**CommuniCare PATHWAYS at Portland State University -** DRAFT

**Background:**

The Harold & Arlene Schnitzer CARE Foundation has provided high school students with the opportunity to be grantmakers for the past 25 years through its CommuniCare program, distributing millions of dollars to Oregon nonprofits across a variety of service areas.

Few youth grantmaking programs exist regionally at the high school or college levels and, within this small cohort, CommuniCare has a well-developed framework for helping participants make important decisions at each stage of the grantmaking process.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In planning for the next 25 years, offering CommuniCare at the college level would be a meaningful and natural extension of the program. PSU’s position as an educational leader within the Portland Metro Area makes it an ideal candidate to help us achieve three larger goals:

* To provide an additional grantmaking experience for CommuniCare alumni who are enrolled at the institution
* To create mentorship opportunities that benefit current high school participants
* To thoughtfully engage existing components of the Schnitzer family legacy – having fewer, focused philanthropic initiatives and doing them very well

**Process:**

To evaluate settings within the PSU ecosystem, options were reviewed using the following guiding questions:

1. Does this setting align with CommuniCare’s mission, Core Values, and Learning Framework?
2. Does this setting align with the Schnitzer family’s vision for creating an active citizenry?
3. Does this setting provide a structure that compliments the CommuniCare grantmaking process?
4. Does this setting engage the university at large? Will the opportunity be available to all students?
5. Is this setting sustainable?

**Contributors**:

This proposal is informed by conversations with professionals from within the PSU community. A special acknowledgement is owed to Suzanne Savaria, longtime friend of the CommuniCare program, who gathered information from PSU colleagues on the program’s behalf and worked in close collaboration with Kristen Engfors-Boess, CommuniCare Program Manager. We are enormously grateful to everyone for their time and candid suggestions.

QUESTION FOR JDS: Who else should I connect with at PSU to solicit ideas and feedback?

**Suzanne Savaria** - faculty, College of the Arts, Co-Director - Artist as Citizen Initiative

**Darrell Grant** - faculty, Associate Director - School of Music and Theater, Co-Director - Artist as Citizen Initiative

**Abby Chroman** - School of Business, Program Manager - Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship

**Billie Sandberg** - faculty, Hatfield School of Government, and former director of Non-Profit Institute

**Peter Chaille** - faculty, Public Administration in the Hatfield School of Government, advisor for Civic Leadership Minor, coordinator for Leading Social Change Jr. Cluster

**Seanna Kerrigan** - University Studies, Capstone Program Director

**Vicki Reitenauer -** faculty, University Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies

**Jaymee Jacoby** - Assistant Vice President for Development, PSU Arts

**Ally Cleasby** - Assistant Director of Development, PSU Arts

**Gerry Recktenwald** - faculty, Associate Professor, Maseeh College of Engineering and Computer Science; Director of Innovation Bootcamp

**Mari Schay** - faculty, Head of Music Education in School of Music and Theater

**Coty Raven Morris** - faculty, Choir in Music Education and Social Justice Choir for houseless community

**Maryanna Ramirez** - Director of the Jordan Schnitzer Museum of Art at PSU

**Research in Progress:**

**Where can this live within the PSU ecosystem?**

Creating an interdisciplinary course with open enrollment is a challenging endeavor within a university setting, as the structures within individual colleges do not promote flexibility and accessibility. However, two potential settings within University Studies were identified for this pilot - Junior Clusters and Senior Capstones. Both are required for all PSU students and fulfill Process Questions 1, 2, and 4.

Junior Clusters, however, are led by many different directors from across the university and are not as well-managed. Efficiency, communication, and cohesion are less reliable, and they can easily become siloed by their administrators. Senior Capstones, in contrast, are managed by a single Director and are well-defined, which allows them to balance openness, sustainability, and quality of experience. PSU’s Senior Capstone program is also nationally recognized as one of the best in the country.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Capstone courses are designed by Portland State University's faculty to build cooperative learning communities by taking students out of the classroom and into the field. In Capstone courses, students bring together the knowledge, skills, and interests developed to this point through all aspects of their education, to work on a community project. Students from a variety of majors and backgrounds work as a team, pooling resources, and collaborating with faculty and community leaders to understand and find solutions for issues that are important to them as literate and engaged citizens.

