Justice and Sustainability Change Strategies
STUDENT PROJECT HANDBOOK

Contents

1. OVERVIEW

The Community Projects are, for many students, the most exciting and transformative part of the course. The Projects are co-designed with community leaders and organizations to meet both immediate and long-term community needs and be a meaningful introduction to how the community works and how it is evolving. If you invest yourself as an individual and as a team in your project, you will very likely have the experience of making a positive difference in the future of this community.

You will receive a summary of each of the projects in the second week of class. The projects are quite varied and, with your help, will be integrally linked to the coursework throughout the semester. I expect you to do at least 3 and up to 4 hours of project work per week throughout the semester, which may include:

● Meeting time with the project guide(s) - could be as little as 1 and as much as 3 hours of your weekly community time.
● The service work the agency does, eg. tutoring, planting, surveying, deconstructing a home,
● Support for Organizational development, aka capacity building work, for your agency, e.g. staff or neighborhood surveys, , promotional video, brochure or website improvement, researching how similar projects have faced certain challenges, etc.
● Final report, community presentation (if relevant), and final class presentation- all co-designed with your guide to be of service to the project in one way or another.

In order to be receptive to the new situations you find yourself in and respectful of the people you meet, you will need to use your best listening skills, pay careful attention, and be willing to see things from a different perspective, even if you think you know better. But this does not mean that you should passively wait around for continuous direction and handholding.

You will be working with great people who have huge personal and professional commitments, often in understaffed and underfunded situations. Some of them have less privileged and well-equipped backgrounds or situations than you may be personally familiar with. ***They may not answer your emails right way or always have time to carefully prepare for every session with you. It's essential to try different ways to make contact, be proactive, take initiative, ask questions, do the tasks you agreed to do, and report back in your group time and/or online on the challenges and successes.*** Find a way to be humble and receptive yet self-reliant and assertive.

Projects may include a modest amount of required reading, especially at the beginning.

We complement the project work in the rest of the course with project check-ins, community skill trainings, opportunities in class for feedback and problem solving, and reflection on community experiences in your reflections and journal work. If you think something about your project is important to explore in class, (or in private with Elan) **speak up** and we'll make room for that.

2. STAYING ON TRACK AND ACCOUNTABLE

Your project time is not optional, regardless of whether you have tests or papers in other courses. If anything, it's a greater responsibility than your classes on campus, because we are making a commitment to community advocates and leaders who work with us to repay their effort with us with our own best effort on behalf of the community. This is also an opportunity to develop community development skills, which will only happen if you invest yourself as fully you would in any job or enterprise of your choice.

 If you are sick or have an emergency, please call or text your team and your guide as soon as possible and find ways to make up the work. Your project work is half the course, and my conversations with project guides and their mid-semester and final evaluations of each team member are much of the basis for half your grade. See Evaluations section below

Weekly Meeting: In order to stay on track and productive it is important to make the most of your weekly meeting with your Project Guide, in most cases on Wednesday afternoons. Use this time to assure that you improve the project outcomes and your own learning by asking questions; sharing challenges, successes, suggestions, and discoveries; reflecting on the changes you're experiencing and seeing; and building your community and cultural competency skills. Some project guides will regularly create an atmosphere for this kind of sharing. In some cases, they may be preoccupied and narrowly task-oriented , and you could be the one to exercise leadership skills and ask for time for whatever you think is needed.

Team Process Meeting. It is also important to meet with your other teammates apart from your guide *at least once every two weeks, even if only for 30 minutes* before or after your regular project time or perhaps on a conference call. This meeting time is not about working on the actual tasks, but about making sure that the communication, collaboration and accountability to each other is going well and that everyone is clear about a plan and strategy you're employing. It is also a great place to actually *practice* the communication, feedback, facilitation and leadership skills we emphasize in the course. And, yes, you can count this part of your 4 hours a week of project time.

