NYU Robert F. Wagner Graduate School of Public Service

Composing Your Career
NONCR-GP.108

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Office Hours during Fall and Spring Semesters: Mondays 4:00-6:00 p.m.
All other times by appointment.

Course Description and Objectives
NYU Wagner prepares students for the real – sometimes messy, always complex – world of public service. To achieve this mission, we are dedicated to creating opportunities for students to discover the interrelationships of conceptual theory, practical realities, and individual career goals. This course will enhance students’ abilities to:

- Develop career planning skills and strategies through concentrated research, written assignments, and large group discussions
- Map an intended career field and develop a broad understanding of the various roles and organizations that influence that field
- Talk about their professional interests in a nuanced and sophisticated way

Throughout this course, students will use their experiences and education as the context for a series of analyses based on the following three lenses:
- Field(s) that guide(s) the student’s commitment to public service,
- Organizations that are doing work in these fields, and
- Roles that students may want to play within these organizations.

Discussions and written assignments will use these lenses to teach students how to process and reflect on past, current, and future work experiences. Students will be encouraged to shift back and forth between lenses, between personal experience and generalized learning, and between strategic thinking and action items. All of this will lead to an action plan to maximize their time at Wagner in the pursuit of a successful public service career.

All discussions will be brought back to Composing Your Career (CYC). CYC is a framework for maximizing one’s time at Wagner and includes the S.E.E. strategies:
- Being Smart by choosing appropriate classes, using assignments strategically, and getting in the habit of reading professionally-related materials
- Gaining practical and relevant Experience in your field of interest and/or role
- Engaging with others who have similar interests through student groups, faculty, professional associations, and attending events on and off campus

Assignments
A series of assignments will be posted on NYU Classes. It is expected that students will complete all assignments before arriving in class, as they are essential for full participation.

Grading
This course is non-credit and will not appear on the student’s transcript. While there is no letter grade for this course, the student will benefit based on the time and effort s/he puts into the readings, assignments, and discussions.

Course Expectations
The following norms for behavior and performance are expected:

• Attendance at every session is required
• Be fully prepared to discuss readings and assignments
• Accord the same professional respect to classmates’ contributions as to instructors’ comments

Course Content and Schedule of Assignments

Week 1:
GETTING STARTED

Before Class:
Watch the 3 CYC videos (The Tracks Exercise, What Employers Look F.O.R., and The S.E.E. Strategies) on NYU Classes:

In Class:
We will focus on setting the stage for you to:

• Explore connections between the experiences and interests of your peers, between diverse public service fields, and between Wagner's various programs
• Frame your interests and career goals
• Understand how employers in your field(s) of interest make hiring decisions and what they look for in potential employees
• Set a series of strategies to maximize your time while in school so that you are better poised for a successful career in public service
• Review Tracks Assignment Due 4th Session:

TRACKS EXERCISE

I. Brainstorm
Download, photocopy, or cut out of the newspaper any job posting that appeals to you on one of two levels:
A. You're drawn to this kind of an organization. You like its mission. You’d like your work to have an impact on this issue, population or area. You like the agency’s approach to the work. And you could see yourself, someday, working for an organization
like this. Don’t worry about where it’s located or whether you like the job description that’s attached to the organization. Just focus on the agency’s overall purpose. Circle the part you like and put it in a folder.

B. You’re drawn to this kind of job description. You like the way the responsibilities are bundled. You like the skills needed to perform the function of the position, and you could see yourself, someday, doing something like this in your day-to-day. Don’t worry about the agency the description is associated with or whether you have the skills to perform the job. Just focus on the actual job description. Circle the part you like and put it in your folder.

Do this until you have a bare minimum of 50 selected items. The more you collect, the better. Remember, when brainstorming, we don’t evaluate along the way, we just collect ideas. Once you have at least 50, continue to the next phase.

II. Analysis
Take the selected items out of your folder and see if you can find any patterns or common themes. Some things to look for might include: issue, population to be served, approach to the work, geography, kind of organization, unit or department within an agency, and role.

III. Synthesis
Using the data gathered from your brainstorming and analysis phases, create at least one and no more than five potential job tracks for yourself. A job track is a way to put parameters around and frame your potential career interests, and can include any of the following that have meaning for you: issue or field of interest; subcomponents of the issue that are of interest; approach to the work; kinds of organizations that do this work; where these organizations are located; size of the organizations; potential departments within organizations; roles that you aspire to play; and the requirement of skills, education, experience, and knowledge to fulfill those roles; an assessment of current fit for those roles; and a plan of action to maximize time at Wagner and beyond to meet your goals.

