

Engaging Students in the Classroom and the Community: Cost-Effective Strategies for Bridging Theory and Practice---Jan Liss

Thank you AAC&U. My name is Jan Liss and I am the Executive Director of Project Pericles.

Project Pericles is a national consortium of 26 colleges and universities that were selected as members because of what they are doing on their campuses to help prepare students to become engaged citizens. We were formed 9 years ago when Eugene Lang, the educational philanthropist, conceived of this organization. Project Pericles seeks to engage college students in social and civic enterprise as a systemic feature of the college experience.

We encourage and facilitate commitments by colleges and universities to educate students for participatory citizenship and a life-long responsibility to their community. We are tackling this in a number of ways with programs on the campus, in the classroom, and in the community as we will discuss here today.

One of our signature programs is the Civic Engagement Course Program, which funds professors to develop, teach, and evaluate courses that incorporate issues of civic engagement into the curricula. We believe that a more pedagogically powerful experience of education results from greater integration between classroom-based and experiential learning. We promote an approach to teaching and learning that integrates classroom and extra-curricular civic engagement.

In this panel, we will discuss three courses recently taught with support from the Civic Engagement Course program, focusing on cost-effective strategies that can be replicated across institutions and disciplines.

In 2007, with generous support from the Christian A. Johnson Endeavor Foundation and The Teagle Foundation, and the Eugene M. Lang Foundation, Project Pericles sent an RFP for courses incorporating civic engagement to our member colleges and received excellent proposals from faculty.

The selection criteria included creativity, connection to civic responsibility, academic rigor, the evaluation plan, and course applicability to future years and other campuses. There were introductory courses, advanced courses, electives, core curricular courses, seminars, and lectures.

We awarded matching grants to 16 Periclean colleges and universities to design 44 courses in a wide range of disciplines across the fine arts, humanities, social sciences, and sciences. Through our ongoing Civic Engagement Course Program, Periclean Faculty have developed and taught over 100 syllabi to 1,000s of students.

These Civic Engagement Courses were intended to encourage students to take pride in their ability to contribute significantly to public affairs, to understand that they can make a difference, and to recognize the importance of experiential learning to ask penetrating questions and to learn to communicate effectively. CEC syllabi that have been tested, evaluated, and approved as Periclean Courses are made available to higher education generally.

Funded faculty provided Project Pericles with syllabi, institutional evaluations, and additional faculty evaluations reflecting on their teaching experiences. In addition, several faculty provided Project Pericles with additional student evaluations, including reflective essays, journals, exit interviews, and self-evaluations. We built on this work

and produced a White Paper this fall, a guide for incorporating civic engagement into higher education curricula.

The White Paper describes the courses taught, the course evaluations, the types of course materials developed, their transferability to other institutions, and the procedures used to solicit, develop, teach, and evaluate civic engagement courses. It summarizes the knowledge gained through our civic engagement course program and proposes ways that knowledge can be used (including Best Practices) in a wide variety of disciplines on a variety of campuses.

Many of the 44 courses incorporated service learning, others did not. Today we will focus on civic engagement courses at 3 of our Periclean colleges and universities that involved the community and were particularly cost-effective from the both the campus and community perspective - Hampshire College, The New School, and Widener University.

Many of the Civic Engagement Courses (CECs) involved community-based partnerships that provided benefits for students and organizations at minimal cost. The faculty found that these projects gave students an opportunity to connect theory to practice and to better understand course material through hands-on application. The students provided skills and resources to help move the work of community organizations forward. A difficult economic climate makes these students' contributions to communities especially important.

The panel will focus on strategies for incorporating projects with community organizations into courses across institutions and disciplines. Panelists will share replicable best practices, challenges, and solutions. These projects and models can be used in new and existing curricula at minimal cost, making these strategies useful for educators who want to prepare students for global and local citizenship in the midst of shrinking resources.

Our panel includes professors who have received Project Pericles grants to develop, teach, and evaluate courses that incorporate civic engagement. They will address issues of assessing community-campus partnerships from the perspective of student learning and benefit to the community organization.

Let me introduce our panel:

Myrna Margulies Breitbart is a Professor of Geography and Urban Studies and also Director of a new Community Engagement and Collaborative Learning Network at Hampshire College. She will speak about “The Crafted City: Urban Regeneration and the New Cultural Economy,” which explores the role of aesthetic practices in the politics and redesign of urban space, drawing on case studies to address urban economic problems and to contribute to area regeneration. Breitbart taught the course at both Hampshire College and the University of Massachusetts. In one project, students designed and completed an external evaluation of several Latino cultural events, as required by a granting organization that had funded local community groups to enhance the income-earning capacities of residents through the arts.

Nancy Hirschinger-Blank is an Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at Widener University. She also serves as the Criminal Justice Internship Coordinator. Her research interests include the effectiveness of varied pedagogical experiences among undergraduate students and the assessment of urban youth courts. She will discuss how Widener uses its curriculum to strengthen community partnerships, in particular through her course on “Delinquency and Juvenile Justice.” This class focused on the development of the U.S. juvenile justice system by examining relevant Supreme Court decisions and the underlying philosophy of the court. To bring these issues to life, the course included a semester-long project for Widener students to tutor high school youth court jurors and elementary and middle school students.

Ella Turenne is the Director of Special Projects and the Project Pericles Program Director at Eugene Lang College the New School for Liberal Arts. Each Periclean campus has a Program Director, the person responsible for coordinating the civic engagement efforts in the classroom, on the campus, and in the community. At Lang, Ella manages all civic engagement initiatives at the college and is involved with various diversity initiatives at the college and university level.

Ella will discuss the CEC course taught at The New School, “Engaging Urban Homelessness,” as well other examples of the university’s curriculum-based community partnerships with low-income housing residents, elementary school students, and homeless families. She will discuss a model of civic engagement that is driven by collaboration between faculty, students, community partners, and university administration.

In the back of the room we have information about Project Pericles and our recent white paper “Civic Engagement in the Classroom: Strategies for Incorporating Education for Civic and Social Responsibility in the Undergraduate Curriculum.

Feel free to ask clarifying questions during the presentation. We will have 30 minutes of Q & A at the end of the presentation. Please share your experiences with cost-effective partnerships.

And now I will turn it over to Myrna Breitbart.

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