



CDWSP CENTRAL

Nurturing the Next Generation of Community Development Professionals

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Office of University
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Community
Development
Work Study
Program

Seminars Allow HUD Fellows to Connect Classroom to Workplace

The opportunity to work for nonprofit organizations and government agencies is one of the most popular features of HUD's Community Development Work Study Program (CDWSP). Yet, most grantees do not stop at simply placing their master's students in good jobs. Instead, these colleges and universities have developed creative ways to make sure that a student's work experience is also an educational experience.

Many CDWSP grantees accomplish this goal by offering special seminars for HUD fellows that, over time, have become the core of their work study programs. The seminars differ greatly from one campus to the next. Some meet weekly, others monthly, and some only a few times a year. Many are offered only for HUD fellows, while some allow other master's students to participate. Some seminars are informal chat sessions, while others have a formal curriculum and academic requirements.

Despite these differences, the seminars have certain key elements in common. They provide CDWSP fellows with a small community of peers where they can share their work experiences and get advice on how to handle difficult situations. The seminars encourage students to reflect on how their work experience relates to their academic work and their career goals. On the practical side, the seminars help faculty advisors keep track of what CDWSP students are doing and how their community work is progressing.

Finally, the seminars provide students with additional information and training that can help them do their jobs well, both now and after they graduate.

"The goal is to have students talk about their work relationships and how their jobs relate to what they have learned in the classroom," says Raymond J. Hummert, administrative director of the Public Administration Department at the University of Kansas (KU), who assists with the department's Professional Development Seminar. "We try to focus on the transition of the student from the academic environment to the professional

work environment. So we talk to them about employee socialization, leadership, administrative change, and those kinds of things. And we let the students themselves tell their stories about what is going on in the workplace."

Professional Development Seminar

The unusual structure of KU's 2-year Master of Public Administration (MPA) program has influenced how the university's Professional Development Seminar is structured. MPA students complete all of their academic work during the program's

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CDWSP Seminars Provide Public Speaking Expertise

When HUD fellows at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, finish a semester in the CDWSP program, they do not keep their experiences to themselves. In fact, the graduate students are required to tell everyone in the university's Master of Public Administration (MPA) program what they learned.

Each fall, the university's Nelson Mandela School of Public Policy and Urban Affairs sponsors a special HUD seminar during which CDWSP students report on the experiences they had during the previous semester. The seminar, which attracts more than 100 students and faculty members, helps the school showcase the achievements of CDWSP fellows and recruit other students for the program. But the seminar's primary purpose is to



Dr. Damien Ejigir

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first year. During the second year—called the intern year—they work in full-time jobs around the country.

Having students working off campus, often in other states, during the internship year can be challenging for the university and the students. That is why staff members at the School of Public Administration put so much effort into planning and carrying out the three sessions that make up the Professional Development Seminar. All master's students—including KU's five HUD fellows—must take time off from work to attend the seminars. They also have to complete what can be challenging reading assignments that relate to the topics that will be discussed.

The first seminar session of the intern year takes place at the annual meeting of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) in the fall. Students attend the meeting along with other professionals from around the country. In addition, they spend about 16 to 18 hours participating in the Professional Development Seminar. During those sessions, they talk about their new work experiences and discuss specific issues in public administration. City managers and other ICMA members often drop by the seminar to share their expertise.

The students meet again in January for a week-long leadership development seminar at KU's Lawrence campus. The third meeting takes place just before the students graduate. In addition to evaluating the MPA program, students spend this final seminar session sharing and receiving feedback on a portfolio they have developed during the previous 2 years.

The portfolio project encourages students to reflect on what they have learned during the MPA program and to develop an ongoing professional development plan, says Hummert.

"What we try to reinforce, especially in the last seminar, is that these students need to continue to learn, they need to continue to develop both personally and professionally, even after graduation" he says. "Hopefully, the portfolio project gives them a tool that will help them do that."

Welcoming Others to HUD Seminars

At Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VPI) in Blacksburg, a 1-credit seminar designed for HUD fellows is now capturing the interest of other master's students in the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA). The interest is keen enough, says Dr. C. Theodore Koebel, director of the university's Center for Housing Research, that SPIA is planning to make the seminar a regular 3-credit course that would be open to all students. Currently, public administration and planning students who are not HUD fellows must get Koebel's permission to attend.

"The first semester we offered the seminar, it was just the three CDWSP students," says Koebel. "I think at its peak we ended up having eight or nine in the seminar."

Up until now, most master's students in the School of Public and International Affairs have focused exclusively on environmental planning, land use planning, or international development, says Koebel. But thanks to the CDWSP seminar, he says, there is now a small core of students who are interested in applying the principles of planning and public administration to disadvantaged neighborhoods and populations. Some of those students have taken Koebel's seminar for several semesters, which effectively gives them three or four community development credits that they would not otherwise have been able to acquire.

"The interaction with a broader group of students is

really beneficial," says Koebel about the weekly seminar sessions. "All the students are interested in the same things. The only distinction is that the HUD students have this grant supporting them. Now we have a more eclectic group of students in terms of their backgrounds, and it brings more issues and perspectives to the discussion."

During the first semester of each grant cycle, students in the seminar receive an introduction to community-building strategies and theories. Once students have acquired this background, the seminar addresses more specific issues. One semester, students focused on HOPE VI and Neighborhood Revitalization, making several site visits to HOPE VI projects. During subsequent semesters, students concentrated on such topics as social capital, microenterprise and community economic development, and strategic planning for nonprofit organizations. Occasionally, students have even become involved in community-based research.

