

## **Legislative Practice and Lobbying: Training Undergraduates to Function in the Legislative Environment**

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Workshop

We propose a workshop/demonstration of a successful model for teaching practical public policy and legislative skills to undergraduates. The course, *Legislative Practice and Lobbying*, applies to the classroom the concepts articulated by the *National Survey of Political and Civic Engagement of Young People* (2007) and Yob and Ferraro (2013) that political engagement, understanding, and confidence can be enhanced by connecting academic knowledge to political activity—especially when personal interests and professional concerns are utilized as a basis for the learning experience. St. Edward's University has taken advantage of its location near the Texas Capitol to develop an undergraduate course that teaches students important public policy concepts and incorporates hands-on learning opportunities to engender a desire for political engagement and provide an overall foundation for service learning.

Distinct from “government,” “civics,” and similar survey courses, *Legislative Practice and Lobbying* dives deep into the nuts and bolts of the Texas legislative process, and equips students to participate in the process as advocates, lobbyists, legislative staff, or professionals in other fields who interact with the policy development process. Although the course focuses on the Texas Legislature, skills learned are transferable to other states and levels of government. Students execute individual legislative analysis and monitoring projects, visit the Capitol, and meet with lawmakers, legislative staff, lobbyists and other players. At the end of the term, groups of students present reports on the legislative status of a policy issue they have followed throughout the semester.

The proposed presentation that will feature an overview of the curriculum strategies and techniques, describe the structuring of practicum assignments to generate student involvement, provide samples of student work, and permit a robust interactive discussion of strategies for implementing the curriculum in other educational institutions and settings. At a time when civic participation is at historic lows, particularly among young people, *Legislative Practice and Lobbying* trains students to participate in government while at the same time illustrating the perils of an uninformed, unengaged public.

### *Bibliography*

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Yob, I. and Ferraro, A. (2013). Political engagement in higher education curricula, *Journal of Social Change* 2013, 5 (1), 1–10