

## 18. Capstone Activities and Projects

Most CLP programs require a final Capstone or practicum demonstrating what students have learned by requiring they develop a product which demonstrates what they have learned and how they can apply that learning to a community issue or in an analysis of situation. While most products are in writing, students increasingly use another medium.

Here are examples of the creative instructions which Network faculty have developed to guide students in their capstone projects. The first two examples are from the Urban Community Change program at West Chester University. They are followed by lessons from a unique Graduate Certificate Program in Rural Development in Mexico, and a capstone project at the University of Michigan/Dearborn.

### West Chester University, Pennsylvania

YES 301: Seminar in Youth Led Media

- **Final Proposal Project Presentation (Group):** You will prepare and present a final Group Project Presentation: *A Proposal for Change in Youth-Led Media Spaces*. This project encompasses your experiences in the YES 301 seminar and during on-site work in Philadelphia. Furthermore, this capstone project will synthesize the theoretical background of the YES program against the activities and insights afforded by site work, the seminar, and previous classes. Generally, this project presentation should demonstrate mastery of digital tools and media literacies as well as mastery of youth-led media as a method of inquiry and community engagement.

Most importantly, it should emerge authentically out of what you noticed through your field work: what problems arose? What strengths were exciting and could be enhanced? What got ignored or silenced? What excites the youth or staff? What confused you, made you angry, made you feel connected? These moments, put in context with the theory we are learning, should guide you toward your proposal ideas.

- *Why a Proposal for Change in Youth-Led Media final Project?* I am glad you've asked! Indeed, this is an academic course; however, your ultimate goal as an active citizen is to contribute to the community

organization you are placed. As a YES student your contributions are two-fold: To support Youth-Led Media programs in the day-to-day activities as well as to provide a critical reflective stance that will support the organizations in their mission.

This project presentation will serve as your original contribution to the organizations you are placed—providing a critical and well-thought out proposal for change/ alteration/ consideration to the organization. This proposal will also include notes toward a draft of your proposition—a document (e.g., brochure, press release, etc.), a game, a podcast, a video, even a training or event—that conveys your *learning* and *doing* over the course/field work time. The pedagogical approach of class will guide you (via assignments, workshops and discussions) in ways to help you combine field work, provided readings, and additional research in youth-led media within your Proposal.

### YES 300: FINAL PROJECT

**FINAL PROJECT: My Critical Urban Youth Work Manifesto (15%)**—This final project can take a variety of forms, from a video to a traditional paper to an oral presentation with a Powerpoint or other visual aid to go with it (some sort of capturable written or media product is needed—it can't just be oral). We will study what a manifesto is meant to do in our final unit, but briefly: it is meant to bring together your field experience and the theory of the course into a product to call out what is really going on out there, make people uncomfortable, imagine and invoke a better, just world, demand what is (im)possible, and declare your commitments as an urban youth worker. “To hope is to look critically at one’s present condition, assess what is missing, and then long for and work for a not-yet reality, a future anticipated. It is grounded in imaginative acts and projects, including art and writing, as vehicles for invoking a better future” --Paula Mathieu

You have read several model manifestos, from --

- A blend of personal and academic (“Love, Justice and Joy”)—please use this model to note how you can cite readings and other texts to make sense of personal and professional experience in a manifesto. Please consider the key learnings in each module, select at least a few of them (go back to each of your module papers and your field/reflection notes—feel free to lift a sentence or two from your past papers).

- A list of demands (“Youth Liberation of Ann Arbor”)—please use this model to note how you can make demands that are big, sweeping and direct in a manifesto.
- A statement made on behalf of a generation (“The Port Huron Statement”)—please use this model to note how you can speak for a grounded “us” or “we,” framing the current events of the day and your era as the background of your demands.

Your manifesto may take various forms in terms of its delivery:

- Straight up written—though you may wish to use font, color, external links, or images to assist your message, such as this example on climate: <https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/> or this feminist manifesto (in Spanish) <https://www.stes.es/manifiesto-8-de-marzo-2020-feminismo-para-una-transformacion-social/>.
- Straight up video—such as this example TedX Youth talk on Black Lives Matter.
- A Powerpoint, a TikTok linked to an open Google doc (TikTok is too short on its own) or other multimedia item (podcast could work, a game, you name it). Here is one example of culture jammers The Yes Men, who use elaborate practical jokes to call out problems in our society such as this recent one, where they created the fake “MotherF&\*%er Awards” and gave one to Facebook: They go around really actually infiltrating corporate meetings and such.

