



DREXEL UNIVERSITY

College of

Arts and Sciences

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To Whom It May Concern:

Drexel University College of Arts and Sciences seeks support for expanding and studying the impact of its Side-By-Side community-based learning format. Side-By-Side courses are a unique community-based learning course format that brings together traditional university college students with community members in a collaborative full-term class experience. In alignment with the National Survey of Student Engagement's (NSSE) category of a *high-impact practice* (Kuh, 2008a), the Side-By-Side course format recognizes that students, the community, and the university offer a unique perspective and knowledge base. The Side-By-Side Community-Based Learning format addresses larger social inequalities or issues of injustice. Thus, this course format creates a space for learning with students who otherwise may not have had an opportunity to learn together. We are requesting support over a three-year period to further research this course format.

Institutions of higher education and the workforce have begun articulating and implementing goals for 21st-century success. However, course pedagogy often neither integrates nor aligns with the goals of democratic engagement and provision of 21st-century skills. Therefore, this research seeks to determine whether the intentional democratic engagement within Side-By-Side community-based learning courses increase students' development of 21st-century skills. In addition, findings may inform course sequencing and engagement opportunities within an undergraduate student's career that may increase acquisition of such skills and encourage civic engagement.

Drexel University's Side-By-Side courses bring campus-enrolled and community students together as classmates in postsecondary courses. These courses are built around deliberative dialogue, collaboration, and experiential learning that challenge faculty and students to address social justice issues inherent in community-based work including the intersections of race, class, and gender (Davis & Roswell, 2013). These high-impact practice courses often require more faculty time for curriculum design. Additionally, non-paying community students hold half of the student enrollment seats, and therefore courses are not financially advantageous to universities.

Research that can demonstrate civic learning and 21st-century skill outcomes, in addition to academic learning objectives, are necessary to support future development of community based-learning courses such as Side-By-Side. Institutions of higher education are developing initiatives for increasing students' levels of local and global civic engagement. This research may demonstrate that the alignment and integration of civic learning and 21st-century skills in Drexel University's Side-By-Side course format provides an academic opportunity to achieve course and institutional objectives. This study provides an opportunity to assess an innovative community-based learning course format not currently represented in the literature. Research overwhelmingly confirms the impact of CBL and value of experiential learning scholarship. Furthermore, it creates a paradigm for CBL courses wherein democratic learning emerges. Within this paradigm, the charge of universities achieving the education of civically engaged students and institutions may be achievable.

Decades of research have demonstrated a strong relationship between traditional learning outcomes and CBL. Researchers have also highlighted the numerous nontraditional outcomes that result from a CBL course. However, there are limited studies that investigate the unique pedagogy of reciprocal-based, high-impact CBL formats such as Side-By-Side. Therefore, studies are needed at institutions offering Side-By-Side courses, such as Drexel University, to provide data that may legitimize such pedagogy as a tool for 21st-century skill acquisition, democratic engagement, and civic learning within higher education.

The purpose of this research is to determine the acquisition of 21st-century skills as a result of the unique, high-practice pedagogy of Side-By-Side courses through the use of the National Survey of Student Engagement. The acquisition of 21st-century skills will be measured by utilizing the four topical modules from the NSSE survey and American Association of Colleges and Universities (2014). The four topical modules and course engagement assess the abilities identified as 21st-century skills for the purpose of this study. They include:

1. Experiences with diverse populations: A perspective that includes cognitive and social elements of global views and intercultural understanding (para, 11).
2. Transferable skills: Activities that develop useful and transferrable skills for the workplace, such as verbal and written fluency and analytical inquiry (para, 5).
3. Civic engagement: Civic engagement is working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes. In addition, civic engagement encompasses actions wherein individuals participate in activities of personal and public concern that are both individually life enriching and socially beneficial to the community ("A Crucible Moment: College Learning & Democracy's Future,").
4. Global perspectives: A perspective, which includes cognitive and social elements of global views and intercultural understanding (para, 11).

