address?

3. How do different scholars and practitioners think about a community? How helpful are these different ideas as guides for getting to know a community? Which approaches make sense to you and why?

4. How do you decide where and how to become involved in the life of a community?

5. How do you "read" the organization you choose to affiliate with, how do you learn to see the community through the lens of this organization and make meaningful contributions to its mission?

**Guiding Principles for this Class**

Our overarching goal is to explore life in a community and how people and organizations can work together for a livable future. We will use our class interactions to model the experience of joining a new community and finding a place within it. The following principles reflect the way that a newcomer might “read” a community----what you notice, what sense you make of what you see and how you decide whether to act on what you have learned and, if so, how. To set up our temporary learning community, we will

- Work together in pairs or teams whenever possible
- Connect what we learn to the needs of community partners
- Select projects that we can get done in a single term
- Explore issues that are important to the Portland community

By interacting this way, we will seek to act according to the following principles.

- **Creative**: A main goal of this course is to offer you practice in designing, preparing and delivering a proposal that addresses a meaningful public issue defined in cooperation with a cooperating social organization (community partner). Much of the work you do for this course will be focused on the craft and process of constructing and revising a meaningful response to a real issue.
- **Student Initiated**: I will serve as a facilitator and coach of discussions and formal assignments. The readings will provide a resource but your primary classroom and laboratory will be the context of Portland itself and the social organization with which you will work. You and your
fellow students will share equal responsibility for your learning. (In other words, I'll do my part, but you have to do yours, too.)

✓ **Collaborative:** In addition to completing a proposal to submit to one of our community partners, you will give and receive ideas, feedback, and critique to your fellow classmates in order to write and revise your formal assignments. Your success depends on their careful, thoughtful, critical comments. Their success depends on yours.

✓ **Practical:** This course is build around the realities of our metropolitan region and the social organizations that arise to respond to our community’s needs. Although we will draw upon more formal and scholarly approaches to understanding the nature of life in a community, your real text will be the community itself.

**What will we be doing?**

**Weekly Activities**

**Readings** appropriate to each week’s theme will be posted in the course D2L site and will be included in the assignments described in the NEWS section. You will be expected to read this material in advance of the class where they will be discussed and applied. There will not be an assigned textbook.

**Posting in the Discussion section of D2L---exercises and reflections.**
Exercises and questions will be part of every assignment both in class and online and will be posted in the NEWS section of D2L. I will post assignments in two week block intervals so you have some advanced planning time.

Please post your responses to class assignments and exercises by Thursday evening each week and then, when asked specifically in the assignment or exercise, read the responses posted by the rest of the class and respond to at least two of those postings. In Exercise set #1, we will be practicing this process.

**The culminating E-portfolio**

You will keep a record of your work in an e-portfolio. The exercises and reflections that you post throughout the term, while not individually graded, will form the core of your e-portfolio and should demonstrate what you have learned about life in the community. How you have practiced skills that you can use to contribute to the communities with which you have an affiliation and an interested your reflections on the effects of these experiences on the
depth of your commitment to taking an active role in changing society for the better.

**Report for your community partner**

You will complete a focused inquiry or research project that addresses a question or challenge facing your partner organization as it develops and delivers its programs and seeks support from the community for its work. You will present your report first to the class in order to get advice and feedback and then, after you have made any changes to reflect the class discussion, you will submit the report to your community partner for review and comment. We will work together on the questions that we will pose to the partners.

**Ongoing feedback and contributions to the course design**

Leadership is as much about learning as it is about enabling others. Although the overall design of this course is in place and its goals are set, the way we work together and the material we use will come in part from the daily life of the Portland community and from your own interests and community connections. Therefore, I will ask you to respond to several questions once a week that explore how you are reacting to the course and how we might adapt our work to speak more directly to your own interests and knowledge. These questions are in a special section of the Discussion component of D2L.

Your weekly feedback will be due on Sunday evening by 6pm.

