



Funding Application for Spring '09 Courses

Experiential Teaching and Learning Grants for Faculty
Deadline: December 15, 2008

Purpose:

This grants program is a component of the *Learning by Doing* initiative to strengthen and grow experiential learning in the School of Arts and Sciences. It is an expression of the university's commitment to support effective, innovative teaching and to provide a full range of opportunities for students to deepen their learning through direct experience. The grants are primarily intended for courses that are either entirely new or newly experiential. Preference will be given to courses that embed the experiential methods throughout the course versus courses with an optional experiential component.

Amount:

Grants of amounts up to \$400 will offset expenses associated with embedding experiential methods into an existing or new course. Eligible expenses might include: research supplies, materials needed for student projects, or transportation to and from sites 'in the field'. Please note we are unlikely to fund renting vehicles for one-time field trips.

Eligibility:

Any faculty member on a multi-year contract, teaching an undergraduate course with a significant experiential component is eligible to apply for funding. Grant recipients will be expected to attend a workshop on teaching experiential learning courses, and to meet with the Academic Administrator for Experiential Learning at the end of the semester to discuss insights from teaching the course. Awardees will also be connected to a network of colleagues who exchange teaching strategies that have proven successful for experiential learning courses.

Selection Criteria:

The selection process will focus on the extent to which an application demonstrates that

1. The course design meets all of the criteria for an academically rigorous experiential learning course (see definition on our website: www.brandeis.edu/experientiallearning)
2. The expenses detailed in the budget are integral to fostering students' learning
3. The reflection activities are appropriate and purposeful
4. There is the potential for the course to have an impact beyond the current group of students enrolled, for example the potential to provide a new model for experiential learning in the program or department

To discuss ideas or to address any questions about the application before submission, please contact Adi Grabiner-Keinan, Academic Administrator for Experiential Learning (grabiner@brandeis.edu)

For further information on experiential learning, including past grant awards, see the website www.brandeis.edu/experientiallearning

Brandeis University

Proposal for Experiential Teaching and Learning Grant

Deadline: Email by December 15, 2008

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

Name: Laura Goldin

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

1. *Title of Course:* Women, Environment & Social Justice

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

3. *Amount requested and budget:*

\$400

***Transportation: \$300 (this will not cover full amount but will help offset)**

A. 2 field trips Reimbursement for 5 cars, gas and tolls:

- 1) To Roxbury for ACE visit and toxic tour
- 2) To Woburn to visit W.R. Grace site, wells, community

B. Student driving for Advocacy clinic and project work.

***Food and Expenses: \$100 (will not cover full amount but will help offset)**

1) Community/class events with Waltham Family School and others involving Housing Rights Training and Healthy Cooking and Nutrition.

2) Student Community Project Expenses

3) Lunches for visitors from ACE and mothers from Woburn.

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

This course focuses on the profound and unique roles that women have played in protecting and enhancing the natural environment and human health. We will explore a range of environmental and environmental health issues from the perspective of women, families and communities; and we become involved first-hand with many of the topics studied through field trips and visiting speakers, discussions with the stakeholders, fieldwork, writing and reflection.

This course also includes a significant “Community Engaged Learning” component. Students will become trained advocates for low income tenants in Waltham, and staff the WATCH Tenant Advocacy Clinic. The students will meet in teams with “clients” to hear concerns, advise on rights and provide assistance. This semester, the class will expand the clinic’s coverage to be able to refer more expertly on health-related issues as well.

In addition to the twice-weekly clinic, groups of students will plan and conduct other out-of-class environmental or environmental health activities of their own design with local community organizations such as Healthy Waltham, the Waltham Family YMCA, the public school system,

the Waltham Land Trust and others. These will be based on their learning and experience from the class.

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

The significant experiential nature of this course offers students first-hand exposure to the course materials and topics through field trips and visiting speakers, discussions with the stakeholders, field observation and writing. For example, in studying the role of mothers whose families are threatened by toxic exposure, the students read “A Civil Action,” meet with the Woburn mothers whose children died of leukemia (likely brought on by exposure to contaminated drinking water) and their lawyers, tour the affected neighborhoods and contaminated well sites, hear from public health officials and scientists about ongoing study findings, and research other similarly affected communities. Similarly, in studying the inordinate burden of environmental damage often borne by low income communities of color, the class takes a “toxic tour” of Roxbury, MA and meets with women activists of Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE), a prominent environmental justice organization working to address some of the community’s most daunting environmental problems.

In addition, the students will engage in the issues themselves in and least two ways:

- **AS A CLASS:** All students will be trained in housing rights, client counseling and other skills to serve as tenant advocates for the minority and low income population in Waltham regarding housing-related issues. Students will staff in teams the free, Tenant Advocacy Clinic twice weekly in the evenings at WATCH. The clinic brings in many residents seeking assistance and fills a real community need. All students also will be involved in preparing and presenting a community Housing Training Workshop, combined with a fun healthy cooking evening in collaboration with Healthy Waltham. This will probably take place with the Waltham Family School and/or the Power Program.
- **IN GROUPS:** Student will organize in groups to design and implement community engagement projects in alliance with community partners to address community needs identified during the course of the semester. Examples might be designing and offering a series of healthy cooking classes to children at the YMCA after-school programs; working with girls in “High Flight” to explore natural, home-made beauty products; working with elders on food cost-savings and nutrition; teaching low-income renters about energy savings methods, etc. I envision that the individual students may play different roles depending on their interests and capabilities, and with the CEF would work with each of them to help ensure that their efforts align with the community’s needs.

For all of the experiences, class discussion, readings and written assignments will provide context for the students’ experiences and opportunity for student self-reflection.

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

In the Tenant Advocacy Clinic, the students will be working with real people with a wide range of as yet undetermined problems and questions. The students will necessarily be learning to adapt to the situation at hand, quickly consider and address the challenges, and make their own decisions as to how to approach each situation. Through client follow-up the students will learn

the outcome of their guidance; and the time for reflection and discussion will give students an opportunity to consider what they have learned from the experience.

Their group projects will allow for enormous opportunities for exploring new territory: using their creativity to address conditions in the community; developing relationships with each other, community partners and individuals from different backgrounds; discovering learning in unexpected places; and making mistakes and correcting mid-course to succeed.

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. [You will find examples of such activities in the teaching toolkit “Making the Connection” on the website].

- A reflection final paper in the class will require students to reflect on their Tenant Advocacy Clinic and other community engagement experiences throughout the semester, and extract common threads that relate to themes and principles covered in the curriculum, such as distributive justice, environmental health and impact on communities, etc.
- A letter to the editor assignment will require students to “make the case” to address a situation of injustice they observe and analyze in the course of the class.

Submit application via email to Adi Grabiner-Keinan (grabiner@brandeis.edu)