Take stock of your qualifications and experiences as they relate to your potential tracks. Your tracks should connect to Composing Your Career and lead to a plan of action to maximize your time at Wagner using the S.E.E. strategies (Smart, Experienced, and Engaged): Your track(s) assignment should inform which courses you take, the professors you should get to know, how you use your assignments, the internship/job experiences you look for, the events you go to, the groups you join, the people you seek out, and how you craft your message.
Week 2:
FIELD, ORGANIZATION, AND ROLE

Before Class:
Read the required readings under the Field, Organization, and Role topic headings and contribute to the online discussion. Contributions will be used as a starting point for our in-class discussion.

FIELD
Many of us are drawn to public service work with a desire to have an impact on a particular issue area, population to be served, or injustice that we want righted. After finishing the assigned readings, take a moment to recall when you became aware of your field of interest/desire to do this kind of work. How might this influence your ability to see a bigger picture – both what happened before your discovery, as well as what has happened subsequently. How might your time of discovery be both a motivating factor as well as a limitation?

Readings for Field:


ORGANIZATION:
It’s not unusual for us to be aware of the 3 or 4 most “in-the-news” agencies doing the work we’re interested in. But there’s a whole world of agencies that share a similar “space.” After finishing the assigned readings, share your sense of how understanding a fuller landscape of agencies doing work in a particular arena might be helpful in composing your career – not only from the perspective of looking for a job, but also for being successful in a job or understanding the interconnectedness between various organizations.

Readings for Organization:


ROLE:
Merriam Webster defines role as “a function or part performed especially in a particular operation or process.” After finishing the assigned readings, reflect on the distinction between formal role and informal role. What are some ways to gain informal authority regardless of your title?

Required Readings for Role:
  o “Social and Community Service Managers”
  o “Medical and Health Services Managers”
  o “Urban and Regional Planners”
• “Leading from the “Middle,”” Center for Applied Research, (September 2004): slides 1-35.

In Class:
Readings and online assignments will be used for a large group discussion on the importance of understanding Field, Organization, and Role.

Week 3:
CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE (1)
Before Class:
Imagine you and a faculty member are waiting for the elevator at the Puck Building. The faculty member says, "Tell me about yourself." You have 90 seconds to describe your professional identity. Elements to consider are:

• What do you know about what you want to do in the field of public service
• Why do you want to do this?
• What do you already have going in your favor?
• Why are you at Wagner at this point in time?
• What organizations are you looking at?
• What are you doing/will you do to maximize your time at school to further your professional goals?
Practice your 90 second pitch. Seriously. Practice it.

Required Readings:


In Class:
Every student will present and get feedback on their 90 second pitch.

Week 4:
SYNTHESIS and CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE (2)

Before Class:
Refine and practice your 90 second pitch

In Class:
Students will refine their 90 second pitch. Discussion will focus on helping students articulate what they have learned from this workshop, their own experiences, and those of their peers. Students will share their reflections on how they plan to implement learning from this class to composing their career.

Tracks/synthesis assignment is due: Create an action plan that clarifies a potential career path(s) and maximizes your time at Wagner and beyond. This written “tracks” assignment can include: specific field(s) of interest/issue area; subcomponents of the issue area that are of interest and why; approach to the work that resonates with you; kinds of organizations that do this work and why they appeal to you; where these organizations are located; size of the organizations; potential departments within organizations; roles you aspire to play and why; requirement of skills, education, experience, and knowledge to fulfill those roles; an assessment of current fit for those roles; and a plan of action to maximize time at Wagner and beyond to meet your goals.

Future Homework (optional):
- Field: Explore the history of the issue area in which you are interested. Include why this issue is a matter of public concern; the roots and evolution of the movement surrounding this issue; the language, jargon, key terms, and symbols that are evident when discussing this issue; the various policies and current debates connected with this issue; and major stakeholders. Identify when you become interested in this field, personally and professionally. Include why you are drawn to this issue.
• Organization: Identify a wide swath of agencies within your field of interest. Start creating a series of desired organizational profiles that include an organization’s approach to the work, recipient of the services, sector(s), size, location, and anything else you find relevant. If possible, list specific organizations. Explain why you are drawn to these kinds of agencies, being mindful of the relationship between organizational mission statement and issue.

• Role: Conduct informational interviews to get a better understanding of role. Pick two possible roles you might want to play within an organization. Interview at least one person who holds each of these roles. Describe the scope of their responsibilities, tasks they perform, requirements to fulfill the positions, skills that are required and useful, educational needs, years of experience required to fulfill these roles successfully, and anything else that may be enlightening.