**What course structure best supports grantmaking?**

Many PSU professionals weighed in on the merits and challenges of offering a one-term course versus a two-term course.

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| **One-term Senior Capstone** | **Two-term Senior Capstone + Practicum** |
| * 10 weeks * Cost of the course is almost fully covered by student credit hours, so it is a sustainable option that requires little additional investment from The CARE Foundation * Consistent enrollment would not be an issue; Capstones typically enroll 14-16 students * Can be offered more than once per school year * The short timeline means professors need to know the grantmaking service area ahead of time so they can have the syllabus prepared. | * 20 weeks * Maintaining consistent enrollment for both terms would be a challenge since the second course, the Practicum, is not required for degree seekers. * Accurately forecasting Practicum enrollment would be very difficult. * A two-term course would require more significant outside funding to be sustainable * Two terms do allow more time for the grantmaking process and more flexibility to select different service areas. |

All benefits and challenges considered, we recommend this pilot take place as 1-term Senior Capstone. It is the most sustainable option and can be offered more than once per school year if The CARE Foundation desires. The 10-week timeline is doable, with some CommuniCare staff support to ensure nonprofits are aware of the opportunity and how they can apply.

QUESTION FOR JDS: If a one-term course is amenable to you, then it needs to have a grantmaking focus at the outset so professors can plan appropriately. How would you feel about students doing Arts & Culture grantmaking? Professors were very excited about the idea, but I’m also biased, as an arts-lover.

**Why Arts & Culture?**

Can art save the world? Regardless of how one answers that question, it can change the way we see the world.

On a philosophical level:

* This course can help illuminate the importance of arts on communities and individuals. It realizes the powerful role of the arts as a chronicler of our time - offering insights and understanding into our world, our issues, and ourselves.
* The arts contribute to the economy - in Oregon alone, pre-pandemic, the arts economy more than doubled that of forestry and agriculture.
* The arts inspire, support curiosity, and develop creative agency. As society moves ahead with eyes on STEM education, the companies that hire want and need creative thinkers.
* It could be a meaningful, mission-aligned way to integrate different parts of the Schnitzer family legacy – democratizing philanthropy through youth grantmaking while supporting the arts and culture that make communities vibrant.

On a practical level:

* The arts are uniquely well-positioned for this pilot because they can engage every other service area. So, while there is a general focus for the grantmaking in this course, it is not unduly limited in content, scope, or impact.
* Arts & Culture is a large enough service area to allow for student choice and interests.
* It is a service are that CommuniCare high school students are not as interested in supporting. This course could provide funding to arts organizations without complicating the high school experience.

By engaging an interdisciplinary approach with guest speakers from across the College of the Arts, College of Urban and Public Administration, the School of Business, the Hatfield School of Government, Women’s and Gender Studies, and University Studies, this course can offer a signature experience for students that is supported by both faculty and administration in its design.

**Who can teach this course?**

Selecting the right facilitator is an important part of the success of this pilot. While there are many qualified staff members, it

Capstones benefit from having a primary and secondary facilitator. Suzanne Savaria, my collaborator in this pilot research, has worked with me previously on CommuniCare projects and is deeply committed to the vision of the program. She is an interdisciplinary member of the PSU staff who has experience teaching Capstones and, having a foot in multiple colleges, is a champion for open and accessible programming. Ms. Savaria also has experience with youth mentorships through her work in the Artist as Citizen Initiative at PSU.

1. Research Fellow Jordan Skornik from the Murdock Trust shared these findings with me in August 2021. Murdock has no stated plans to begin grantmaking in higher education but, if they did, the earliest they would consider implementing a pilot is fall 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.pdx.edu/news/psu-earns-top-us-news-rankings-innovation-social-mobility-and-service-learning [↑](#footnote-ref-2)