CRES 4860 Public Forum Facilitation

Instructor: Martin Carcasson
Office Hours: Before/after class, as well Tuesday mornings as announced
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Class time and location: Mondays, 6:00-8:50pm, Ben Cherrington Hall Room 219

Course description: Diverse democracies require high quality communication and coordination to function well. In the current era, however, polarization, cynicism and apathy have become the norm, obstructing possibilities for collaborative problem-solving. What are the best processes for making public decisions in a democracy? This course examines the tools of advocacy, debate, dialogue and deliberation through the lens of facilitation in public forums.

Public deliberation is an approach to politics in which citizens, not just experts or politicians, are involved in public decision making. Working with trained facilitators who utilize a wide variety of specific deliberative techniques, citizens come together and consider relevant facts from multiple points of view; converse with one another to think critically about the various options before them; enlarge their perspectives, opinions, and understandings; and ultimately seek to come to some conclusion for action in the form of a reasoned public judgment. The art of public deliberation is as old as democracy itself, but has nonetheless enjoyed a significant renaissance in recent years. Dubbed by some as the “Deliberative Democracy Movement,” scholars in a variety of fields have turned their focus to understanding and furthering the scope and impact of public deliberation efforts.

This class will provide an overview of the deliberative democracy movement, its theory and practice, with a focus on the critical role of design and facilitation of public forums focused either on education, community action, or public input into institutional decision-making. Other key tasks tied to deliberative practice that link with and benefit from high quality facilitation will also be explored, such as deliberative issue analysis, convening, and forum analysis and reporting.

Assignments -

60% Reading responses, short papers, online discussions, homework, in-class assignments and participation Students are expected to participate in online discussions, as well as complete short assignments as assigned (either during class or during the week by email or on the Blackboard discussion board). Students are also expected to participate actively in class.

40% Semester project (negotiated with instructor) Students are expected to complete a project that will both be substantial in terms of academic quality but also useful to the student in terms of furthering their grasp of class concepts. Projects may take the form of an academic paper (likely around 10 page or so), or students may propose an alternative that may be more useful but still fit the expectations of the graduate class. For example, students may analyze a particular issue in a particular community, and develop an engagement plan for that issue. Students may also decide to work in groups to complete these projects together. Topics may focus on deliberative theory, deliberative practice, or specific issues. A one page proposal is due on Friday, May 6th by email to the instructor.
Class schedule
Day 1 (April 25) – Introduction to class and deliberative theory and practice
Day 2 (May 2) – Practice forum and basics of facilitation and forum design
Day 3 (May 9) – Advanced facilitation topics
Day 4 (May 16) – Continue advanced facilitation topics, process design basics
Day 5 (May 23) – Continue advanced facilitation topics, TBD

Final projects due by email on June 2

Readings
In order to adjust the class to the needs, interest, and pace of the students, readings will be assigned on the Tuesday after class and posted on Blackboard. Reading responses will typically be due by Friday.