EDUC 362:

The Michigan Student Caucus

Winter 2015

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Project website: http://www.michiganstudentcaucus.org

Overview

The Michigan Student Caucus (MSC) is the currently offered project for EDUC 362. Online participation in the MSC makes up the core of this course. (Required tasks and expectations are outlined later on in this syllabus.)

The Michigan Student Caucus is an organization representing the interests of students, K-12 through postsecondary, in Michigan. It is not affiliated with any political party.
The Michigan Student Caucus began its existence as the Michigan Youth Caucus, a program developed in partnership with the Michigan Civics Institute, The University of Michigan, and The Michigan House of Representatives Special Commission on Civic Engagement. This program was originally developed by and for students to give young people a say in Michigan affairs. In its current guise, the MSC strives to represent the interests of students of all ages.

Under the leadership of former Michigan State Representative Doug Hart, the program thrived for two years, during which time thousands of students around the state actively took a part in shaping policy. Resolutions were written and voted upon using a (then) state-of-the-art website developed by students in the Instructional Project Design course at The University of Michigan; testimony was given in front of legislators in Lansing; and real legislation made it onto the books as a result of the MYC's efforts.

In fall 2005, the project was revived as the MSC. With the help of numerous state and local politicians, not to mention the University, our goal is once again to have the voices of young people heard in state government.

Because the work of the MSC comes out of the issues that are raised and discussed, much of the coursework, including your reading and writing tasks, will depend on the collective interests and actions of the MSC community. In other words, success in this course depends on you taking an ongoing, proactive role in the MSC.

**Big Questions**

The MSC is, in one sense, an open-ended project, and so the issues that come up and the experiences that occur are, in large part, dependent on the ideas and interests of the participants. There are some broad questions, though, that underlie the project as a whole. For example:

- What are the most important issues facing young people and students of all ages, today and in the future?  
- How is it possible to effect change at a local and state level?  
- How do particular electronic tools help – or hinder – decision-making in a group?  
- What can a person learn through participation in a project like this, and what are its benefits and limitations as an educational experience?
Through the tasks outlined below, you will address these questions both explicitly and implicitly.

Tasks and Expectations

1. ONLINE REQUIREMENTS.

Overall requirement for consistent contribution. At the absolute minimum, you must make numerous thoughtful postings in the various areas of the website (including substantial contributions to both discussions and proposals) at least three days a week. Please note that this means visibly contributing online on at least three different days each week, every week of the term. It goes without saying--but we'll say it anyway--that these posts should be well-researched, well-reasoned, and articulate, and they should add substantively to the level of civic discourse in the program. Combined with the other programmatic requirements listed below, this is a bare minimum required for a passing grade. Higher grades will require considerably more commitment and input on your part. In person work with other MSC members, interest groups, and people in the community is also encouraged; to get credit for this work, documentation (such as meeting notes) must be submitted to the instructors before the end of the semester. If you are not able to log on for more than a day or two, you must contact the instructors as soon as possible.

Areas of online activity:

a. Proposal Authoring. You must author or significantly coauthor a legislative proposal (alternately called a “resolution”) in at least two of the six main topic areas. At least one proposal must be submitted by February 13th, and at least one more by March 27th. Your contribution to a coauthored proposal will be judged based on the contributions made with your username, so be sure to post your contributions under your own name.

IMPORTANT: With the exception of proposals in the “Public Culture and Community-Building” area, proposals must begin with a reference to a current Michigan law (from “Michigan Compiled Laws”) or a bill proposed in the Michigan Legislature (“Legislative Bills”). Both can be found at http://www.legislature.mi.gov. Proposals should describe and justify a change, amendment, extension, repeal, or other
improvement to the law or bill. Needless to say, your proposal should carefully consider the rationale for the original law or bill, its effects (social, economic, political), the perspective of its supporters, and the potential impact of your proposed changes.

Proposals in the “Public Culture and Community-Building” area must target a particular geographic area (neighborhood, city, or region) or population (set of people with something in common).

Additionally, to encourage substantive research into other communities: for a proposal to be considered valid, its authors must consult with at least three people outside of the MSC who are knowledgeable about the issue (including but not limited to professionals, professors, government officials, community leaders, and other members of the communities that would be affected) and engage them in substantive discussion regarding the resolution’s need, scope and likely impact. These consultations must be listed in the "consultations" section of the resolution, and they must be documented by (a) a video or audio clip of the discussion and/or (b) a text summary of the discussion or (c) a text transcript of part of the discussion. All documentation must be uploaded to the resolution as an attachment. Note: consultations must be conversations with real, live people, not something you read on the web! Website references should be included, where appropriate, in the “references” section of your proposal.

Finally, for a proposal to be valid, you must review your proposal with one of the Topic Coordinators, all of whom are veterans of MSC. The Topic Coordinator will review your proposal for its coherence, practicality, and originality, will ask you questions, and will offer you some thoughts both about the merits of your proposal and about how it might be strengthened. There is a section on the proposal template where you’ll be asked to talk about the feedback you received in your topic coordinator review, and how it impacted the evolution of your proposal.

