

# Brandeis University

## Proposal for Experiential Teaching and Learning Grant Deadline: Email by December 17, 2007

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Date: 12/15/07

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MS005

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1. *Title of Course:* Greening the Ivory Tower: Environmental Research Workshop  
Note: Course Title will be changed for next Bulletin listing to reflect community engagement, for example: "Greening the Campus and Community: Environmental Sustainability for a Healthier World"

2. *Amount requested:* \$775

3. *Explanation of how the funds will be used:*

### **\*Transportation:**

Crystal Bus for 2 longer distance field trips (to "follow the Brandeis waste" to composting facility in Marlborough, and to view and participate in unique regional household goods reclamation and reuse "ministry" in Acton), @\$300 each = \$600.

Gas reimbursement for student driving, for one shorter distance field trip to Newton, and periodic community engagement at Prospect Terrace and possibly other community locations = \$60

### **\*Food**

One or more community events at Prospect Terrace to exhibit and "install" youth project = \$40

### **\*Project Supplies**

For environmental art and sustainability projects (acrylic paint, large canvases, planting supplies, etc.) at Prospect Terrace, and campus projects = \$75

### **TOTAL: \$775**

4. *Is this a brand new course or a redesign of an existing course?*

This is an existing EL course, which has been significantly expanded and reshaped to include a substantial community engagement component. Prior classes have involved experiential learning through hands-on research, design and implementation of environmental sustainability projects on the Brandeis campus; this year the class will engage with low income and minority children at Prospect Hill Terrace and elsewhere to do environmental study and develop projects..

5. *Summarize the focus of the course and what you hope students will learn from the experiential methods.*

This course focuses on the environmental “footprint” of human activities on the world’s natural resources, and explores strategies for creating healthy, vigorous, environmentally sustainable communities in the face of increasingly challenging environmental concerns. The Brandeis campus, as a small, socially responsible community and significant environmental consumer, serves as the course “laboratory”. The students study the University’s buildings, grounds, operations and infrastructure –sewage disposal, energy use, food consumption and more—to analyze environmental impacts. They then each go on in small teams to design and implement workable “greening” projects intended to create lasting improvements to the campus environment. The students report their findings and their projects to the community on the Brandeis Environmental Sustainability Team (B.E.S.T.) website at [http://www.brandeis.edu/best/student\\_projects/](http://www.brandeis.edu/best/student_projects/)

This year the focus will extend to the community around Brandeis, and in particular the challenges faced by the public housing community of Prospect Terrace. Students will engage in “greening” projects with children and others at Prospect Terrace, including :1)creating an environmentally-themed art project to adorn the walls at the new temporary Community Center at Prospect Terrace (art designed to be moveable to the permanent Center when opened); 2) testing soils for presence of hazardous waste at the site of the proposed new Community Garden adjacent to Prospect Terrace; 3) developing preliminary plans with residents for new Community Garden to be prepared and planted when weather allows. Some of these will be class-wide projects; others may be student team projects.

**Learning goals:** Apart from considerable knowledge about how human activity affects the environment, students will learn observational and research skills, problem-solving, oral presentation and website design skills. They also will learn how to design and implement successful environmental improvement projects, and how to work in teams with each other and with community members.

*6. Explain how this course will involve direct or “hands-on” experiences that engage students on multiple levels.*

Please see above. Students will reflect periodically, in writing individually and orally as a class, about their hands-on activities, participating in their own learning about their experiences.

*7. Explain how the design of the course allows students to make decisions and learn from natural consequences rather than predetermined outcomes.*

The environmental sustainability projects and interactions described above allow for enormous opportunities for exploring new territory: discovering learning in unexpected places (e.g. the flush of a toilet, the consumption of a hamburger), making mistakes and correcting mid-course, remaining open to learning from each other and from community members.

*8. Give examples of two assignments/activities you will use to encourage critical thinking about the direct experiences in relation to course content and theories. [You will find examples of such activities in the teaching toolkit “Making the Connection” on the website].*

-After receiving appropriate training, students will engage in a partial Environmental Compliance Audit of the Brandeis student chemistry labs. This is designed to leads to considerable discussion of the impact of chemical use and potential toxic exposure, the adequacy of the laws and policies in place for controlling that impact in the U.S. and abroad, Green Chemistry and other strategies for minimizing the extent of chemical use both in the lab environment and in society at large, etc.

-Students take from “eco-tours” of campus, class readings and research about human environmental impact and strategies for minimization, guest speakers, and field visits to view some unique models of sustainability, to develop their own understanding and approaches to environmentally sustainability in their class projects and in their individual lives.