EDUC 362:
The Michigan Student Caucus
Fall, 2014

Instructors

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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 post-secondary, 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 thousands of students around the state actively took a part in shaping policy. Resolutions were written and voted upon online 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: 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 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 co-author 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 Oct. 10, and at least one more by Nov. 24. Your
contribution to a co-authored 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 “Community Revitalization and Social Entrepreneurship” area, proposals must be 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 on 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.

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 “whereas” sections of your proposals.

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.
 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. **Thematic Working Groups (new for 2014-2015).** For each of the six MSC themes (Environment & Health; Justice & Equity; Arts & Culture; Community Revitalization & Social Entrepreneurship; Human Development & Welfare; Economic Opportunity) there will be working groups, designed to give you the opportunity to dig more deeply into the core questions animating our work. During designated weeks (weeks of September 7 and 15, and weeks of October 20 and 27), members of each group will discuss “docs” (required readings), seeking to better understand the issues at play in each domain, and to enrich your process of formulating and crafting proposals.

Members of the MSC faculty will facilitate these discussions, with help from the topic coordinators, and each MSC student is expected to take an active part in at least two working groups of your choice throughout the semester. Your active participation in at least two groups and at least during the four designated discussion weeks 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 specifically informed your proposal writing and/or your participation in the public discussions and voting.

2. **OFF-LINE REQUIREMENTS.** While much of work in the course will be online, all students must fulfill the following off-line requirements:

   a. **Orientation session.** A mandatory orientation session will be scheduled on a weekday evening within the first two weeks of the term.

   b. **Service activity.** By October 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 suggested organizations; you may make other arrangements with prior approval of the Service Coordinators. **Service activity plans must be submitted before beginning the activity via a form linked from the MSC website.**
To initiate your service activity:

■ 1) If you wish to work with an organization not already on the suggested list, you must get approval from a peer Service Coordinator before making a final commitment.

■ 2) 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 pre-approved. Most organizations have limited opportunities and they may be looking for volunteers with particular backgrounds and/or availability.

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

■ 4) 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.

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). A primary purpose of your service activity is to gain first-hand knowledge and experience of issues facing communities in Michigan; you are strongly encouraged to discuss these issues and potential legislative solutions with members of the organization, and 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.
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. The 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.

### 3. WHAT’S UNIQUE ABOUT THIS CLASS?

You already know that this course is conducted online and offline, both in the “classroom” of www.michiganstudentcaucus.org and the “classroom” of our various communities. It spans your peer relations and your relation 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 be pushing 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 discussions in your thematic working group) 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 SYNTHESIS/PORTFOLIO.** This should be submitted to the instructors via the MSC website (a link will be posted near the end of the term), and it must include:

- The title and committee of each resolution you have authored or co-authored, a few words describing changes or revisions that you have made along the way.

- The name of the organization to which you contributed service, with supporting documentation (minimum: a list of each location, date, and time when you contributed service to your chosen organization), and a short statement of how your service experience led to ideas or proposals in the MSC.

- Two or three comments you made on other resolutions or in the "brainstorming" sections, which you think were particularly helpful or relevant contributions to the caucus.

- At least one important point you gained from each town hall meeting you attended.

- At least one thing you learned from the hearing, in particular from the responses and questions given by the Commission panelists.
• Your response to the question of how your work in one or both of the thematic working groups in which you participated informed your thinking and your actual work in MSC.

• One important thing that you understand now which you hadn't understood before -- about state government, about effecting change, about particular issues, or anything else meaningful that you will take away from your experience in MSC.

• (Optional) Suggestions for improving MSC in the future -- either technically or programmatically, and/or advice for the people who will be participating in the MSC next semester.

• Any other relevant information you would like to be considered by the instructors when considering your final grade.