**b. Discussion.** You are expected to contribute to brainstorming discussions, critiques of resolutions, and discussions about votes on a daily or near-daily basis. Discussion posts may be informal in tone, but they should be as specific and detailed as possible.

Good discussion posts may reference related ideas within or outside the MSC; they may offer alternative perspectives or relevant background information; they may provide specific suggestions for improving ideas, they may broaden or narrow the scope of proposal, and they may constructively point out weaknesses or inconsistencies. We will expect you to speak substantively about the topic or proposal being discussed, and to support your statements with evidence and elaboration.
Needless to say, while criticism and debate are expected and encouraged, we expect that all discussion posts be constructive and respectful in tone. Personal attacks on others will not be tolerated.

c. **"DOCS" Discussions.** For each of the five MSC themes (Environment & Health; Justice & Equity; Public Culture and Community-Building; Human Development & Welfare; Economic Opportunity) there will be DOCS discussions, designed to give you the opportunity to dig more deeply into the core questions animating our work. During the designated weeks listed below, there will be discussions of “DOCS” (required readings), seeking to give you a deeper look at some of the issues at play in each domain, and to enrich your process of formulating and crafting proposals. During the first week of each thematic working group discussion, MSC members will be expected to do the readings and respond to the questions posted, and during the second week, you'll be expected to respond to the comments of your peers.

Topic Coordinators and members of the MSC faculty will facilitate these discussions, and each MSC student is expected to take an active part in the DOCS discussions. Your active participation will be measured by the quality of your participation in the discussion groups themselves, but also by evidence you'll provide in the final portfolio articulating how your work in the discussion groups impacted your thinking, and informed your proposal writing and/or your participation in the public discussions and voting.

**DOCS Discussion Period One:** Weeks of January 19 and 26

**DOCS Discussion Period Two:** Weeks of March 9 and 16

**Minimum Participation in DOCS Discussions:** In each of the two discussion periods you must participate in at least one DOCS discussion with a response to the reading and at least one reply to one of your peers in the same discussion. We encourage you to participate in additional discussions.

2. OFFLINE REQUIREMENTS.

While much of work in the course will be online, all students must fulfill the following offline requirements:

a. **Orientation session.** The mandatory orientation will take place on Tuesday, January 13th from 7:30-9:00 pm in Schorling Auditorium (1202 School of Education).
b. Service activity. By February 1, you must commit to contributing at least 15 hours of service to an approved organization and begin that activity. Service activity should be scheduled in consultation with the organization. The Service Coordinators will provide a list of approved organizations. **Service activity plans must be submitted before beginning the activity via a form linked from the MSC website.**

A primary purpose of your service activity is to gain firsthand knowledge and experience with issues facing communities in Michigan; you are strongly encouraged to discuss these issues and potential legislative solutions with members of the organization, and to use these discussions to shape resolutions that you author. Service activities, therefore, should be chosen so as to create **opportunities for meeting people and experiencing situations outside of your regular day-to-day environment** and you will be expected to write in your portfolio about how your service activity informed your work in MSC, and your thinking about that work. **Activities that consist mainly of fundraising, or activities that involve minimal contact with other people (e.g., clerical work, cleaning), generally do not meet these goals and so, while they may be worthy activities in themselves, they are not appropriate for your MSC service requirement.**

To initiate your service activity:

1) Contact the organization to discuss your potential service activity. Keep in mind that organizations do not have an obligation to accept your offer of service, even if the organization is listed as preapproved. Most organizations have limited opportunities and they may be looking for volunteers with particular backgrounds and/or availability.

2) Submit your plan online via the designated form linked from the MSC website, noting service organization, activity plan, approval (if necessary) from Service Coordinator

3) As you begin your service, please carefully document your hours of activity, reflections and observations, consultations with service providers and members of the public all for inclusion in your final portfolio.

4) Those of you who’ll be working with minors will need to have a background check done here at the U of M. The process is simple, and we’ll provide you with the link at which you can request the check.

Documentation of your service activity must be included in your final portfolio (minimum: a list of each location, date, and time when you contributed service to your chosen organization).
c. Town Hall Meetings. Topic coordinators will schedule one “town hall meeting” per topic in which you will have the opportunity to talk with experts and stakeholders about your proposals and ideas related to that topic. You must attend and actively participate in at least two of these meetings during the semester. You should take notes and be prepared to document in your final portfolio at least one important thing you learned from each meeting attended.

d. Midterm meeting. An in-person meeting for all EDUC 362 members will be scheduled near the midpoint of the semester. This optional meeting will be an opportunity to hear feedback from the instructors on ideas and proposals raised in the Caucus, and to review requirements for the second half of the course.

e. House Commission on Civic Engagement Hearing. All proposals that are passed into the MSC platform will be presented before a special commission of the Michigan House of Representatives in Lansing at a date to be determined, near the end of the term. Topic coordinators and proposal authors will do the actual presenting, but attendance is mandatory for all MSC members. The hearing may be scheduled as late as the last study day before finals; please plan accordingly.

