

# Communicating School Redesign Seminar

Fall 2017-Spring 2018

## Course Syllabus

### Course Information:

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Seminar Meeting Date	Location
September 13-14	VCFA: The Chapel
October 6	Capitol Plaza: Montpelier Room
November 3	Capitol Plaza: Montpelier Room
December 8	CSR School Host
February 2	CSR School Host
March 2	CSR School Host
April 6	CSR School Host
May 4	Highland Center for the Arts Greensboro

**Note: School teams will also meet regularly (weekly) in their own schools in order to implement their unique strategies.**

**Course Prerequisite: None**

### Course Overview:

*“There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”  
Margaret Wheatley*

Experts on any issue in American life often assume that the public understands what they are saying and/or that people come to their issue with a clean slate. What cognitive and social scientists know, however, is that the public often misunderstands what experts are saying, and that the language of experts often bumps up against existing mental models that ultimately hamper public understanding. The purpose of this course is to introduce an approach to

**communications called “strategic framing” that is grounded in research about how Americans—adults and youth—think about education. It will provide participants with alternative ways of communicating that have been shown to be very effective in securing public understanding and support for change. Development of responsive facilitation skills will provide a powerful means to implement this dialogue-for-change approach.**

In addition, this course will pay particular attention to the importance of elevating student voice in the school redesign process. Ironically, the growing movement in New England for student-centered approaches to learning often, and unwittingly, excludes young people from the conversation about school change altogether, or creates a separate space for a small handful of youth activists. As Eric Toshalis and Michael Nakkula have stated so eloquently in a 2012 article on motivation, engagement and student voice: “Fostering student voice—empowering youth to express their opinions and influence their educational experiences so that they feel they have a stake in the outcomes—is one of the most powerful tools schools have to increase learning.” For these reasons, high school students will enroll in this same course for dual enrollment credit, as integral team members in shaping and implementing a communications strategy that will reach out to students, teachers, parents and community members.

**The immediate need for deep and deliberate work to address the considerable challenges of communicating about school change in a way that will build genuine understanding among all stakeholders, as well as the critical need to put students at the center of the change process, has never been more apparent. Vermont Act 77 legislation and Education Quality Standards have identified the following priorities in the state’s transformation plan:**

- **Personalized learning plans (PLPs) for all students**
- **Flexible pathways (FPs)**

**The titles of these priorities are steeped in jargon, difficult to explain and frequently misunderstood. We need a common language and tools that unpack the “alphabet soup” of these priorities, capturing the potential of the innovative practices *from both youth and adult perspectives*. Good communications tools and strategies will be key to successful implementation in schools embarking on a school remodeling process.**

**Youth and adults in this project-based course will break new ground by working together to make sense of a robust body of research on how Americans understand education and learning, and by applying that learning to their own school and community contexts through a diverse set of communications and community engagement strategies and tools.**

### **Course Description:**

**This work will be undertaken by youth and adults who are both knowledgeable and vested in this work, comprised of youth-adult teams (3-4 youth and 3-4 adults) from 3-5 schools in Vermont schools (maximum team size of 8). They will serve as in-house communications consultants and initiators. This group will periodically be joined by “alumni” schools that continue to be engaged in building public understanding and support for change.**

**In addition to regular school-based meetings, this group will meet once every four to eight weeks in a seminar format. The course will occur in two phases:**

**PHASE 1: Communications Strategy Development and Skill Building Phase**  
**(September to November)**

During the fall, the school teams will:

1. Create a *shared vision of*:

- ✓ *Your communications approach,*
- ✓ *The central aspects of school redesign, and*
- ✓ *Your decisionmaking process*

2. *Learn about the art and science of communicating about social change* . Review communications research and recommendations regarding how Americans—both youth and adults—think about school redesign grounded in a civic engagement model. Explore best practices in communications campaign design.

3. *Design and conduct participatory action research* to better understand local stakeholder perspectives regarding education and change, and to help shape your tools and strategies. This includes administration of a school-wide survey.

4. *Develop communications strategies* . Your team will create a communications plan that aligns with your school's strategic plan (and/or implementation plan for Act 77 and/or proficiency-based learning). This plan will include such strategies as press releases, oped pieces, an elevator speech, and social media options, and dialogue strategies to build understanding and support for school change within the student body, faculty, board and greater community.

5. *Participate in Responsive Facilitation training* to learn effective strategies to lead community dialogue sessions about school redesign.

6. *Understand and develop youth adult partnerships* as the foundation for team collaboration and school change.

