EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING
AT THE ROCKEFELLER CENTER

The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center
for public policy and the social sciences

SEPTEMBER 2014
In his Inauguration address, President Hanlon issued a call-to-action to build Dartmouth’s academic enterprise around four themes: experiential learning, learning technologies, research impact, and affordability. The programs at the Nelson A. Rockefeller Center incorporate all of these themes—most prominently experiential learning—in the realms of public policy and leadership development. Many of the Center’s programs are among the College’s best examples of experiential learning.

Rockefeller Center programs engage students in and out of the classroom, on and off campus. The opportunity to participate in the Center’s high-touch learning experiences is often a factor that draws students to Dartmouth rather than its peer institutions. In Dartmouth’s Class of 2014, one out of five students participated in a Rockefeller Center program while at the College.

Some of the Center’s programs have existed for a decade or more, while others have been launched within the last year. In all cases, programs are being revised in light of experience and new opportunities, and new programs are under development. As you learn about these opportunities, I invite you to share your questions, comments, and participation. You can reach me at Andrew.Samwick@Dartmouth.edu.

Andrew Samwick
Director

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Austin Boral ’16 says:
“As a legislative intern on Capitol Hill, I was able to sit in on meetings with activists, lobbyists, constituents, and CEOs, which allowed me to take the pulse of New York in a way I had never imagined. I also attended committee hearings, legislative briefings and exclusive media and lobbying events, which featured some of the most prominent thinkers of the political sphere. In all, the internship made me feel like a true Washington “insider”—a feeling I did not anticipate experiencing as a college freshman.

My experiences with the First-Year Fellows program have also enhanced my approach to academic work at Dartmouth by providing a unique outlook on the role of policy making. As a public policy minor, I will be able to apply my hands-on experience from the Hill to courses and policy-research opportunities on campus.”

Why
The First-Year Fellows program (FYF) instills the value of civic engagement early in the careers of students interested in public policy at Dartmouth and teaches them how to translate theory into practice. The program empowers students and prepares them for subsequent academic and career paths in public service and public policy.

What
Established in 2007, FYF is a highly competitive program that selects approximately 20 first-year students each academic year. Fellows are placed in summer fellowships in Washington, D.C., under the mentorship of Dartmouth alumni who work for Senate and Congressional offices, government agencies, think tanks, or nonprofit organizations. Fellows are engaged in work on many prominent public policy issues, including those related to poverty, health, education, law, energy, and the environment.

How
Students who excel in Public Policy 5: Introduction to Public Policy, a statistical methods course, and a five-session program called “Dartmouth Leadership Attitudes and Behaviors,” are invited to apply for FYF. Prior to beginning their summer fellowships, Fellows must complete Civic Skills Training (CST). An intensive, five-day training in Washington, D.C., CST engages students in workshops on public speaking, networking, project management, and writing in the workplace.
Sarah Ogren ’16 says:

“The Policy Research Shop has allowed me to apply the policy-analysis skills that I have learned in my policy classes to contribute to the knowledge base of various government institutions. Currently, I am working on a project that analyzes more than 33,000 entries of children in the New Hampshire Division of Children, Youth and Families programs. The goal of the project is to identify demographic factors and placements that yield the highest rates of re-entry into programs. My research team and I will present our report in July to the Division of Children, Youth and Families and provide them with our analysis of the dataset. This analysis will hopefully yield policy changes that will reduce program re-entry. With such a large dataset that has never been previously analyzed, I have found this to be an exciting project to work on with the Policy Research Shop. I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to work at the Policy Research Shop and feel that it is a key component of my Dartmouth education.”

Why

The Policy Research Shop (PRS) demonstrates the role of nonpartisan research in improving public policy and engages students directly in that process through interactions with policy makers in Vermont and New Hampshire. Students gain essential research skills, work collaboratively with their peers, and testify publicly on their findings.

What

Established in 2004–2005, PRS students conduct objective, nonpartisan research for Vermont and New Hampshire legislators on critical issues facing each state. PRS students research, compose, and testify on policy briefs in front of the state legislatures, allowing them to practice necessary research and presentation skills while maintaining high levels of civic engagement. Topics of recent policy briefs include a carbon tax in New Hampshire, homelessness in Vermont, divestment from fossil fuel investments, and the Northern Pass project.

How

PRS students begin by taking Public Policy 45: Introduction to Public Policy Research or two other policy courses in order to learn how to conduct public policy research and analyze public policy challenges facing local and state policy makers. Following their completion of the course, students can join the PRS as paid interns or as candidates for independent study. Faculty and post-doctoral fellows mentor students through the research, presentation-making, and delivery processes and serve as support systems for the students.
Nikki Sachdeva ’15 says:

“MLDP prepared me for the unconventional work environment at Instiglio and enabled me to practice essential workplace (and life) skills, such as developing a personal narrative, networking, giving and receiving feedback, and project management.

After I returned from Medellín, the RGLP program has allowed me to reflect on my internship experience, ensuring my lessons are neither lost nor forgotten. RGLP has heightened my self-awareness about my cultural competency and tendencies towards American exceptionalism.”

Why

The Management and Leadership Development Program (MLDP) and the Rockefeller Global Leadership Program (RGLP) facilitate the development of students into citizen leaders. MLDP emphasizes management skills and professionalism, preparing students to work in teams and in their later professions. RGLP encourages a globally conscious mindset, allowing students to work across borders and cultures.