This study will examine the acquisition of 21st-century skills course (i.e., experience with diversity, global perspectives, civic engagement, transferable skills, and course engagement) within Side-By-Side community-based learning, through both quantitative and qualitative methods. There are four research questions for this study.

Quantitative Question:

1. How do student 21st-century skills (i.e., experience with diversity, global perspectives, civic engagement, transferable skills and course engagement), as measured by the National Survey of Student Engagement survey tool change within a Side-By-Side course during the 10-week term?

Qualitative Questions:

1. How do Side-By-Side community student and Drexel student pairs describe their learning in areas of 21st-century skills (i.e., experience with diversity, global perspectives, civic engagement, transferable skills, and course engagement) within a Side-By-Side Course?
2. How are 21st-century skills (i.e., experience with diversity, global perspectives, civic engagement, transferable skills, and course engagement) reflected in a Side-By-Side course assigned project?
3. What evidence of 21st-century skills (i.e., experience with diversity, global perspectives, civic engagement, transferable skills, and course engagement) is demonstrated in a Side-By-Side recorded video of the final assignment course presentation during the last week of the term?

A convergent-mixed methods approach will be utilized to determine if four identified 21st-century skills emerge as a result of engagement within a Side-By-Side course (Creswell, 2012, p. 551). This research will take place within Drexel University. Drexel University is a comprehensive global research institution in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The institution has approximately 26,000 students, of which 13,000 are full-time undergraduate students and 10,000 are graduate students. Drexel University requires students to enroll in cooperative education (e.g., co-op), which engages students for a period of time in the workforce. Subsequently, the university operates under a term system whereby courses are 10 weeks unlike semester schools.

The site of the Side-By-Side courses researched will be the university's urban extension campus, Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships. The Dornsife Center is approximately four blocks from the main campus and is located between two communities: Powelton Village and Mantua. The extension center was renovated and began extension education and programming in June 2014. The facility serves as a site for community programming, community-based research, and Side-By-Side courses. The purpose of this study is to examine the acquisition of 21st-century skills as a result of engagement within this community-based course format. The Study of the National Student Survey of Engagement and a *a priori* code analysis of student pair interviews, course presentation video, and a final course project combine into a convergent mixed-methods study to examine skill acquisition.

Drexel University is committed to becoming the most civically engaged university in the nation. To that end, Drexel defines civic engagement along three dimensions: academic & research, public service, and institutional investment. The Side-by-Side course model exemplifies Drexel's commitment to both engaged academics and research, providing an opportunity for both traditional students and community members to co-learn and co-develop 21st-century skills.

Drexel's community engagement work is framed by the Office of University-Community Partnerships. Within this office, there are two key centers that will play an integral role in this project. The Dornsife Center for Neighborhood Partnerships is modeled in the spirit of extension, and works to address the needs of the local community in a way that strengthens, empowers, and educates, while maintaining a strong commitment to economic and social justice. Additionally, the Lindy Center for Civic Engagement works to promote the ideals of social responsibility and public service by facilitating community based learning experiences for students, faculty, and staff. Together, the Dornsife Center and the Lindy Center share a mutual interest in supporting the Side-By-Side course model, as it provides a way for Drexel students and local community members to authentically connect through a shared learning experience.

This past year, Drexel University was awarded re-accreditation in 2015 for the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. Additionally, Drexel University is a multi-year recipient of the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, including recognition in both the general community service and economic development categories for 2014. Additionally, Drexel University is involved in the national conversation around civic learning and democratic engagement, serving as a lead consulting institution in the NASPA CLDE initiative, as a member of the engaged scholars circle of the International Association of Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE), and as a member of the Philadelphia Civic Learning & Democratic Engagement Action Collaborative supported by AAC&U.

The Side-By-Side community-based learning format has evolved since its inception in 2012. The format aligns not only with Drexel's commitment to this work but also supports the national call to civic learning and action. Funding to support further research will not only provide support for this pedagogy but also suggest how undergraduate students may obtain 21st-century skills through the deliberative dialogue of Side-By-Side.

Please feel free to contact me, principal investigator at crr46@drexel.edu or 610.905.4028 with any questions.

Sincerely,

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