## Teaching Community-Based Rural Development in Mexico:

When CLP’s International Working Group on University Education for Community Change visited Mexico, we were all deeply impressed by the approach taken by the one-year Certificate and two year Masters Program in Rural Development at Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM). Despite the fact that these programs provide postgraduate education, **their very creative and practical teaching approach is instructive** for Community Change Studies programs at the AA and BA levels in the US.

For almost three decades, UAM’s postgraduate programs have provided medical doctors, agronomists, organizers and other specialists with a rich combination of on-site experience and extensive study. The courses are taught by faculty from

different disciplines as well as guest instructors from nonprofit NGOs. Most students are practitioners from NGOs or social organizations, others from government, medical doctors, agronomists, economists, and others working in rural areas

The students do not do additional study in their own fields of specialization. Instead, the programs are designed to develop their **skills in working with people and bringing about change**. There is a strong emphasis on how you work with people, take into account their perspective, and help them accomplish what they want to accomplish. Students study the history of social organizations and movements and look at issues from the people's viewpoint. They take seriously the political, social, economic and cultural dimensions of development and change.

While students are at the university for one week every five weeks, the rest of the time they are on site in rural areas, continuing in their jobs. A central part of the program is human development. They study the "social actors" – economic, political and cultural—and do research projects on site focusing on the "social actors" – who are they, how are they developing, what would strengthen them, how to influence and move them, etc.), plus lots of reading. Very importantly, **they keep emphasizing how essential it is to view peasants themselves as social actors**. Students learn that peasants know as much as they do and that each student is more likely to succeed in bringing about change if he/she collaborates closely with the people. This transformation is often dramatic, with many students refocusing their careers, building strong respectful relationships with peasants and seeing new opportunities to bring about change.

The one-year Certificate is divided into four quarters, culminating in a Capstone report. The four quarters focus on four key steps in bringing about community change in rural Mexico.

**Step 1:** Become fully familiar with village life by living in a village while reading a series of studies of **peasant life and issues**. Develop an understanding of the peasants' viewpoints on the challenges and opportunities they face, especially in your specialized field (e.g. land ownership for agronomists, health care for doctors, etc.).

**Step 2:** Analyze a **particular community issue** in your field which peasants want to tackle, deepening your understanding of that particular issue and the role of key social actors and how change happens in that environment and the implications of what you're learning for the specialize in. Return to the village for discussions and strategizing with the villagers.

**Step 3:** Develop an understanding of **how best to push for policy change** on this issue. What are the key institutions and current policies? What's the policy decision-making process? Develop a power analysis. What are the politics of the situation? Are there openings for change, useful handles, potential allies? What strategies are most likely to bring about positive change? Return again to the village for discussions and strategizing with the villagers.

**Step 4:** The Capstone, or practicum, pursue the course of **action** which has greatest chance of building power and being successful. **Reflection** on the results with the peasants. Develop written report on what you and the peasants have learned.

## **Course Description: Senior Capstone in Community-Based Research University of Michigan at Dearborn**

“As the senior capstone course for the Urban and Regional Studies (URS) Program, this course is designed to involve you intellectually with the surrounding urban community in a rigorous research project. The specific research topic of the course changes from year to year.

“We will conduct an action-research project in collaboration with *Street Democracy*, a nonprofit legal aid organization running the Street Outreach Court of Detroit: <https://www.streetdemocracy.org/> Our work will include reviewing research on the criminalization of poverty and the development of specialty courts as a response to social problems. We will research the costs of the justice system for misdemeanors in the state of Michigan and learn the history of the Street Outreach Court of Detroit and its founding partner, the Detroit Action Commonwealth: <http://www.detroitaction.org/>. You will develop skills in developing an action-research project, collecting secondary data and interviewing, organizing and synthesizing data, and drawing appropriate conclusions based on the research.

“A key learning objective for this course is that students apply an understanding of urban issues to the development and critical analysis of programs and policies appropriate to addressing contemporary social and economic problems. This research will lead to production of two reports--

1. *Reporting on the costs of sentencing the poor for misdemeanors:* The first half of this semester we will be gaining background knowledge to carry out an action-research project during the second half, in collaboration with Street Democracy. Our specific project goal is to research and diagnose the costs to the public of ticketing and sentencing indigent people for non-violent misdemeanors in Michigan, for example, the cost to the city of enforcing tickets for “driving without insurance” or “driving while

license suspended” on insurance rates city-wide, on employment, and income tax and property tax revenue.

2. *Collecting testimonies from DAC members/clients:* During the semester as time allows, we will speak with and interview DAC members who have been or are clients of the Street Outreach Court, in order to document their experiences on behalf of the community organization.