Finally:

• It is your responsibility to read the announcements on the MSC site, and 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" of each topic, as well as 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 area 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. Schedules for individual topics will be posted on the site.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 4</td>
<td>Orientation; MSC activity begins immediately after orientation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 7</td>
<td>Week 1 “docs” thematic working group discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 15</td>
<td>Week 2 “docs” thematic working group discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 1</td>
<td>Service activity plans must be submitted, and service activity must begin by this date.</td>
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<td>October 10</td>
<td>You must have at least one proposal submitted and published by this date.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 20</td>
<td>Week 3 “docs” thematic working group discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 27</td>
<td>Week 4 “docs” thematic working group discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 24</td>
<td>All proposals must be submitted by this date. All EDUC 362 participants must have at least two proposals submitted by this date.</td>
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<td>Late Nov. - Early Dec.</td>
<td>Voting (rating) of proposals and related discussion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Service activities</td>
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<td>Early December</td>
<td>House Commission hearing (exact date TBA)</td>
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<td>December 13</td>
<td>Final summary/portfolio due by midnight</td>
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**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.

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Featured Theme for 2014-2015: Arts and Culture

This year we’re shining a spotlight on the theme of Arts and Culture, and we encourage you to join us in taking a closer look at what Arts and Culture means, how it impacts our lives, and what sorts of proposal ideas you might be able to generate. To inaugurate this focus, MSC Faculty Member Jay McDowell offers some thoughts about what “Arts and Culture” means:

Arts and Culture: What is it?
Arts and Culture is one of the main topics within which we will explore policy options for improving our quality of life in Michigan. People often have a difficult time deciphering exactly what the topic entails as an abstract concept, and what concrete issues should be addressed within the theme. MSC students, in the past, have sometimes myopically explored limited issues such as art in public schools and required cultural understanding classes in college. It is our hope, this year, that students will expand their understanding of the topic "Arts and Culture" to include the type of "Creative Placemaking" that Ann Markusen and Anne Gadwa elegantly write about in their white paper Creative Placemaking.

First by way of introduction to the topic, let us look at the basic dictionary definitions of both Arts and Culture. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines Art as:

"1. Something that is created with imagination and skill and that is beautiful or that expresses important ideas or feelings" and, "2. Works created by artists: paintings, sculptures, etc., that are created to be beautiful or to express important ideas or feelings"
It defines Culture as:

"1. The beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time, "2. A way of thinking, behaving, or working that exists in a place or organization (such as a business)" and also, "3. The customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group."

Although these definitions give us a starting point for looking at the topic of Arts and Culture, a thought from Leo Tolstoy, who wrote quite extensively on the concept of Art, inches us closer to what the topic may mean for us as policy makers:

"Art is not, as the metaphysicians say, the manifestation of some mysterious idea of beauty or God; it is not, as the aesthetical physiologists say, a game in which man lets off his excess of stored up energy; it is not the expression of man's emotions by external signs; it is not the production of pleasing objects; and, above all, it is not pleasure; but it is a means of union among men, joining them together in the same feelings, and indispensable for the life and progress toward wellbeing of individuals and of humanity."

As policy makers, we need to focus on the last bit of that quote: "It is a means of union among men...indispensable for the life and progress...of humanity."

In their white paper, Creative Placemaking, Ann Markusen and Ann Gadwa give us a more detailed explanation of what Arts and Culture might mean as a policy matter to local and state communities:

"Creative placemaking serves livability, diversity, and economic development goals. Livability outcomes include heightened public safety, community identity, environmental quality, increased affordable housing and workplace options for creative workers, more beautiful and reliable transportation choices, and increased collaboration between civic, nonprofit, and for profit partners. Economic development quickens because arts and cultural investments help a locality capture a higher share of expenditures from local income. Instead of traveling elsewhere for entertainment and culture, or going to a big-box retailer or shopping mall, residents are patrons of local talent and venues, earnings that recirculate at a higher rate in the local economy."

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If we simply think of the Labor Day options in Metro Detroit such as the Arts, Beats, and Eats Festival in Royal Oak, the Peach Festival in Romeo, and the Detroit Jazz Fest, then we will get an idea of what Markusen and Gadwa are proposing in terms of community life in general (as reflected in their framing of “livability, diversity, and economic development”), and as we think about the different ways that communities might invest in Arts and Culture we begin to see the breadth of this topic as a policy matter.

As you explore this topic area, ponder the many ways that policy makers could create situations in which Arts and Culture are, as Leo Tolstoy writes, "A means of union among men...indispensable for the life and progress...of humanity."