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THE DAILY BEACON

The editorially independent student newspaper of the University of Tennessee

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Corrected: UT adopts hands-on city sustainability course for fall

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Beginning next fall, UT students will be solving problems in Tennessee while earning credit hours and experience.

The Smart Communities Initiative (<http://servicelearning.utk.edu/smart-communities-initiative-3/>), modeled after Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program, will engage students and faculty of UT with Tennessee cities, counties and regions to provide hands-on experience outside the classroom.

"It all started about five years ago, when faculty was sitting around talking about how every term students turn in this great work, and it just sits and never goes anywhere. These great ideas never get implemented or anything," said Bob Choquette, the program manager of Oregon's Sustainable City Year Program.

After Oregon presented their program on UT's campus in the fall, UT adopted a customized version of Oregon's model. Every year, the university will work with one Tennessee "host" city, or municipal partner to match projects with academic courses. Although instructors will still adhere to course curriculums, the class will primarily focus on the host city's projects and culminate in a collaborative written report from the students.

"The projects will happen through our academic courses," said Kelly Ellenburg, the campus coordinator for Service Learning and an initiator of SCI. "So the matching process will begin with the identification of faculty teaching courses that align with the proposed projects, and then the students in these courses will complete the projects under the faculty member's guidance.

"For example, if it were a redevelopment project, the students under the faculty member's guidance could work with city staff, citizens, and stakeholders to come up with a design plan that improves the quality of life for those that live and work in the area."

Projects will range from architectural designs to social input research studies and economic policy analysis. The SCI program is meant to include as many university students and faculty as possible.

"The program will span across disciplines," Ellenburg said. "We've tried to maintain a wide cross section of faculty across disciplines so that it can be very diverse and interdisciplinary."

Funded by the host cities, the projects are expected to produce professional results. As a result, classes within the SCI program are currently limited to upper-class and graduate level studies.

In addition to benefiting municipal partners, the SCI program also allows students to network with potential employers and gain work experience. Oregon's students have already benefited from the program.

"We do a survey before and after ... and 73 percent said it will become part of their resume or their portfolio when they go out looking for a real job," Choquette said. "Students see the value in working with real clients, and our post class surveys say that they work harder and they get something tangible out of it."

Ellenburg said projects proposed include revitalizing the downtown area, social input research, policy analysis, strategic planning and designing incentive plans for local businesses.

"Most architecture classes at universities work on a fictitious project, but we have students that have designed real schools and real libraries," Choquette said. "Right now we have students designing four different fire stations in Medford, Ore. This isn't make-up work, these are real projects and the cities pay for this. They have got to get this stuff done. It's taken very seriously."

SCI will accept applications from prospective host cities through the end of February.

"I think it's going to be an all-around really valuable program for faculty, for students, and for cities and counties in the state," Ellenburg said. "As far as service learning goes, this is really quality stuff. Just the outcomes that are coming out of it—professional skill development and working with a professional client and set of stakeholders, networking, critical thinking — it's applying inquiry, analysis and research to a real world problem to make real solutions happen, and our state needs this. ... It's exciting."

Corrections:

In the January 14th edition of The Daily Beacon, the article headlined "UT adopts hands-on city sustainability course for fall" incorrectly reported that the projects for the Smart Communities Initiative cannot yet announce confirmed projects, but are currently considering a downtown revitalization project. In fact, it is too early to tell which cities will be applying as the first SCI host and projects discussed with potential applicants have included downtown revitalization, but are not yet under consideration. Additionally, the article incorrectly

reported that each student enrolled in an SCI course must complete a student report at the end of the course. Instead, each course will collectively yield a written report. The actual deadline for SCI applications is February 28, but a Request for Applications will be released early next week.

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