Prior Learning and the Core: Sample proposal

Students may be eligible to have prior-learning of a non-academic/non-credit-bearing nature applied to a specific Core requirement. Inquiries should address the learning outcomes for the requirement in question. Learning outcomes may be viewed at USM Core Learning Outcomes. Requests for review of prior-learning of a non-academic/non-credit bearing nature should concretely address the learning outcomes of the core requirement in question. Students should submit a written narrative which explains how this prior learning has allowed them to achieve the learning outcomes of the requirement, and should document this appropriately (e.g., with copies of a resume, job descriptions(s), certifications, etc.). The narrative should explicitly indicate how specific non-academic learning experiences allowed the student to achieve the outcomes, and the documentation should back up those claims, and should be explicitly referred to in the narrative.

SAMPLE Prior Learning Proposal for USM Core: Ethical Inquiry requirement

I am writing this proposal in the hopes of gaining credit for prior learning in the general education category of Ethical inquiry, Social Responsibility, and Citizenship. I feel that I have accomplished the learning objectives for this educational category through training for and a position I held in Androscoggin Home Care and Hospice’s (AHCH) bereavement program from January 2010 until September 2011. After completing a total of 37 hours of training I was qualified to work as a facilitator for AHCH’s Program for Grieving Children and Teens. This training covered topics pertaining to the organizations procedures as well as the stages and management of grief, a child’s understanding of death, elements of the healing process, skills pertaining to group facilitation such as communication, supportive behaviors, activity guidelines, and the boundaries that needed to be respected by facilitators. This program was designed to service children three to eighteen years-old, as well as their parents, who had recently experienced the loss of someone close to them. Specifically the age range I worked with was boys between the ages of eight and fourteen. Within the groups our job as a group facilitator was to plan activities that would both distract the kids from their pain as well as give them an avenue for the boys to express emotions they were feeling at the time. It is through my experience volunteering for Androscoggin Home Care and Hospice that I believe I have gained the experience necessary to satisfy the goals of the Ethical inquiry, Social Responsibility, and Citizenship general education requirement.

1) **Analyze a topic relating to diverse human cultures and the natural world that has a significant ethical dimension and that is shaped by conflicting goals, values, traditions, institutions or structures.**

   Evidence of this goal being accomplished was through the training sessions we had to go through to become facilitators. Due to the diverse nature of the Lewiston-Auburn area it was emphasized that different cultures handle the grieving process in different manners. Through the training we discussed different religious beliefs that are associated with death. Our goal was to be sensitive to these issues but to facilitate our groups in a nondenominational manner.

2) **Describe their deliberative process for informed decision-making (e.g. weighing evidence, generating multiple alternatives and articulating the rationale for a final decision).**
A particular situation that I had to deal with as a facilitator to my group serves as an example of weighing evidence and coming to a rational final decision. There was a younger child in my group. He was the youngest of the group but age-wise just didn’t fit in with the youngest group we had which stopped at five years old. While his age may not have been a match for the younger group his behavior and maturity level certainly did. He was a constant disruption to our group to a point where his behavior was starting to cause some of the parents to raise a concern when their children were anxious about attending due to this child's actions. Due to his behavior there was a discussion between the director of the bereavement program and myself. We took his actions into consideration when determining if he should remain in the group. We also took into consideration that his behavior may the way that he was expressing his grief. We ultimately came to the decision that that we as an organization still had a role in which we could fill to help him deal with his grief. With that being said we determined that the situation to help him may not be in a group setting, rather he may benefit from more one on one attention. Ultimately the program director work with the child one on one for the majority of the session and then he would rejoin the group for the last ten minutes of the session which was geared more towards outside activities.

3) Articulate their personal viewpoints as informed by specialized perspectives (including those encountered in previous coursework) and distinguish their viewpoints from those of others.

Evidence of this goal being accomplished was the experience of working for a period of time with another facilitator. The other facilitator and I often had opposing views of how the group should be run. She held the perspective of more of an authoritative figure and mother, while I held the viewpoint of being much younger and acting in an older sibling mentoring capacity. I performed my duty of a facilitator based on prior experience and what I had been taught in the training session. While our perspective often clashed since, she demanded everything be structured and done exactly by the book, we needed to find a common ground to make the sessions run smoothly and be productive for the children. Ultimately through repeated discussion after sessions we found common ground on which we could effectively proceed with productive sessions.

4) Employ their own ethical framework as a basis for and assessment of an action that resonates with the themes of the course.