"One semester we looked at transportation access to a health clinic that was being proposed for an impoverished Roanoke neighborhood," says Koebel. "I was able to use this project to say to the students, 'Okay, you've already learned about data analysis and you've learned about census data. Now let's apply those skills to this particular problem.'"

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Dr. Koebel (far right) with VPI seminar students

Internship Experiences Benefit UWM Graduate

"Making a difference is inherently important to me," says Jenn Tracy, a 2004 graduate of the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (UWM), Master of Public Administration program and CDSWP participant. "The best way for me to do that is by being out in the community, listening to the problems people experience, talking to them about their concerns, and working with them to build a solution unique to their situation." By participating in UWM's CDWSP, Tracy applied her classroom knowledge to her internships and gained practical hands-on experience working with government officials, nonprofit leaders, and low-income residents.

Working with the city of Milwaukee's Department of City Development (DCD), the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA), the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC), and the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) helped Tracy focus her career goals and land her current job at the city of Milwaukee's Housing Authority. "I am working with the city government and with residents who have real problems. Even though I just started and I'm still in training, I feel it is a place that I can make a difference."

Making it Happen

"I always wanted to work in the public realm," explains Tracy. "I was really interested in working for local government and doing community development at the grassroots level, but I didn't have the financial support to undertake a full-time master's degree. The CDWSP program allowed me to go to school full time and learn more about Milwaukee and the community development field."

Her first internship exposed Tracy to the inner workings of the Milwaukee city government and how it works with residents, developers, businesses, and consultants. She worked with a community planner at DCD revising a market analysis of an aging business corridor on Milwaukee's north side. She also acted as a liaison between the city and neighborhood organizations near the UWM campus concerned with commuting students parking in their neighborhood and about a proposed parking structure. "Part of my job was to receive feedback from residents so that the planners could incorporate resident input into the solutions being developed," says Tracy.

Connecting with Residents

The knowledge Tracy gained at DCD set the stage for her experience working with WHEDA, a statewide nonprofit agency that provides financing for affordable housing and business development. "While at DCD, I learned a lot of basic things such as reading grid maps. This foundation really allowed me to jump right in at WHEDA."

At WHEDA, Tracy documented the history of Lindsay Heights, a Milwaukee neighborhood using infill development to rebuild itself, and the impact the revitalization effort is having on residents. The revitalization effort, which is coordinated by WHEDA and the city of Milwaukee, focuses on spurring redevelopment activity by building new housing units on previously vacant, city-owned lots.

"The real goal of this project was not only to increase the number of owner-occupied homes, but also to encourage the homeowners living on either side of the new homes to make

improvements to their homes by accessing city façade grants and loans from WHEDA," explains Tracy.

Guidance and support were important to the success of Tracy's project. "My boss was very committed to Lindsay Heights. She spent a lot of her work time and out-of-work time working on the project. She really believed in it. And she felt it was very important that WHEDA document the project because of its scale and also because it was a major partnership project."



Jenn Tracy (left) with Milwaukee resident

Partnership in Learning

"Developing the internship was like starting a partnership," observes Tracy. "All three parties [the university, internship sites, and myself] worked together toward HUD's goal of developing a young pool of energetic, knowledgeable, community-development professionals in the city of Milwaukee." This meant making sure the internships complemented Tracy's career goals and exposed her to a variety of community development projects.

"Each of my internships complemented my focus on municipal management, and I was able to see how the planning concepts and policies I learned in class applied in practice."

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help each HUD fellow develop the skills he or she needs to make public presentations before a large audience. Students take the task seriously. They spend weeks preparing for the seminar, during which they make their presentations, field questions from fellow students, and are evaluated and graded by MPA professors.

"This is a very rewarding experience in my opinion," says Dr. Damien Ejigiri, dean of the Nelson Mandela School. "It provides basic, fundamental training for these fellows. They will be public servants so they have to learn how to make a presentation before the public."

The art of public speaking is also becoming the focus of a seminar that the Center for Urban and Public Affairs (CUPA) at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio, holds each month for its 14 to 16 interns and graduate research assistants. Five CDWSP fellows participate in the seminar, which was originally designed to give master's students the opportunity to talk about and find ways to resolve challenging issues they faced during their field placements. Now—at the students' request—the meetings also include some public speaking practice.

Catherine Crosby, CUPA's assistant director of operations, says she welcomed the opportunity to help students hone their public speaking skills. Crosby says she has observed that many students do not always tell the whole story when they report on their activities.

"Students are not comfortable presenting information about the projects that they've worked on or they won't give the whole picture," says Crosby, recalling student reports to the advisory board for Wright State's New Directions grant. "(The students) work really really hard, but they only give the board a little bit of information about what they've accomplished. I know that they've done so much more, and I want to make sure they learn how to communicate that."

CUPA interns and research assistants received formal instruction in public speaking from the university's communications department in April of 2004. Beginning in the fall, they will take turns making 15-minute presentations to their peers during the monthly seminar sessions. Crosby will tape each presentation, the group will critique it, and the student presenter will then write a report outlining the areas in which he or she needs to improve.

"We are trying to teach (the students) what they need to communicate, how they need to communicate it, and how to do it in a short period of time," says Crosby.

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