What

Launched in 2009, MLDP is offered during the fall, winter, and spring terms of each academic year. Session topics include innovation, collaboration, networking, leadership and followership, writing in the workplace, and the art of the public narrative.

Established in 2012 and offered three times a year, RGLP helps Dartmouth students to develop international leadership competencies. Students practice how they would respond to situations they face in various cultural contexts, including foreign study programs, internships abroad, international volunteering, research positions, and future careers. Session topics include understanding American exceptionalism, intercultural communication, teamwork across borders and cultures, resilience and hope.

How

Led by an expert guest speaker, weekly MLDP sessions introduce key areas of management and leadership and guide participants through a variety of exercises, activities, and simulations. Participants develop as managers and leaders by practicing, reflecting, and receiving feedback on key competencies.

Each week, RGLP participants gain firsthand experience in cross-cultural communication and discuss issues related to cultural identity, cultural competency, and leadership. Participants are exposed to concepts about leadership in a global context through interactive activities, ranging from scenario act-outs and group presentations to themed discussions and assessments of cross-cultural competence.

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Nick Judson ’14 says:
“In my junior year, I was honored to be chosen as a Rockefeller Leadership Fellow. I have gained a tremendous amount from this experience. I really enjoyed the session with Nate Fick, former Marine and current trustee of Dartmouth. In this session, Fick led us through scenarios he had been faced with during his military service, prompting us to practice making quick decisions. The fall retreat was an incredible learning experience, during which the Fellows had the opportunity to learn through several workshops with Brian Mandell, Director of the Kennedy School Negotiation Project at Harvard University. In these workshops, I notably improved my skills in negotiation and interviewing. Altogether, these experiences provided me with the opportunity to learn about my own leadership style as well as the style of others and to build on my skills and capabilities while being surrounded by an incredible and supportive group of 20 Fellows.”

Why
Through this program, fellows gain an understanding of self, how to work in teams, and how to work within organizations to achieve societal good. The RLF Program asks fellows to reflect on how their past successes and failures prepare them for leadership opportunities after graduation.

What
RLF runs through the fall, winter, and spring academic terms of the fellows’ senior year. By engaging fellows in the process of guided reflection, RLF enables them to examine and practice their leadership competencies and prepare for their post-graduate endeavors.

How
Each week, fellows participate in workshops, discussions, and team-building exercises. Fellows interact with each other and the speakers to gain insight into the qualities, responsibilities, and adaptability of effective leaders.
**Why**
The courses *Public Policy 43: Social Entrepreneurship (PBPL 43/ECON 77)* and *Public Policy 85: Global Policy Practicum (PBPL 85)* combine the study of public policy with experiential learning. The courses introduce students to the process of developing and applying solutions to public policy challenges, a practice important to cultivating civically engaged, global leaders.

**What**
Launched in summer 2014, *PBPL 43* introduces students to the underlying causes of domestic and global poverty and the processes by which entrepreneurs recognize opportunities and generate innovations. For a final project, students work in teams to develop their own business model to provide a viable solution to a social problem.

*PBPL 85* offers a select group of students the opportunity to study the evolution of an international public policy challenge during the fall term and then travel to the region during Dartmouth’s December interim to conduct field research. For a final project, the students jointly write and distribute a detailed policy brief. Initial course topics include economic reform in India (fall 2013) and the peace process in Northern Ireland (fall 2014).

**How**
Twice each week, students in *PBPL 43* and *PBPL 85* engage in topical research, hands-on activities, group discussions, writing exercises, and class projects in order to understand, contextualize, and design solutions for domestic and international policy issues, respectively.
For the past three decades, the Nelson A. Rockefeller Center has been a home for students interested in public policy. One key to the positive impact the Center’s programs have on each successive cohort of Dartmouth students is the involvement and support of the Dartmouth alumni community. To read about the impact of the Center’s programs, see http://bit.ly/RockyMe and http://bit.ly/RockyFieldNotes for reflections by recent and current students, respectively.

In some of the Center’s programs, alumni involvement is front and center. The most prominent examples are the more-than 50 alumni who have served as mentors in the First-Year Fellows program, enabling students to engage in public policy as early as possible in their college careers. Several classes also provide funds in the form of named internships for students to have these experiences later in their Dartmouth careers.

Alumni involvement is also critically important to the Center’s programs in more subtle and less visible ways. In experiential courses that go beyond the traditional classroom setting like Public Policy 43 and Public Policy 85, alumni participate by attending class sessions to discuss their past entrepreneurial experiences or to help facilitate field work, respectively. Alumni serve as facilitators in sessions related to their expertise in Civic Skills Training, the Management and Leadership Development Program, and the Rockefeller Leadership Fellows Program. To learn more about participating in these programs, please contact the Center’s deputy director at Sadhana.W.Hall@Dartmouth.edu

Finally, Dartmouth alumni continue to be an important source of financial support for the Rockefeller Center. The Center’s focus on experiential learning has made three signature programs—First-Year Fellows, the Policy Research Shop, and Rockefeller Leadership Fellows—development priorities for endowment funding. Every year, the Friends of the Rockefeller Center appeal generates vital, unrestricted funds to support all of the Center’s programs. To learn about sponsoring these or other opportunities at the Center, please go to http://rockefeller.dartmouth.edu/give.html.