

Community-Engaged Teaching
Social Work Practice with Organizations and Communities (Practice II)
Project Overview 2018-19

Background

Social Work Practice with Organizations and Communities (Practice II) is a required foundation course at the Brown School of Washington University in St. Louis. This course is designed around an organizationally based project which enables students to better understand the nature of problem-solving and planned change at the organizational and community level. Evidence-based practice skills are advanced in this course, stressing the application of field research methods, environmental contexts, and equity perspectives while also learning from professionals in the community and the classroom.

Organizations benefit from the data collection and recommendations of Brown School students and can utilize the results from these projects to help strengthen programs, services and outreach. The Brown School partners with the Gephardt Institute for Civic and Community Engagement to recruit and select community projects for this course.

Projects

Projects are structured to address a program or service related social work practice question posed by community organizations. Questions should focus on issues pertaining to groups such as organizations, affinity communities, or geographic communities. Note that the projects should not pertain to program evaluation, but instead focus on program development, effective practices, or the status of the organization. Past questions include:

- What is the status of diversity issues at a women's issues-based non-profit organization—from the level of the board to staff to clients, and how might it be enhanced?
- Where are financial institutions relative to unbanked populations in St. Louis, and what are effective strategies for reaching unbanked populations?
- Where are Bosnian immigrant populations in St. Louis, and what are their possible mental health issues and preferred means for addressing them?

In each project, students:

- Collaborate with a community partner to identify the stakeholders of a given organizational or community-based issue.
- Assess the community and the designated topic or issues to be addressed through engagement with stakeholders and review of available information.
- Research evidence-based practice models or strategies related to the given issue.
- Recommend strategies for addressing the issue and weigh the capacity and sustainability of each strategy given the organizational and community context.

Projects occur during Spring semester 2019, where they work in teams of five and are mentored by a faculty member and a community liaison. Through lectures and assignments, this course will support students through all aspects of the community-engaged projects. In addition, students will have dedicated class time to work on the project and critically reflect on their experiences with faculty and staff.

Assignments

Students will submit the following items as assignments related to their project. Depending on the professor, the number of actual assignments may vary, but all students will complete all items.

- Literature Review: a comprehensive review of the issue, scope, and supporting evidence for potential recommendations. This review contextualizes the issue(s) and places it/them within the larger scope of the identified problem (e.g., mentoring as part of the educational opportunity structure of urban youth). Evidence-based practices (i.e., what has been used to address similar issues) should be reviewed in detail.

- Final Paper and Presentation: Summary of the project, methods, and outcomes of the project.

Expectations of Community Partners

The course could not happen without strong community partners. Community partners suggest potential projects based on the needs of the organization.

For a successful project, community partners should be able to:

- Provide community-engaged learning opportunities that are significant and/or challenging to the students, relevant to course learning objectives, and address community partner's goals.

- Provide orientation, supervision, feedback, resources, and sufficient information about the organization to aid in the success of students' community-based projects.

- Connect students to community stakeholders.

- Provide access to key information related to the project.

- Participate in the evaluation process.

- Engage in ongoing communication with students and community liaisons.

- Attend end of semester final presentations. While community partners are free to use the knowledge and insights generated by students to best serve organizational needs, students may not use or share the data collected in other research projects or publications.