In addition, we will be experimenting with a modified set of learning goals developed by the Association of American Schools and Colleges---the Rubric mentioned on page 2 of the syllabus. We want to find out whether it is possible to see movement along a continuum of increasing knowledge and skill during a single 10 week term. Our researcher is Molly Griffith. Molly Griffith is a doctoral candidate in Public Administration and Policy at PSU. She has taught Urban Sociology courses here and at other local institutions, and currently works at PSU’s Center for Online Learning. Her doctoral research is on recent assessment efforts in higher education, particularly, how critical thinking, civic engagement and civic learning are measured and assessed across institutions. In her work with the Center for Online Learning, she has designed and implemented a series of assessment-based course design workshops for faculty. Her participation in this course will explore the effectiveness of the VALUE rubric and the Degree Qualifications Profile in measuring civic learning.

**How will we be working?**
**Working with each other**

Where possible, you will be paired with another member of the class who shares your interests and together you will get to know your community partner and work on a problem that you and the partner agree upon.

**Working with Technology**

Some of you are very familiar with technology and comfortable with the tools we will use. Some of you are still learning to navigate in Cyberspace. If you have any questions after you get started, just let Molly know and she can help you.

Although our real “textbook” will be the Portland community and some of our work will be done there, much of our interactions will take place online in D2L and later in Blogger. Online collaboration is an important part of community building in today’s world and the community we create in this course should mirror that reality. I will make all of the readings and resources that you will need to use to complete the assignments available online.

To access the course D2L site, go to my.pdx.edu and click on the “student” tab. You will see a section called “My Quick Links” on the top left hand side. You will find the link to D2L there.

Instructions for setting up your e-Portfolio in Blogger can be found in the section on the E-Portfolio in D2L but we will also demonstrate how to do this in class.

**Working with Community Partners**

I will ask three or four community groups or agencies to work with us on some problem or issue that you and they identify that lends itself to the short timeframe of a quarter long course (10 weeks) and the knowledge and expertise that members of the class bring to this exercise. These relationships and problems will be our textbook and working laboratory for exploring the questions I want you to think about during the quarter.

If you already have a close association with a social organization (e.g., voluntary associations, public interest groups, educational and religious institutions, and nonprofit organizations you may work individually or with another member of the class on a project for that organization. Talk with me about this before choosing this way of meeting the requirements of this course.
Among the possible benefits to the partner will be the opportunity to reflect on some of the issues or questions that busy staff and volunteers do not have much time to consider. They will have assistance from students in this class in gathering evidence, preparing reports or designing a possible response or solution to a problem facing the organization. The commitment on the part of staff or volunteers of a partner social organization will vary but there will not be any direct supervisory responsibility community partner, you will present your report and findings to the members of the class and gather feedback and advice.

Grading

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Postings on line</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culminating E-Portfolio</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Report for Community Partner</td>
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In lieu of a final exam, you will submit a report that addresses a question or problem that you identify with one of our community partners.

Course Policies

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is taking another person's work and using it as your own. When writers use material from other sources, they must acknowledge this source. Not doing so is called plagiarism, which means using without credit the ideas or expressions of another. You are therefore cautioned against using

1. Phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc., word-for-word, without acknowledgment, from the written material of others;
2. Phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc., with only slight changes the written materials of another; and
3. The general plan, the main headings, or a rewritten form of someone else's material.

These cautions apply to the work of other students as well as to the published work of professional or amateur writers. If you submit someone else's writing or ideas as your own, you will fail the assignment and may fail the class. I will also forward your name to the college's student conduct office for further action. Learning how to separate your ideas and words from those of others, ensuring proper credit to everyone involved, is a goal of this class. When in doubt, ask me.
See PSU Student Code of Conduct for a complete list of policies related to student conduct at PSU.

Disability Access Information

If you require accommodations (e.g. special seating, interpreter, note-taker, etc.), please inform your instructor immediately. Students with disabilities should register with the PSU Disability Resource Center (503-725-4150 TTY or Relay 503-725-4178) to document their need for accommodations and obtain support services.

- PSU Writing Center, http://writingcenter.pdx.edu/
- D2L Online Learning Support for Students (including tutorials) http://www.pdx.edu/psuonline/node/40