

Political Engagement Project
Ferris State University
Implementation Report for Spring Semester 2007

PEP Courses and Enrollments – During Spring 2007, 28 instructors offered 29 different courses (41 sections in all) to 1,044 students (duplicated count). These data mirrored the course activity level for Fall 2006 and resulted in a total for the year of 38 instructors, 47 courses (representing 22 departments), and 2,200 students. Once again, pre and post assessments were administered, with the data compiled and analyzed by the students and instructor in one of the PEP courses, a psychology statistics course. In addition to that course activity, there were many interesting PEP course functions in the spring, including:

- Certification of students in various emergency management strategies as part of the Sociology of Disasters course.
- Preparation of scripts and videos for the new “Dump and Party” initiative as a required assignment for a Broadcast Writing course. This course raised awareness of poverty issues in surrounding communities.
- Class-wide debate about the issue of Global Warming among students in the Weather and Climate course.
- A visit to Sierra Club lobbyists and to legislators in Lansing by the students enrolled in College Critical Reading and Thinking.
- A series of student debates on the proposition to require community service for graduation judged by community service leaders in the Argumentation and Debate course.
- Exploration of the role of music and social/political activism in the 1960s in a history course. These students created the first course “Wiki” at Ferris and used this as a demonstration project for integrating technology into the classroom.
- Secondary Education majors connected the classroom with the policy arena in the Grand Rapids Public Schools by means of site visits.
- Debating the role of courts, voting, social movements and the legislature in protecting minority rights in a Social Stratification course.
- Students in a political science course conducted oral history interviews with veterans of World War II in order to identify connections between that service and subsequent political engagement. This project will be ongoing and collaborative with other faculty and veterans of Korea and Vietnam.
- A Media Production course that taped and broadcast campus political events including student government and the faculty Academic Senate.

Ferris State University – PEP Events for Spring 2007 -- Beyond the scheduled activities for the 28 PEP courses for spring semester, the Political Engagement Project at Ferris State University scheduled eight campus-wide events.

Global Warming Events. In an effort to develop a common theme for the semester, PEP faculty and staff initiated preparations for hosting a series of campus-wide discussions/events regarding the issue of Global Warming. This discussion topic was inspired in part by the activities in the Geography 121 course, Weather and Climate.

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- On Wednesday, March 14, at 7:00 p.m. in SCI 126, PEP sponsored a public address by Professor Robert Balling, Jr. a professor in the climatology program at Arizona State University. More than 200 students and faculty attended this lecture.
- This presentation was followed on Monday, April 16 at 7:00 p.m. with a second campus screening of *An Inconvenient Truth*.
- A mock trial about global warming by students in the Weather and Climate class was conducted on April 17 and 19.
- In addition, professor Mike Berghoef set up a discussion board on the Ferris PEP WEBCT site for PEP faculty to suggest alternatives or insights into how other faculty might frame this discussion.

Other Events. In addition to PEP events concerning Global Warming, the Ferris Political Engagement Project sponsored several other campus-wide events during the last half of spring semester, including:

- A question and answer session with Ferris student Nate Heffron, a fall 2006 candidate for a seat in the Michigan House of Representatives, was held on Wednesday, April 11 with approximately twenty students and faculty in attendance.
- Bi-weekly faculty roundtable discussions for PEP co-coordinators and all 28 PEP faculty were conducted throughout spring semester to address bureaucratic details and share experiences with students.
- A campus-wide speech contest was held on Tuesday, April 3 with contest finals held on Tuesday, April 10.
- A celebratory reception to recognize faculty and staff who participated in the Political Engagement Project during 2006-7 was held on April 11 in the Rankin Center Art Gallery. In spite of the last major winter storm of the year, approximately 20 faculty were present to receive commemorative PEP mugs and the gratitude of the Academic Affairs division and the PEP co-coordinators.
- Two University College PEP instructors presented a paper about their efforts at the 26th Annual Conference on the First Year Experience in February. A College of Pharmacy and PEP professor will present about her work at the ADP meetings in June.

Faculty Capstone Roundtable Anecdotal Evaluations. The final Faculty Roundtable session for the Ferris Political Engagement Project focused on PEP oral evaluations for the project. The following anecdotal statements were shared by participating faculty.

“PEP has given me teaching opportunities that I didn’t have in the past. PEP involves experiential learning, not just learning from a text book. The simulations, the training, basically all PEP activities have contributed to this experiential learning. We are ‘doing’ Chapter 5, for example, not just discussing it. There is a final product. Students are really learning.”

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“PEP has led my Social Work students to better understanding and interpretation of both micro and macro aspects of public policy areas. A good example is ‘bullying’ in public schools.”

“Debate has been more ‘academic’ and ‘clinical.’ PEP has resulted in a higher level of problem solving among debate team students, as they have experienced more interaction with member of the Big Rapids community. Debate has reached a more ‘realistic level.’”

“PEP allows me, as a professor, to approach more sociological and political aspects of music. I am very hopeful that PEP will result in facilitating a greater ‘buy in’ of students for Arts & Lectures activities.”

“I used a panel of students to advise me in the determination of PEP activities. They will also give advice for future PEP activities for my classes.”

“My PEP students who interviewed World War II veterans said that the experience really ‘opened their eyes’ as to the ‘realities’ of past generations of Americans. My students also tell me that the probability of such an eye opening experience with this PEP activity is ‘next to none.’”

“The political issues of today would have been ‘disconnected’ to students without the PEP Project.”

“PEP has led faculty to better understand the importance of electronic media such as the Internet to students.”

Additional Outcomes:

- A general sense of shared goals and strategies among faculty as a result of the PEP roundtables.
- Faculty from a variety of disciplines engaged with each other and students around debates related to global warming.
- Intentional collaboration occurred with faculty in creating new team taught courses. For instance, faculty roundtable created a collaborative research course for the Winter semester of 2008 by faculty in Criminal Justice and Sociology
- Preparations have begun to develop a theme of Technology and Democracy for the 2007/2008 Academic year. This theme will involve several collaborations that will create campus wide conversations around the role of technology, democracy and freedom, especially in the context of the forthcoming Presidential Election.
- PEP will also support a discussion of technology and politics in collaboration with the Williams Auditorium presentation of *1984*.
- A deeper investment and focus by the Administration at the executive level and across campus in the goals of the American Democracy Project and the Political Engagement Project.

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Planning for 2007-8. At the present time, funding for 2007-8 has been requested in the amount of \$72,000 to support offerings comparable to 2006-7. Co-coordinators Tony Baker and Rick Griffin sponsored informational luncheons on April 30 and May 1 in order to allow new participants the chance to find out how they can become involved in the Political Engagement Project at Ferris. To facilitate instructor planning, the theme for fall semester has been designated as “Technology and Democracy”. Collaborative planning for a production of the play 1984 by Tim Robbins’ The Actors’ Gang is underway as part of this theme. Professors Griffin and Baker, the co-coordinators will attend the ADP/PEP meetings in Philadelphia along with Vice President for Academic Affairs, Michael Harris. Also in attendance will be professor Connie Meinholdt, campus ADP coordinator, professors Adnan Dakkuri and Lucy Ngoh from the College of Pharmacy, and Michelle Johnston, Dean of the College of Education and Human Services.

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