

PUBLIC SCHOLARSHIP ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Public Scholarship Courses – Definitions and Criteria

In order to qualify for a Public Scholarship (PS) designation, a course must meet the following criteria:

Research Topics/Focus: Public Scholarship courses are distinguished primarily by the ‘public’, ‘civic’ or ‘policy relevant’ focus of the research topics/questions students must address in their major course assignments (ie. in their written work, oral presentations, performances, exhibits, etc). Somewhat more specifically, in order to qualify for a PS designation, a course must require students to complete at least one major/significant work of research/scholarship that:

- addresses significant social/public problems confronting the local and global communities in which we live;
- provides citizens and civic leaders with the dependable knowledge necessary for reaching responsible public judgments and decisions;
- enriches public discourse on controversial issues;
- empowers marginalized constituencies to participate more effectively in public/civic life;
- is directly responsive to the needs of a specific community organization or public agency; and/or
- enlivens democratic debate and deliberation.

Research Methods: Public scholarship projects are, above all, works of *engaged scholarship*. To the extent that such works of scholarship involve research, they may take one of three basic forms. First, they may take the form of *theoretical research* into conceptual questions related to democratic practice, civic engagement, ‘public work’ and community enhancement/empowerment. Second, they may take the form of traditional *policy relevant research*. This typically involves the application of (disciplinary/interdisciplinary) modes of inquiry/research methods to public problems (typically for a specific client). Finally, they may take the form of *community based research* (CBR). This involves academics and community members pooling their respective skills and forms of knowledge to collaboratively design and implement mutually beneficial research projects. Regardless of the specific form, all such projects are subject to the appropriate ethical norms and the highest standards of academic excellence.

Presentation of Findings: Public scholarship is distinguished in part by the fact that it is accessible, relevant and useful to citizens, public officials and/or civic leaders. A partial list of ‘modes of presentation’ that meet this criterion would include:

- public intellectual essays;
- public exhibits/performances of creative work;
- policy relevant reports; and
- research reports that are prepared for specific community organizations or public agencies.

Learning Outcomes: In the course of helping students learn how to conduct high-quality public scholarship, PS courses should create an environment in which several of the following competencies are developed:

- an understanding of the political context within which public scholarship takes place (civic knowledge);
- a capacity to use a variety of methods, theories and modes of inquiry to develop informed/reflexive judgements about public issues (critical thinking);
- an ability to engage in effective communication with both civic/political leaders and fellow citizens (public communication skills);
- an ability to identify and address public problems (public problem solving);
- an ability to use publically defensible moral standards to guide research and action (civic judgment)
- the ability to think imaginatively and creatively about public problems and their solutions (civic imagination);
- the ability to work collectively (and across differences) with members of the community to address matters of common concern or advance public goals (collective action); and,
- an ability to understand the institutional settings within which their research will be conducted and/or circulated (organizational analysis); and
- a capacity for critical reflection on the nature of public scholarship.

(These competencies are adapted from Richard Battistoni, *Civic Engagement Across the Curriculum*)