7. Choose/create a decision-making process that is agreed to by all team members.

**PHASE 2: Campaign Implementation, Assessment and Reflection (December - May)**

The focus during this phase will be to effectively communicate the desired shift to a personalized and proficiency-based learning model, integrating prior research and training into the design and implementation of a communications plan. This campaign will include submitting a press release or Op-Ed to their local papers, developing alternative tools and strategies to trigger discussion (eg. videos, webs, social media approaches) and leading informational/dialogue sessions with 1) the school board, 2) the faculty, 3) the student body, and 4) the community-at-large.

Teams will readminister an abbreviated survey before the final class that focuses on those areas they specifically targeted in their communications campaign in order to assess the impact of their efforts.

**This course has THREE major components:**

**Multi-School Time:**

**The four fall seminar days (*September 13 & 14, October 6, November 3*) will be devoted to building the skills and knowledge in order to effectively implement a local campaign to foster public understanding and support for school change.**

**Three “Studio Days” will be hosted by one of the participating schools (*December 8, February 2, March 2, April 6*). These days will be a time for teams to share their work and dilemmas, receive peer and expert guidance to tune their communications plans, and benefit from team time.**

***One webinar* will be offered on April 6 to further support teams’ field-based strategy implementation.**

***A final full day meeting on May 4* will provide the opportunity to present a culminating communications resource developed by the team, and share what has been learned. These presentations will be videotaped for public distribution.**

**School-based Team Time:**

**Each school team will meet on a regular basis to 1) discuss readings, 2) plan and conduct interviews and research to create map of community perceptions of education and learning mental models (between the September and October gatherings), and 3) shape, implement and assess communications campaign strategies, 4) document the work. Use of this time will be largely team-directed, with off-site access to instructors to help at any point. The time commitment will ebb and flow from week to week depending on the nature of the communications plan events and planning demands. When home-based, adult support for youth team members to address college level expectations will ensure the success of the team. (Note: If student team members opt for high school credit, one adult team member will serve as that student’s academic advisor regarding meeting course requirements.**

**On-Line Assignments and Blog:**

**In the fall, readings and short writing assignments will be assigned between classes to deepen understanding of essential core concepts necessary to create a successful communications campaign.**

**On active blog will allow participants to be a learning community, posing questions, seeking dilemma solutions or sharing resources and what has worked particularly well.**

## Desired Results / Course Outcomes

### Established Goal:

Participants will have the knowledge, skills, and support to develop and implement new communication tools and strategies to build public understanding and support for current school change efforts focused on school redesign. These strategies will create a common language for change and engage stakeholders of all ages. Communicating the essential nature of youth-adult partnership in learning and decision-making is another key goal of all research and tool development.

### Enduring Understandings:

*As a result of the course, learners will understand that:*

- **Communication needs to be adjusted based on audience, context and purpose.**
- **Communications is both a science and an art, and there is robust research from the cognitive social sciences that can guide us.**
- **Our ability to communicate a vision for change is based on how effectively we articulate the importance of education to the common good and to the future success of our communities and our state.**
- **Without the embrace of the public, school change efforts are likely to fail.**
- **Youth and adults require a common language to become effective agents of change.**
- **Responsive facilitation habits, skills and dispositions are essential for conversations about change.**
- **Youth Adult Partnership development is a continuum.**
- **Authentic Youth Adult Partnership requires reflection & tending.**
- **Youth can and should play a central role in both learning and school redesign efforts, shifting school cultures to embrace youth-adult partnership in learning and decision-making.**

### *Learners will know...*

Strategies to engage in the change process and civic life of their school community.

Existing local research findings of the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups regarding school redesign, learning, Act 77 and proficiency based learning.

Effective skills of youth-adult team members addressing communication, decision making and shared responsibility.

Responsive dialogue strategies to build public understanding of school redesign

Specific communications strategies to build public understanding and support of school redesign, based on research.

### *Learners will be able to...*

Create team identity with an understanding of youth-adult partnership, establish our team process and commitments.

Use local research-based evidence to inform our communication plan for school redesign.

Create a shared vision and understanding of school redesign in Vermont.

Understand and demonstrate framing principles for communicating social change.

Use the appropriate metaphor/s to effectively communicate public understanding for school redesign.

Utilize technology to be integrated into a strategic communications plan.

Communicate the tone of school redesign effectively, respectfully and with the purpose of shared values.

Facilitate and integrate information through dialogue to build public understanding for school redesign.

Engage in the civic life of my community.

Authentically partner in the co-creation and collaboration of the design and implementation of our communications plan.