Get back to Elan. Since I have long-term relationships with most of the projects and guides, you may save yourself a great deal of unnecessary confusion or frustration by checking in with me if you can't seem to solve a puzzle in the regular course of your project work. I have been doing this work for about a decade now, and some of the challenges are becoming more familiar and easier to work with. Similarly, if you can't work out challenges within your group after earnestly trying, ask for help!

3. TRANSPORTATION

Getting to projects in as reliable, timely, and low-impact a way as possible is an integral and fun part of the curriculum. Most projects will engage you downtown, though one is primarily on South Hill , and the ReUse project will be at Triphammer Mall in Lansing much of the time. Besides the ReUSe project , I encourage you to use bus (or when feasible, walk or bike) to get to projects, but sometimes car use will be necessary for some or all team members. We will establish early on who has use of a car and will make cars available for each team, if and when needed. Keep track of your miles driven and I will reimburse you at the rate of 50 cents per mile

You must notify your team and your guide(s) by email and/or cell phone, as needed, of any delay or absence. Clear communication and accountability will be essential to project success.

4. PROJECT PRESENTATIONS
There will be opportunities during the semester for your team to present their work to the class. The presentations challenge you to summarize and synthesize your understandings and your accomplishments in order to enhance our collective learning, and are also intended to help you sharpen your skills in public outreach and community education. It's important , therefore, to ***focus on creating as clear, educational, creative, interactive, and user-friendly a presentation as possible,***

Short presentations
We set aside time at various points for brief project check-ins and feedback or problem solving sessions that project groups request. In addition, you will do a 15 minute Short Project Presentation after Spring Break. The Short Presentation will have four goals
● To summarize the mission and work of the agency (2-3 minutes)
● To summarize the goals of the project and the progress you've made so far (2-3) min)
● To reflect on your team's strengths, weaknesses, and "lessons learned" as effective collaborators. (2-3 min)
● To share dilemmas and questions, get feedback on what you're doing and puzzling over, and perhaps draw out from the larger group ideas for improvement (4-8 min)

Community Presentation
 With some projects, your project guide may feel it's important to have you present your work, including findings, lessons, and recommendations, to their group's Board of Directors or program staff, or a relevant neighborhood group or city agency. If the schedule permits, you would ideally first present to our class to get feedback and practice, and then present to a community audience. The **community presentations would ideally take place in late April or early May, and not later than May 6**. I will help with the logistics, as needed (e.g. food and drinks, meeting space, etc.). You will create a better outcome if you send a rough draft for feedback or rehearse with your guide before doing your public presentation.

Final Project Presentation
● **Present on Wednesday, May 1st or Monday, May 6th in class** (sometime between 1:00-3:50)
● **In mid-April invite your guide(s) to attend** and find out which day and which times are best for him or her.
● **Think ahead in mid-April or earlier with your project guide about how the final presentation can benefit your project**, in addition to the project work you are already doing. In what way might the slide show, photos, posters, videos, or summaries you choose to use in your presentation be useful in your agency's outreach, development or community education work?
● **Presentations run 25-35 minutes including 5-10 minutes of engaging the group interactively** such as: an experiential learning activity, getting feedback or doing a task relevant to the project, and/or Q&A
● **Address the same 9 content points as the Project Report** (see below) though not necessarily in a linear manner, and not in as much detail
● Put greater emphasis on the changes that have happened in the time since the Short Presentation and incorporate the feedback you got from the Short Presentation
● The presentation should be as **creative** and impactful as possible, can include a mural, map, video, photo gallery, demonstration, skit, news flash, etc.

● If your group is also going to present in the community, this is great opportunity to practice and get feedback**.**

Evaluation of your presentations is based on

● **Content** - Clarity and depth, E.g. clear and specific examples and principles linked to broader course context. *The specific content can be the same as the report (see below) but it will be more concise and captivating in the presentation format*

● **Presentation-** Community Education skills - Effective connection with and engagement of the audience. Common-sense language, creativity, instructive stories, audience engagement, consciously "connecting the dots"

● **Collaboration**- Evidence of effective group collaboration with each other, guides, other community members, etc.