At the Program for Grieving Children and Teens our mind set that we shared before every session was "We are all here because someone we loved and cared for has died. This is a safe and healing place where you can feel what you need to feel, say what you need to say or just be quiet if it is too hard to talk. Remember what we say here stays here, this is a process, we need to just trust in the process." At times I was personally conflicted with this statement and how to portray its meaning upon my group. I felt like the children needed to be participants in the group in order to help their healing processes along, but I also understood, based on my own personality, that it would be difficult for some kids to come out of their shell in group settings. The basic theme of this “course” was to help others along a path of healing. This required the adaptation of one’s own beliefs to better suit the group’s progression. This required me to recognize the ones who shied away from participation, work with them in a manner that suited their level of comfort, and help to integrate their position into the dynamics of the group.
5) **Demonstrate effective oral and written communication that draws on the higher level cognitive skills: analysis, synthesis and evaluation.**

Evidence of this goal being accomplished was the skill needed to communicate with young children who were experiencing a phenomenon in their lives that they may not have the ability to comprehend. This skill was taped into every meeting of the ten week session. You could never have a specific plan of what you were going to do on that one night. It was necessary to have multiple plans in place that you would select from and manipulate based on how the group presented in the initial check in period. It was important to be able to assess the state each boy was in that day, how their attitude would play into the dynamics of the group, and what you thought from your observation what the overall group mood was that night. It was through this evaluation that you would be able to formulate a plan that was situated so that each boy could get something from this meeting. In addition to the mental analyzing and examination that was needed written and oral communication was also used to accomplish general education goals. After each meeting we were required to essentially debrief so that we wouldn’t take the emotional load home with us. Keeping with confidentiality practices we shared with the group of facilitators what had happened with our group and any issues we encountered. This was then followed by our written recording of our nights events so we could keep track of what had worked with our group and what needed improvements in general and with specific people in the group.

My experience working at AHCH with their bereavement program was one of the most enlightening experiences I have been a part of. Not often is one required to try and see a process through the eyes of another in a time where they feel like no one can possibly change the way they are feeling. I have used the strategies I have learned through working with these children to help myself through major losses in my life. I hope that these experiences have demonstrated that I have gained so much more knowledge then could possibly be learned through reading a book.

**NOTE:** Additional documentation provided by student as evidence of a learning experience comparable to a three credit university-level course: e-mail confirmation from direct supervisor of hours worked and time-span of work experience; official job description and official description of pre-job training program as evidence to support claims made in narrative. Additional written narrative addressing outcome 3, especially ethical frameworks.
Ethical Inquiry, Social Responsibility and Citizenship

Ethical Inquiry, Social Responsibility, and Citizenship courses focus on a theme that engages students in critical reflection on their responsibilities for informed decision making and action in their public and private roles. Courses require students to frame, analyze, and evaluate ethical issues, as well as to articulate and evaluate their own viewpoints and actions in relation to the ethical frameworks introduced.

Learning Outcomes
Students completing this course should be able to

1. Analyze a topic relating to diverse human cultures and the natural world that has a significant ethical dimension and that is shaped by conflicting goals, values, traditions, institutions or structures.
2. Describe their deliberative process for informed decision-making (e.g. weighing evidence, generating multiple alternatives and articulating the rationale for a final decision).
3. Articulate their personal viewpoints as informed by specialized perspectives (including those encountered in previous coursework) and distinguish their viewpoints from those of others.
4. Employ their own ethical framework as a basis for and assessment of an action that resonates with the themes of the course. Note: Student action should be meaningful, possibly public, such as service learning, sharing knowledge through public presentations, organizing and participating in co-curricular activities and events, writing a letter to the editor or legislator, or otherwise intentionally acting in their public and private roles.
5. Demonstrate effective oral and written communication that draws on the higher level cognitive skills: analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

Course Characteristics

An EISRC course
1. is theme-based and designed by faculty teams;
2. uses one of the listed common texts intended to facilitate discussion of ethics and citizenship across multiple sections of the course regardless of topic. Faculty will recommend texts (such as a reading, film, artifacts) to the CCC, which will maintain and publish a list of no more than 5 approved common texts. The list will be reviewed and revised based on faculty input.
3. reintroduces the five goals of general education at USM and helps students understand the role of this course in the development of them;
4. analyzes quantitative and qualitative information and uses writing as a tool of learning and assessment.
5. includes co-curricular experiences as a form of learning.