## **Required Materials:**

All readings will be provided.

## **Assessment and Evaluation Criteria:**

This course is designed on a proficiency-based model:

### **Proficiency-based Assessment- Transferable Skills**

The following transferable skills and learning targets have been identified to guide proficiency development over the course of the year:

#### **Transferable Skill: Responsible and Involved Citizenship**

**Learning Target 1: I can engage in the change process and civic life of my community by building understanding and support for school redesign.**

#### **Transferable Skill: Clear and Effective Communications**

**Learning Target 2: I participate as a full partner in our youth-adult team as we co-create communications tools and strategies.**

**Learning Target 3: I can use local research-based evidence to inform my communication plan for school redesign.**

**Learning Target 4: I can design and facilitate dialogue to build public understanding and support for school redesign.**

Class participants will regularly cross-check and document their evolving level of competency in these areas, pursuing learning opportunities to reach mastery. This assessment is on an individual basis.

### **Performance-based Assessment- Communications Campaign**

This assessment component will focus on the effectiveness of your communications campaign design and implementation, and its alignment with the best practices that you will learn about early this fall. Feedback from your “target groups” (students, teaching peers and parents/community) will help inform your reflections. This assessment will be on a team basis and shared at the final gathering.

### **Process Assessment: Youth – Adult Partnership**

The integrity of the youth-adult partnership will directly impact the quality of the initiative. Participants will use the UP for Learning Youth-Adult Partnership rubric to regularly reflect on their team’s process.

Reflections regarding proficiency targets, campaign design and implementation, and the team’s process will be synthesized and shared with the instructors in mid-year and end-of year reflection papers.

## **Grading Policy**

The Field-based Graduate Program in Education feels strongly that the learning that occurs in each class is very individualized and that assessment should occur based on each individual's ongoing improvement and progress. Evidence for that progress is therefore determined based on regular self, peer, and instructor assessment throughout the varying activities and discussions during every class session as well as any assignments given for outside of class time. Attendance at each class meeting is very important in order to provide that evidence of continual learning.

Unlike a fully evolved proficiency system, participants in this class need their final assessment in a letter grade form for reimbursement purposes. Each class member taking this course for credit will therefore include in their final paper a rationale for a grade translation based on their ultimate assessment in the three domains noted above. Instructors will review this rationale and issue or amend this proposed grade as deemed appropriate. If the grade is to be amended, the instructor(s) will discuss this with the class participant in depth.

## **Attendance Policy**

A great deal of the instruction in this course will occur during in-class time as a result of the implementation of constructivist teaching and subsequent learning for all. It is therefore crucial to attend all class meetings. Planning ahead by looking at your site's complete Master Schedule and prioritizing your graduate program is mandatory. However, emergencies do happen, and, in the very rare cases they occur, immediate communications with your instructor to determine how to proceed are required.

## **Copyright Policy**

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## **Academic Honesty Policy**

Southern New Hampshire University requires all students to adhere to high standards of integrity in their academic work. Activities such as plagiarism and cheating are not condoned by the university. Students involved in such activities are subject to serious disciplinary action. Plagiarism is defined as the intentional or unintentional use, whether by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another without full and clear acknowledgment. Cheating includes the giving or receiving of unauthorized assistance on quizzes, examinations, or written assignments from any source not approved by the instructor.

For a full definition of academic dishonesty, please refer to the undergraduate or graduate catalogs.

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**we encourage you to contact the Office of Disability Services to discuss accommodations for which you may be qualified. For questions concerning support services, documentation guidelines, or general disability issues: Office of Disability Services, Exeter Hall, Suite 59 Hyla Jaffe, Director 603.626.9100 ext.2386 h.jaffe@snhu.edu**

### **Disability Services - ADA/504 Compliance Statement**

**For questions concerning disability related compliance matters, grievance or legal issues: Ms. Jet Goldberg, ADA/504 Compliance Officer Director of Wellness Center 603-645-9679 j.goldberg@snhu.edu**

### **Library Resources**

In addition to the intellectual resources available on site and online (<http://www.snhu.edu/library>), Shapiro Library makes available group and one-on-one instruction in information literacy, enabling students to define and articulate what knowledge-based resources are relevant to their research interests. Library staff are available to assist students in effectively and efficiently accessing information from credible sources, to compare new knowledge with prior beliefs, and to consider the related ethical, legal, and socio-economic issues that are inherent in scholarly investigation.

### **Web-based Instruction Required**

**YES**  **NO** The use of Web-based supplemental instruction is required in this course.