**EDHI 196: Civic Engagement in Local Communities**

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*“Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.” – John Dewey*

**Course Description**

This course explores different forms of civic engagement through the lens of community-based, participatory action, focusing on critical issues facing local people and places, and how those issues are being addressed. Students will be challenged to consider the intersection of meaning and purpose, sense of place, and identity as they relate to complex systems and social issues. Students will engage in meaningful analysis and reciprocal partnership to become more informed and engaged citizens of the local communities to which they belong.

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, students will have:

* Critically examined different forms of civic engagement and how they manifest locally
* Evaluated community-based initiatives in the context of dynamic socio-ecological systems and social change
* Identified various forms of community need, and engaged in meaningful community-engaged work to address it
* Analyzed complex social issues from a diversity of perspectives
* Engaged with local leaders and changemakers representing differing approaches to community-based social change

**Pedagogical approach and course content**

In addition to readings, discussions, and written assignments, this course will include a number of more atypical elements. Much of your learning will be experiential, project-based, community-engaged, and personal. We will seek a diversity of perspectives and lived experiences—both in our readings and through the people we meet—and will engage in extensive critical reflection. Our community partners will serve as both experts and supports. All of this will require flexibility from everybody involved, and a willingness to embrace variety and complexity.

This is an interdisciplinary course, including material drawn from social science, education, environmental studies, arts & humanities, and others. Given the diversity of experience and perspective of students in this class, you may be quite familiar with some concepts and material, while less fluent or comfortable with others. Please consider this as an opportunity to share your own strengths, while pushing yourself to expand your knowledge in new ways.

Theories, concepts & frameworks covered may include:

* Community capitals
* Community sustainability & resilience
* Community-based participatory research
* Critical reflection
* Governance
* Innovation & Entrepreneurship
* Leverage points
* Place-based learning
* Power structures
* Public Art & Design
* Socio-ecological systems
* Social movements
* Storytelling
* Systems thinking
* Theories of social change
* Transferable skills

**Reading Materials**

There are no textbooks to purchase for this course. Required readings will be electronic and posted to Blackboard. Additional handouts and other materials may be distributed in class.

**Key Learning Activities**

*Reflective Practice*

As much as our learning will be focused externally on the people and places that make up our local communities, we will likewise spend a lot of time practicing critical reflection. This will allow us to share our personal histories and stories, explore our identities and social positions, practice leadership, and connect our learning to our own experiences. Reflection will be built in to everything we do. It will be assessed based on the extent to which you approach new (and potentially challenging) material and experiences with openness and genuine effort, and your ability to evaluate and synthesize various data, facts, and experiences to come to thorough and authentic conclusions.

*Site visits*

Some of our “class sessions” will actually be visits to local businesses, nonprofits, farms, natural features, etc. We plan to learn with and from members of the communities about which we’re learning this semester. You will be assessed according to your engagement with our hosts and the ways in which you connect the visit to previous learning and course materials.

*Service-learning*

Service-learning is an intentional combination of meaningful, community-based service and academic learning, designed so that the learners and community partners all benefit. While meeting a community need—as identified by the community itself—learners reflect on their activities, working to develop a deeper understanding of academic concepts linked to the SL experience. We will be doing a series of small-scale service projects for some of the partners sharing their knowledge and experience with us.

*Community need analysis*

This assignment will ask you to examine several different kinds of sources that showcase several different kinds of community need in the area; find similar sources of information related to an issue area of importance to you personally; write a “needs statement” for your issue area; and present your findings to the class.

*Social Change Models*

Group project. You will examine an initiative or organization according to several of the social change models studied in class, and present recommendations building on existing efforts.

*Storytelling Assignment*

Choose an existing article (or series of images) that is intended to convey local community engagement efforts, and analyze the article/images in terms of the perspectives being represented, the intended audience. You will then have the chance to add content or context, and your justification for what you’ve added and why.

*Independent professional development activities*

You will be required to take part in at least two “professional development” activities of your choice outside of normal class time. These events should relate to a topic covered in the course, be relevant to your future professional goals, or both. These may include lectures, events, screenings, trainings, days of service, etc. If you’re wondering whether an opportunity qualifies, please ask! In addition to the events themselves, you will complete a brief reflection — both beforehand (“preflection”) and afterwards (“debrief”).

**Assessment**

Classroom/Course Engagement (including site visits & service-learning): 30%

Weekly Reflection/Responses: 20%

Final Reflective Paper: 10%

Community Need Analysis: 10%

Social Change Models Assignment: 10%

Professional Development Activities: 5% each = 10%

Group Discussion Synthesis: 5%

Storytelling Assignment: 5%

**Diversity & Inclusion Statement**

Students from all backgrounds, perspectives, and lived experiences are welcome; we value you and your unique collection of ideas and identities. You should expect to be treated with respect. In return, we expect you to show respect to yourselves, your peers, and the people we meet in the communities we enter. Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, ability, gender, sexuality, or any other identity or set of identities will not be condoned or tolerated.

This course will also strive to highlight a diversity of identities and perspectives in the assigned materials and the people we meet. Our educational system has historically privileged a small subset of voices and perspectives, and in this course we will seek to broaden the lens through which we see the world. That said, we all carry blind spot and unconscious biases, instructors very much included; please let me know at any time if you have ideas about how a diversity of viewpoints and identities can be more fully represented. We will also co-create a set of community norms that will guide or discussions and ensure a safe place in which we can speak honestly and openly. We recognize that everyone will sometimes make mistakes, and we will strive to create an environment in which we can all learn from them.

**Statement Regarding Learning Accommodations**

This course is designed to appeal to different styles of learners and academic skillsets. However, I also recognize that certain activities may be particularly difficult for students, whether due to learning differences, circumstances at home, or other challenges. I encourage students to discuss the need for learning accommodations at any time, and will work with you to create a plan for adjusting and/or making up learning activities that prove difficult.

Students are responsible for communicating about any problems they are experiencing, either in the course or in general; course requirements will not simply be waived. You may also ask a Dean or other school staff to communicate about any challenges. I recognize that you all have real lives and may have to cope with illness and other challenges — I’m happy to work through these with you if you proactively communicate with me.

**Attendance & Classroom Conduct**

Due to our infrequent meeting schedule, you should make every possible effort to attend class. Information provided in class – and especially during site visits and other community-based activities – will often not be available in any other way. Attendance and participation are central components of the course, and missed classes will affect the Course Engagement portion of your grade. Please let me know as soon as possible if you will be unable to attend a class session.

In class, please behave respectfully to the instructor and the other students, which includes the following arriving on time and staying until the end of class, unless arranged ahead of time; avoiding texting/reading texts, social media or other non-class-related computer usage; doing other homework; or talking excessively with your classmates.

**Religious Holidays**

Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. If you need to miss class to observe a religious holiday, please submit the dates of your absence to me in writing by the end of the second full week of classes. You will be permitted to make up work within a mutually agreed-upon time.

**Academic Integrity**

All students are expected to abide by the UVM’s guidelines for academic honesty, as detailed in the Code of Academic Integrity [link]. Students found to have intentionally plagiarized others’ work can be penalized – from receiving no credit on an assignment to expulsion from the university in extreme cases. Please be careful with your sources, and contact me if you have any questions about appropriately citing work.