SCYP Faculty Guide: The Basics

"Perhaps the most comprehensive effort by a U.S. university to infuse sustainability into its curricula and community outreach." – The New York Times, 2010

"One of higher education's most successful and comprehensive service-learning programs." – Chronicle of Higher Education, 2013

How SCYP works

The Sustainable City Year Program (SCYP) engages students on real-life, projects for the duration of one academic year, in collaboration with our partner city, agency, or community. These projects help our partner to enhance quality of life, support economic and community development efforts, and address sustainability goals. By combining student passion with faculty expertise, SCYP energizes our partner, builds momentum in communities, and enables students and faculty to create real world solutions in Oregon communities.

Participation

Faculty from across campus, including adjunct faculty and instructors, are encouraged to participate in the program. If you teach an existing upper division undergraduate or graduate course with an applied learning component, would like to incorporate a real world project into your curriculum, or would like to serve a community by applying student energy to their challenges, SCYP can help you build this experience into your syllabus. Certain lower division classes may be a good fit, depending on the class and partner project.

How SCYP benefits your classroom

SCYP exists to bring communities and students together to catalyze real change. By focusing an existing course on a city-identified project, your students are linked to a larger effort with a tangible impact in our partner city. As much as cities are seeking resources and assistance in accomplishing critical projects, students are seeking tangible, real world experience to make a difference, and practice their skills outside the classroom.

Seventy-eight percent of surveyed recent graduates identified "internships or practical experience in college" as the most important factor when it comes to success in a current or future job and career.

Faculty participation benefits

SCYP matches courses with real world projects from our partner and provides the support and infrastructure to make the project applicable for your existing course. The opportunity SCYP courses provide are of direct interest to students, and fuel their engagement and excitement in the classroom.

SCYP faculty responsibilities

- Constructing a syllabus that includes SCYP work, and guiding students in their research and outcomes.
- Incorporating a final presentation component that focuses on students presenting their final work to city staff.
- Assisting the SCYP Manager Megan Banks with identifying a high achieving student who can create the final summary report (paid, temporary position through SCI).
- Facilitating the transfer of materials to the report writer.

Time commitment

Little time is required to participate. We recognize that faculty have strict time constraints, and we minimize this barrier by connecting existing courses with city needs. Our SCYP Manager provides support before, during, and after your course. While there may some upfront time investment to develop the class activity, SCYP provides maximum support to reduce faculty time burden.

Plan for flexibility

We project scope in advance of the course to ensure that the project enriches course content, that students will have access to data necessary to complete the project, and that the project is logistically feasible for a 10-week timeframe. However, given the dynamic nature of cities and projects, unpredictable or changing circumstances may alter the timeline. This could include delays accessing data, recruiting study participants, or unexpected changes in the lives and work of our partners. Project trajectory may also change as more information is gathered. We create a roadmap, and it works most of the time, but you may experience unexpected detours along the way. Please contact Megan Banks, SCYP Manager, at mbanks@uoregon.edu sooner rather than later if things seem to be off track.

Student participation benefits

- Enhanced learning experiences
- Applied skills and experience that students can use on resumes and in interviews
- Development of personal relationships with local communities

Student workload

A successful SCYP project requires student engagement. Students will get out of the project what they put in. If they don't engage, they will feel as if they are just working on a textbook problem that is missing key pieces of information. If they do engage, they'll learn how to apply what they're learning to navigate the complexity of the real world and contribute solutions to real problems, all of which are skills that they'll need after graduation.

How to help guide your students

It is critical to include specific requirements in your syllabus and prepare students on the very first day, so that their expectations match the reality of the task at hand. Please consider including the SCYP Syllabus (available in the SCYP Faculty Portal) in your own course syllabus. You are also welcome to modify it or include only specific sections. In SCYP courses, students may struggle with the following:

- Ambiguity: Many students struggle to make the transition from solving textbook problems or completing defined laboratories to working on a real, complex project with no known solution. Students need to be prepared for real world data limitations (they won't have all the data/background they want) and a somewhat unpredictable problem solving process that requires creativity, initiative, and persistence. A few proactive measures can help students thrive in ambiguity:

  - Share the project scope with students, or a modified version. This lets students know that the project was collaboratively developed in advance of course, and it helps them better understand the project.
  - Let students know that you and your partner expect ambiguity in the project – and that's okay. Help them feel comfortable working within ambiguity, and emphasize that this an important skill for their future careers.
  - Emphasize that a valuable outcome for our partner doesn't necessarily mean a clear answer from students. Even if students feel the contribution is insignificant, assure them that it is significant to the partner.

- Communication: Students may need to reach out to other contacts. Please review with students how to write a professional email. Also, remind students to be both patient and persistent: people are often out of the office, busy with other responsibilities, and may need multiple follow-up emails or phone calls. Please prepare them for the fact that they may not get a response from all of people they contact.

SCYP will provide faculty with extensive support

The SCYP Manager will assist you in identifying projects, connecting with the community partners, and setting up learning activities.

- The SCYP Manager facilitates contact with city and community partners, works with you and city staff to develop the initial concept into a project that is appropriate for your course, and ensures that you have what you need for your project.
- The SCYP Manager will communicate with city staff throughout the project to maintain a collaborative relationship and provide technical assistance. We will communicate project successes to campus and local media, and set up presentations of project findings to the city and stakeholders as needed.
- We will also work with a paid student from your course to develop a report that serves as the final deliverable to the city (see following section for more information).

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End of term course deliverable

At the end of the term, the partner receives a summary report of the designs, solutions, and/or products generated by your class for each project. The SCYP manager will contract with a student in the course to write the report, outside of class. Reports will be posted on our website and faculty will receive a hard copy. We appreciate your help in selecting a student that is a good writer and is responsive to deadlines.

Remember that partners don't expect perfection

Faculty pride themselves on high quality deliverables. However, student abilities don't always mean these standards can be met. Our partners understand that the process of learning is messy and unpredictable. They also recognize that student work will not be the caliber of professional consultants. Having multiple groups independently tackle a problem can build in redundancy and increase quality. Plus, student perspective often helps provide creative and unique ideas to answer questions in a way a professional consultant wouldn't. This is what partners are often looking for.

You don't need a background in sustainability

You can help our partner meet their sustainability goals whether you have a background in sustainability or not. For example, a course project that provides recommendations for financial savings or increases citizen access to city services both support SCYP goals. The program strives to contribute to the quality of life of our partner communities.

Reach out

Please get in touch with the SCYP Manager, Megan Banks, at mbanks@uoregon.edu.