I will grade the short and the final presentations together as 10 of the 50 project points you can get in the course. More important, your classmates will write down anonymous constructive feedback that you'll collect at the end of your presentations.

5. **PROJECT REPORT AND DELIVERABLES/PORTFOLIO**
● **Rough draft due** to project guide(s) and instructor **Monday April 29th** by midnight
● **Receive feedback** from instructor & project guide by **Thursday May 2nd, 5 pm.**
● **Final version (6-12 pages) due** to project guide & instructor **Monday May 6th** by midnight

Purpose
 The Final Project Report challenges your group to:
● Summarize & synthesize your learning, accomplishments, & suggestions (see 9 points below)
● Sharpen your skills in public outreach & community education
● **Create something that's of direct value to your organization** that also meets the class's requirements. Depending on what you and your guide decide, it can emphasize
     *feedback to your agency or initiative for future project development;
     *have components that can be used for **presentations to donors and foundations**, e.g., stories of what you experienced and the changes you witnessed in the situations you worked in.
     *and/or be **adaptable for outreach, orientation** and/or **education** for other volunteers, interns, and campus departments and professors. In this case, or in these sections, you can frame it more as a volunteer handbook or brochure. This last outcome, if effectively disseminated, can make it easy for the next group of volunteers or professors from local colleges to pick up the essentials of the project and have a sense of what they may be building upon.
 This last goal ("Create something of direct value…") can best be realized if you engage with your project guide and perhaps others in your agency/initiative sometime in mid-April or earlier with this question.

While the report must be, as much as possible, in *plain language,* and formatted more like a handbook or in-house report than an academic document, it should still demonstrate depth of learning and reflection. The report, **6-12 pages long,** should cover in clear **summary** form, as well as with **examples and stories** that bring it to life:

1. **Organizational context (mission, history, initiatives, activities)**
2. **Project Goals**
3. **Methods**
4. **Steps**
5. **Challenges**
6. **Successes and Outcomes (include success factors)**
7. **Lessons Learned** about the organization, the community, and the change process; the people you worked with; how race, class, culture, and justice issues play out locally; and your own community and cultural competency. (1-2 pages)
8. **Beyond the lessons learned, above, other connections to our class goals,** topics and skills training. How does it link to the systemic change strategies we are studying**? (1-3 pages)**
9. **Recommendations for improving project impact, volunteer management, and/or integration with course work**

The amount in each of the above areas you focus on will vary a great deal by what will be most useful to your organization/project.

Tips to make the finale easier:
● Your **final presentation** will cover much of the same material as the **final report,** though with a different style and purpose. If you do the report carefully, well before April 26th, it will make it much easier to create the presentation and present it the following week in class (and, in some cases, in the community).
● **If possible, make notes in a dedicated place in a notebook or shared computer file about the key areas covered in the project report (esp. items 5-9)over the course of the project work or at least during the last weeks of the semester.**
● Your **Individual Journal writing** will include opportunities to reflect on the **project's relevance** to your life, learning, and change process The Project Report is a collaborative document, but it can certainly be enriched with short individual reflections from team members

Language
Your report does not have to read like a formal academic document though it should **demonstrate depth of learning and reflection**. The **language, style, and format should read like a user-friendly handbook for orientation and community education.** It should, for example, [DC3] make it easy for the next group of IC or CU volunteers or professors to pick up the essentials of the project and have a sense of what they may be building upon*.*

Evaluation
Evaluation is based on same criteria as the Short Presentation- **Content, Presentation and Collaboration**, (see above), plus **Improvement** from rough to final draft*.*

Portfolio Materials (or "deliverables")
Deliverables are survey reports or reports on other research; curriculum modules; brochures, posters, videos, website pages, etc. anything that you worked on that supports your group's " capacity" to serve the community. They vary widely with each project. Some may have been submitted and revised at different points in the semester. If they haven't been previously completed, *follow the same timing as you do with project report*: **Submit Final draft by Monday April 29, get feedback by Thursday May 2 , Submit Final version by Monday May 6**