Syllabus: Law and Social Innovation: Creative Problem Solving

Spring 2016

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This course will explore the role of lawyer as problem solver. In it, students will have the opportunity to assess the strategies and tools lawyers, advocates, policy, information technologists, and data analysts use to promote social innovation and solve some of the world’s most pressing problems. Students will put the skills they have developed to use in contexts where those skills are most desperately needed. They will also hone additional skills: e.g., the ability to work effectively in groups, run a productive meeting, collaborate on document drafting and production, think creatively to construct elegant solutions to complex problems, “pitch” ideas, and conduct a group presentation.

This semester, this array of skills will be put to use to address a range of problems facing municipalities as a result of abandoned properties and blight. This work will ultimately culminate in a joint oral presentation as well as a written report.

Required Texts:


This introductory class will outline the goals of the course and explore legal problem solving and social innovation as concepts.

Readings:


Week 2. February 2, 2016. Meet Our Partners

This class will give the class an opportunity to meet with representatives of the government of the City of Albany and City of Schenectady to review the project we will undertake this semester.
Readings:

To Be Announced.

Group Project: Ask questions of city officials and talk about organization of groups.


This class will review the history of urban planning and housing policy in the United States. This background will provide a firm footing for the work we will do throughout the semester.

Readings:


This class will explore some of the nuts and bolts of creativity, including how to harness individual creativity, conduct effective interviews, run effective meetings, and work collaboratively.

Readings:


Joseph William Singer, How to Be a Good Team Member, HARVARD PROBLEM SOLVING WORKSHOP TECHNICAL NOTE (2010)(TWEN).


Group Project: Discuss development of ground rules for group functioning.

This class will explore the theme of the use of information technology to address social problems in intuitive, creative, and effective ways.

Readings:

To Be Announced.


Week 6: February 29, 2016: Advocacy in the “Conceptual Age”

This class will review Dan Pink’s “A Whole New Mind” and discuss ways that what Pink calls the “high touch/high concept” aptitudes can be incorporated into our work.

Dan Pink, A WHOLE NEW MIND.


This class will explore the ways that “design thinking” can inform effective legal advocacy.

Group Project: Students will discuss the ways that they could incorporate design thinking approaches into the group project.

Reading:


In this class we will conduct a case study of a policy advocacy campaign to understand its components and assess its relative success.
Group Project: Students will report back on their preliminary research findings and workshop some of their ideas for how they will structure their written work product.

Readings:


First Draft of Research Papers Due March 25, 2016.


In this class we will review the draft Research Report. Students are expected to have read the entire research project draft and come prepared with constructive comments and suggestions for revisions.


In this class, we will begin to prepare for the students to make their research presentations to Mayors Sheehan and McCarthy.

Group Project: Students will begin to organize their group presentation.

Readings:

JEFF RADEL, PREPARING AN ORAL PRESENTATION: SUGGESTIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR SCIENTIFIC AND ACADEMIC SETTINGS (online tutorial), available at: http://www.kumc.edu/SAH/OTEd/jradel/Preparing_talks/TalkStrt.html


Week 11: April 11, 2016. The Skills of Creative Problem Solving IV: Oral Advocacy and Effective Presentations, Class B.

In this class, students will offer preliminary findings to representatives of the cities of Albany and Schenectady. In this exercise, students will complete a run-through of their presentation in its current form. Critique of the presentation will follow.

Second Draft of Research Paper Due April 15, 2016, and distributed to entire class.

In this class we will review the second draft of the Research Report.  Students are expected to have read each section of the research project and come to class prepared with constructive comments and suggestions for revisions.  Students will also begin final preparations for the Week 13 Group Presentation.

Final Papers Due: April 20, 2016.


Group presentation to community partners. Students will give their final, public presentation to Mayors Sheehan and McCarthy and their staff.


Group presentation to New York Conference of Mayors, Saratoga Springs, NY (awaiting confirmation).