

EDUC 362-04/05/06: The Michigan Student Caucus

Winter, 2009

Instructors: Gary Weisserman
gweiss@umich.edu
248-390-7847

Jeff Kupperman
jkupp@umich.edu
734-604-6117

David Lossing
dalossin@umflint.edu

Office Hours: by appointment

Project website: <http://www.michiganstudentcaucus.org>

Overview

The Michigan Student Caucus (MSC) is the currently offered project for EDU 362-004, 005 and 006. 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.

Beginning in fall, 2005, the project has been 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.

1. ONLINE REQUIREMENTS.

Overall requirement for consistent contribution. *At the absolute minimum, you must make numerous thoughtful postings in public discussions areas about the current topic or topics at least three days a week to receive a passing grade.* 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 instructor as soon as possible.

Areas of online activity:

a. Resolution authoring. You must author or significantly co-author a resolution in at least two of the five main topic areas. ("Service" is a separate requirement; see below.)

Your contribution to a co-authored resolution will be judged based on the clauses that you have authored, so be sure to post your contributions under your own name.

Additionally, to encourage substantive research into those other communities: for a resolution 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 in substantive discussion on the MSC website 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 (b) a text summary of the discussion (b) a text transcript of part of the discussion. All documentation must be uploaded to the resolution as an attachment.

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 alternate 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.

b. Expert Q&A. Online chats or email exchanges with experts from state agencies and other relevant institutions will be scheduled throughout the term. You must participate in **at least three** of these Q & A sessions by contributing questions related to a resolution you have written or an issue you are researching. More information will be given as the consultations are scheduled.

c. Service activity proposals. Before March 9 you must author or significantly co-author at least one service proposal. By March 14 you must commit to at least one service activity other than your own. On or around March 14, several service proposals will be "featured" (chosen for enactment), based on appropriateness and number of commitments. At that point, all MSC members who are not committed to a featured proposal will then re-commit to a featured proposal. (Authors of featured proposals will be excused from their commitment to a second activity.) Enactment and documentation of featured service activities should take place in the second half of November. You should contact the instructors if your schedule, location, or life situation prevents your meaningful participation in a featured service proposal.

Service proposals should have the following characteristics:

- They should allow for broad participation by students of a broad range of ages in a broad range of locations in Michigan.
- Participation should be possible with no (or very minimal) financial commitment from participants.
- The activity should not focus on a particular political party.
- The activity should not involve simply volunteering for or contributing to an existing organization in a standard way.

- All parts of the activity must be legal and must not put participants at increased physical or mental risk.

2. OFF-LINE REQUIREMENTS. While the lion's share 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 enactment.* Part of the work of the caucus this semester involves proposing, discussing, and enacting service/social activism projects. In addition to participating in the online writing and discussion of service proposals, you must commit to and actually participate in at least one of the projects that are chosen for enactment. You must document your participation through photos and/or brief video clips, and submit this documentation with your final portfolio.

c. *House Commission on Civic Engagement Hearing.* All resolutions 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 resolution authors will do the actual presenting, but **attendance is mandatory for all MSC members.**

3. MEMBERSHIP GROWTH. The MSC grows stronger with a broader membership, so we would like you to help recruit new members to the MSC. If you recruit two or more members who become active (defined as at least one substantive post per week for four weeks), it will count positively toward your grade (up to, but not more than, half a letter grade). These members must be **in addition** to the community members who comment on your resolutions. Names of any recruited members should be noted in your final portfolio.

4. FINAL SYNTHESIS/PORTFOLIO. This should be submitted via email to the instructors, and it must include:

- The title and committee of each resolution and service proposal you have authored or co-authored, a few words describing changes or revisions that you have made along the way.
- The title of the service activity that you actually participated in, with supporting documentation.

- 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.
- 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.
- Advice for the people who will be participating in the MSC next semester. (We will take the best of these and give them to next semester's participants.)
- (Optional) Suggestions for improving MSC in the future -- either technically or programmatically.
- 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 and Service Coordinators

Experienced MSC members will be chosen to be "Coordinators" of each topic and of the "Service" area. Topic Coordinators will facilitate discussion, schedule expert chats, help organize the MSC platform from those resolutions receiving the most votes, and introduce their topic area at the hearing in Lansing. Service Coordinators will help choose service activities for enactment based on appropriateness and number of commitments, and they will help coordinate and schedule the enactment of the activities. Please give the Coordinators your utmost cooperation.

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%

(c) Recruitment of new members: extra credit, up to 1/2 letter grade

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:

A: Meets expectations for **all** tasks and exceeds expectations in one or more areas.

B: Meets minimum expectations for **all** tasks*

C: Meets minimum expectations for most, but not all tasks

D/E: Fails to meet minimum expectations for several or all tasks.

*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. Expert roundtables will also be scheduled as the semester goes on. Schedules for individual topics will be posted on the site.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Tasks</u>
January 7	Orientation; MSC activity begins immediately after orientation.
January - March	Brainstorming, resolution writing, discussion, and voting.
March 9	Service commitments should be posted by this date; featured service proposals chosen by March 14
Late March	Service project enactment

Early April	House Commission hearing (exact date TBA)
April 10	Last required day of online participation
April 24	Final summary/portfolio due by midnight

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.