3. WHAT’S UNIQUE ABOUT THIS CLASS?

You know that this course is conducted online and offline, both in the “classroom” of www.michiganstudentcaucus.org and in the “classroom” of our various communities. It spans your peer relations and your relationship as citizens to our local and state governments. As such, it’s important that we underline two important things related to the structure and spirit of this course that are directly connected with our evaluation of your work in Education 362:

First, it is important that you consistently demonstrate initiative throughout the class. The faculty will be very much present in the course, as will the topic coordinators, but because we don’t meet each week, there won’t be the same sort of implicit reminder to do your work that happens in a traditional class that meets face-to-face. If you’re going to be successful in this course, you need to take the initiative to consistently do your online work, to keep up with course readings, materials and schedule, and to make sure that you’re doing your service work and attending town hall meetings. You also need to show the initiative to seek out consultants to your proposal writing that can truly help you to see an issue from different and broader perspectives. If you are someone
who needs your professor to push you to do your work, Education 362 is not the course for you.

The other big idea to keep in mind is connections. We expect that aspects of your work in this class (your service activity, for example, or the DOCS discussions) will influence your work in other parts of the class (your proposal writing and your participation in the online discussions, etc.) We encourage you to look for useful connections between aspects of your studies here at the university and your work and thinking in the Caucus. We want to see you actively seeking out these connections, and making them visible in your work throughout the term, particularly in your final portfolio.

4. FINAL PORTFOLIO

A final portfolio must be submitted to the instructors via the MSC website (a link will be posted near the end of the term). A template document containing detailed guidelines will be provided.

Finally:

· It is your responsibility to read the announcements on the MSC site, and to check your email regularly for messages from the instructors.

· It is your responsibility to make sure that evidence of your participation and contributions to the caucus is accessible and apparent to the instructors.

Topic Coordinators

Experienced MSC members will take leadership roles as "Coordinators" for each topic area, as well as for service activities and the hearing. Topic Coordinators will facilitate discussion, schedule town hall meetings, help organize the MSC platform from those resolutions receiving the most votes, and introduce their topic areas at the hearing in Lansing. Please give the Coordinators your utmost cooperation.

Office Hours

Office hours will be available each week through three formats: (1) face-to-face with faculty, (2) face-to-face with topic coordinators, (3) online with faculty. For all formats, dates, times, and locations will announced on the MSC website.
Grades

Grades will be based on the following:

(a) Completeness, consistency, and quality of your online and offline contributions to the MSC: 75%

(b) Final portfolio completeness and quality, including documentation of service enactment: 25%

Final grades will take into account your work over the entire semester, viewed holistically. You may email the instructors at any time between the third and tenth week of the semester for an assessment of your work to date.

Grading scale:

B+ or higher: Meets expectations for all tasks and exceeds expectations in multiple areas, including both quantity and quality of contributions to the Caucus, as judged by the instructors.

B: Meets minimum expectations for all tasks*

C: Meets some but not all expectations.

D/E: Fails to meet basic expectations.

*Failure to complete any of the required tasks at the minimum level will result in a grade of B or lower, regardless of the quality and quantity of other work.

Schedule

Unless otherwise noted, MSC activity is ongoing, and you are expected to make substantial contributions on a minimum of 3 days each week. Town Hall Meetings will also be scheduled as the semester goes on.

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
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<tr>
<td>January 13</td>
<td>Mandatory Orientation from 7:30-9:00 pm in Schorling Auditorium, 1202 School of Education; MSC activity begins immediately after orientation.</td>
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January 19-30  First round of “DOCS” discussions

February 1  Service activity plans must be submitted and approved, and service activity must begin by this date.

February 13  You must have at least one proposal submitted and published by this date.

March 9-20  Second round of “DOCS” discussions

March 27  All proposals must be submitted by this date. All EDUC 362 participants must have at least two proposals submitted by this date.

Late March - Early April  Voting (rating) of proposals and related discussion.

Mid-April  House Commission hearing (exact date TBA)

April 25  Final summary/portfolio due by midnight

**Conditions and disclaimers**

SYLLABUS DISCLAIMER: This syllabus is subject to change.

GOOD CONDUCT: Participants are encouraged to take strong positions and debate issues passionately. However, any activity that is intended to prevent other members from participating, or that is intended to damage the technical infrastructure of the MSC, is strictly prohibited. In addition, participants must adhere to the policies of the computing environment from which they are accessing the MSC. Violators will be suspended from the course, and additional disciplinary action may be taken as necessary.

PLAGIARISM POLICY: As a participant in a public forum, you are expected to refer to ideas and statements from both inside and outside the MSC. Such references are expected to be respectful and appropriate, and they must give clear, specific attribution to the original source. It is assumed that anything posted under your name is your own work, unless explicitly attributed to someone else. Outright plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the course and possible additional disciplinary action.