Brandeis University

Proposal for Experiential Teaching and Learning Grant
Deadline: Email by December 15, 2008

[Electronic version available at www.brandeis.edu/experientiallearning]

Name: **Silvia M. Arrom**
Department: **History**
Email: **Arrom@brandeis.edu**

Date: **Dec. 14, 2008**
Campus Address: **MS 036**
Campus Phone: **62290**

Please provide the following information on the proposed course in 2-3 pages.

1. Title of Course: **Hist 171B "Latino/a History"**

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

This is the second time I will teach HIst 171b, last taught in fall 2006. The CEL portion has been redesigned with a new experiential learning project developed in conjunction with the CEL fellow, Rachel Sier. It is still the only CEL course in the History Department, and thus reaches a different group of Brandeis undergraduates than other CEL courses. Ideally, the CEl project we develop this semester can serve as a model for future students in this History class as well as, potentially, for other LALS courses.

3. *Amount requested and budget:*

$400 for after-school snacks/refreshments for participating middle-school students and their parents (if we decide to hold an end of semester event to bring parents into the school).

Our goal is to work with high-risk Latino youth in the ELL program in the Waltham middle schools who are not currently involved in after school programs, and to incorporate their parents if possible. In my experience, snacks significantly help increase attendance at any event, and this will particularly be the case because we are trying to attract impoverished, recent immigrants who need special incentive to participate in after-school activities.

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

The focus of the course is the history of Latinos in the U.S. I hope that by having students work with Latino youth in Waltham's McDevitt Middle school, students will obtain a first-hand understanding of the needs of the Latino community in Waltham, the challenges of adjusting to life in the U.S., and particularly the problems of the second generation of youth who face special educational challenges and are at risk of dropping out, joining gangs etc. By embedding a required field research and service component into this course, students will supplement their "book learning" and experience the excitement of conducting original research. Moreover, by brainstorming together and creating connections between Brandeis and Waltham, Brandeis students will contribute to the resolution of local problems.

5. *Explain how this course will involve direct or "hands-on" experiences that engage students on multiple levels. AND 6. Explain how the design of the course allows students to make decisions and learn from natural consequences rather than predetermined outcomes.*

In meetings with CEL fellow Rachel Sier, the McDevitt school administration has requested class help in reaching newly immigrated students and their parents. The final shape of this project is still very much in flux, and will be developed by the students in the course after they meet with students in the McDevitt Middle School and achieve a better understanding of their needs and desires.

The first step will be to have Brenda Ortiz, the McDevitt social worker, come to Brandeis on Jan. 28 and conduct an in-class training session to prepare for the CEL project. Students will then spend the next two weeks (one session required for each member of Hist 171b) conversing with the middle school students under the guise of helping them practice English. These meetings will provide oral history experience for our students and serve as the basis for developing a final project where the middle school students can practice their English, perhaps highlight some aspect of their culture, and have fun.

The third phase of the CEL project will take place after February break, when the class will design a project/s to take place during March. Perhaps the middle-school students can make short videos about themselves, accompanied by a written script? Or write rap poems about something that is important to them? Or perhaps they will request workshops provided by the Brandeis students about local resources, college, or some other aspect of life in the U.S.? I foresee that – in addition to reinforcing their English language skills -- any of these outcomes could lead to a "public" presentation/performance to which parents could be invited, and which will bring them into the school for the first time.

In short, this CEL project provides plenty of space for Brandeis students to take initiative, make decisions, and be held accountable for the results.

7. *Give examples of two assignments/activities you will use to encourage critical thinking about the direct experiences in relation to course content and theories.* .

Hist 171B will include several opportunities for critical thinking about the "hands-on" experiences. At the end of February, after the first stage of the project, members of the class will write a "reflection" on their initial interviews with the middle-school students that includes 1) what they learned about the Waltham Latino community and individual students' lives and problems, and 2) identifying needs and potential responses. A second "reflection" will be due on April 8, when the class evaluates the CEL component of the class. In addition, the CEL project may be related to the final research paper, which can explore such subjects as Latino immigration, poverty and adjustment, youth gangs, legal status, educational experiences, discrimination etc. in historical context. Although it is not mandatory that the paper investigate a topic related to the class CEL project, doing so will provide another opportunity for students to connect "real life" experience with academic learning.