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# Interdisciplinary Projects-Based Community Entrepreneurship Courses

*Anthony J. Luppino and Brandon Weiss*

Over the last approximately fifteen years, the University of Missouri—Kansas City (UMKC) School of Law has developed a multifaceted set of courses, including interdisciplinary courses, *pro bono* clinics, and other programs and events relating to for-profit entrepreneurship and economic development, and social and civic entrepreneurship. This presentation will describe two recent interdisciplinary additions to these offerings—the Law, Technology and Public Policy (LT&PP) course and the Entrepreneurial Urban Development (EUD) course. Both have strong elements of increased access to law and justice, with particular focus on presently disadvantaged and underrepresented individuals, groups, and communities. They significantly enhance the training of individuals to become effective community economic development and social justice advocates and facilitators. They deliver productive projects-based learning through multidisciplinary teamwork among faculty, students, and government officials and/or community activists, grounded in design thinking, and embracing the emphasis on empathy and constructing solutions responsive to the needs of various stakeholders that design thinking entails.

The LT&PP course grew out of the July 2014 Law Schools, Technology & Access to Justice Conference organized by UMKC School of Law with support from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. That event brought together champions of both law technology and access to justice from across the United States. The course concept was to build on the “legal hackathons” movement, often involving weekend events that challenge participants to create technology-assisted solutions to societal challenges, by instituting a semester-long course in which interdisciplinary teams seek to design and build problem-solving prototypes. UMKC has now offered the course eight times.

UMKC participants in the LT&PP course have come predominantly from the School of Law, the School of Management, and the School of Computing & Engineering at UMKC. Individuals from several other academic institutions (including Brooklyn Law School, Missouri Western State University, MIT Media Lab, Queen Mary University of London, and Vermont Law School) have also been involved with course design or mentoring on particular projects. Course teams have interacted with government

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officials in Kansas City, Missouri, and Kansas City, Kansas, representatives of the KC Chapter of Code for America, and leaders of several community organizations/initiatives. Examples of the course projects include creating streamlined and consumer-friendly online tools to apply for permits and licenses (more established/better resourced individuals/businesses can and do pay professionals to help them navigate through the complex web of current processes, but entrepreneurs of modest financial means struggle to do so); suggesting model policies for Smart City data collection (e.g., through sensors) and dissemination that can stimulate economic development and public safety, but must be tempered by attention to community perspectives and privacy concerns; and electronically mapping abandoned properties and developing means to predict when properties may be headed toward abandonment and to make redevelopment of such properties more accessible to developers and local tradespersons.

The new EUD course, offered for the first time in the 2017 spring semester, is one of the key components of an Urban Entrepreneurship Initiative co-organized by the UMKC Law School and the Lewis White Real Estate Center at the Bloch School of Management. The course consists of interdisciplinary teams of students, faculty, and community mentors providing analysis to local governments and nonprofits on real estate-based community development projects in the greater Kansas City area. Students receive instruction in real estate feasibility analysis, community economic development, tax incentives (federal, state, and local), principles of urban planning, public-private partnerships, zoning, and racial and environmental justice. Faculty are drawn from UMKC's Law School, School of Management, Department of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design, Latinx and Latin American Studies Program, and Department of Geosciences.

In the course's first year, student teams applied their classroom learning to provide advice to a wide variety of project providers, including a city government hoping to turn an investment in a downtown healthy campus into a catalyst for broader revitalization; a community development corporation considering establishing a community land trust and worker-owned housing rehab cooperative; a nonprofit founded by a historically Black sorority converting a historic athenaeum into a community space; and a city looking to connect racially and economically segregated neighborhoods via an innovative transit corridor.

The goals of both of the above-described courses include breaking down traditional interdepartmental barriers, exposing students to how professionals across fields collaborate on real-world projects, and, ultimately, leveraging the resources of the university to effect positive change in the surrounding communities. Challenges for future iterations of these courses include further shifting institutional incentives to reward interdisciplinary collaboration, refining project-provider and student-selection procedures to better leverage resources, and maintaining engagement with projects over multiple semesters for more sustained community impact. In our presentation, we will share reflections on lessons learned and suggestions on developing these types of courses.