

Bringing Public Sphere Pedagogy into your Course: A Beginner's Guide

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What is Public Sphere Pedagogy? Public Sphere Pedagogy (PSP) is rooted in the belief that students learn best by doing. The theoretical framework for PSP is Lave and Wenger's "communities of practice" (1991) that proposes that learning should not be a separate and discreet activity taking place only in the classroom, but that learning occurs in different social arrangements and engagements that are both around and created by each of us.

How does Public Sphere Pedagogy fit into course curriculum? PSP adds a public/community component to classroom instruction. Students approach their classroom assignments through the prism of an identified contemporary public issue and that issue is the focal point for class assignments. The culmination of a PSP course is a community event where students present their work about the public issue and have a dialogue about it with interested community members and civic leaders.

What are the Guiding Principles of Public Sphere Pedagogy?

- 1) Focus student's course reading, class discussions and research efforts on a contemporary public issue(s)
- 2) Connect students' class work to public arenas
- 3) Place students in dialog with diverse campus and community members
- 4) Aim to increase students' sense of civic agency and personal and social responsibility

How has PSP been used in CSU Courses? Vice-President Byron White first discovered the ways that PSP was integrated into the curriculum of the "First Year Experience" at Cal State-Chico and the impact that PSP had on civic engagement. Beginning in Fall 2013, a small group of Cleveland State faculty meet with Julian Rogers in the CSU Office of Civic Engagement to learn about PSP. Dr. Edward Horowitz in the School of Communication volunteered to adapt the PSP framework into his COM 224: Principles of Journalism and Promotional Communication course. The PSP curriculum was first taught in Fall 2014 and has continued to be taught in Dr. Horowitz's course for three additional semesters (thru Spring '16).

What Contemporary Public Issues have been used in the PSP Curriculum at CSU?

- 1) The "Arts Sin Tax" in Cuyahoga County (the 20 cents per pack cigarette tax that is used to fund community arts programs)—a county ballot measure in Fall '14
- 2) Issues surrounding Charter Schools
- 3) The Legalization of Marijuana in Ohio—a statewide ballot measure in Fall '15
- 4) Issues surrounding Food (including Community Gardens, GMOs, School Lunches)

What does the PSP Curriculum Involve? Dr. Horowitz's teaches the history and foundations of journalism, public relations and advertising in a 3-credit, 200-level course. Interwoven throughout the course are assignments related to the Public Issue that is selected for the semester. First, students do *reporting*—gathering facts about the issue, primarily reading articles about the Public Issue. Second, students do *interviewing*—speaking to individuals about the Public Issue, writing about their interviewing, and analyzing a set of interviews for patterns and themes (i.e., qualitative research). Third, students do *group work* to present a campaign about the Public Issue—creating materials for a Poster Session, plus creating live social media platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook) to promote their campaign and interact within the wider community.

What is the PSP "Town Hall Event"? The final part of the PSP experience in Dr. Horowitz's COM 224 course is the community presentation. The Town Hall in Spring '15 was held in the Ballroom of the

Student Center and titled “Food in our Mouths, our Community & our World.” The Town Hall involved 12 student groups from COM 224 with Poster Presentations, displays of their live social media pages, and fliers. The keynote speaker was Jeff Heinen, co-CEO of Heinen’s Fine Foods. Two student groups gave 5-minute Prezi presentations. Following the presentations, students and guests had discussions at their tables to come up with an “Action Plan” to move their issue forward within the Public Sphere. The Town Hall concluded with the sharing of the Action Plans among all participants, facilitated by Dr. Horowitz.

What is the Public Issue for the PSP Curriculum in Fall ’16? This semester the focus will be on issues surrounding Lead in our communities. Similar to the large issue of Food, the problem of Lead involves many Publics—children, families, politicians, community activists, city planners, etc. The problems of Lead also occur in many areas—paint (a significant problem in the housing stock within the City of Cleveland), water (a continuing problem in Flint, Michigan).

How have other CSU Courses been Involved with PSP? The Spring ’16 Town Hall event involved students from Dr. Horowitz’s COM 224 course, plus students from COM 326: Advanced Reporting. The COM 326 students wrote news stories about issues related to Food and attended the Town Hall. The COM 326 students were actively involved in the group discussions and in crafting Action Plans that came out of the discussion. Other CSU faculty and staff attended, and joined the tables for the group discussions. The engagement with the guests at the Town Hall is a significant part of the PSP experience.

How can your Course become Engaged with PSP in Fall ’16? There are several levels of possible engagement for faculty and students with PSP.

*Level I: Faculty member agrees to attend the Town Hall and join a student group at a table, and offer extra-credit to their students to attend the Town Hall meeting. (To increase student engagement, we suggest students be required to participate in the group discussions and Action Plan portion of the Town Hall. Having students write a “Reflection Essay” after the Town Hall tends to increase engagement during the event.)

*Level II: Faculty completes Level I, but also has their students read one (or more) articles about Lead prior to the Town Hall and complete a required, graded assignment based on the Lead article(s) prior to the event.

Level III: Faculty complete Levels I and II, but also agrees to set aside one day of teaching to lecture about the issue(s) of Lead in a manner that naturally corresponds to the content and curriculum of the faculty’s course.

Level IV: Faculty completes Levels I, II, and III, but also agrees to create an additional short assignment related to Lead that naturally corresponds to the content and curriculum of the faculty’s course and/or have additional lecturing about the issue.

Level V: Faculty completes Levels I-IV, but also agrees to have their students build upon their assignment with additional original research and/or additional readings that naturally corresponds to the content and curriculum of the course. This additional work could culminate in a Poster Presentation or other similar final projects that could be shared at the Town Hall.

How can I get More Involved with PSP on Lead for Fall ’16? Contact Julian Rogers, Office of Civic Engagement, j.a.rogers@csuohio.edu, or Dr. Edward Horowitz, School of Communication, e.horowitz@csuohio.edu