

CASL Practice Based Learning¹: Interdisciplinary Themes, Courses, and Affinity Groups

Overview. Students will be required to choose at least one theme upon entering CASL. This theme will enrich their first year experience, inform their choice of major and selection of courses and co-curricular activities, and shape their PBL experiences. Students and faculty working within a particular theme will serve as the student's scholarly family or affinity group, supporting them as they launch their academic career and throughout their time in CASL.

PBL Themes. Themes were selected to reflect our campus identity (Block M with an applied and regional focus), and to align with broad areas of employment opportunity in the region. These themes have the potential to integrate existing faculty research, drive new research, and generate external funding. In addition, they allow donors to target their support.

- Social and Environmental Justice
- Storytelling: Arts, Media, and Culture
- Health and Community
- People and Technology (Innovation and Design)

We will recruit students to PBL themes based on general and career interests, problems they would like to solve, or questions they would like to address, rather than by academic major. This approach may be particularly attractive to undecided majors, non-STEM majors (due to less defined career paths), and those seeking employment immediately upon graduation.

PBL Interdisciplinary Courses. Two separate courses will be offered within each theme, and will be team-taught by faculty from different disciplines. These courses will focus on examining applied problems from an interdisciplinary perspective.

- *PBL Career Exploration Course* will be completed within a student's first two semesters in CASL, and will introduce PBL and focus on major/career exploration. Students will work on interdisciplinary problems, and in doing so they will actively test different perspectives and roles to determine their interests and fit with various majors and careers.
- *PBL Capstone Course* will be completed junior or senior year. It will emphasize the development of professional skills through interdisciplinary project work as well as how to communicate those skills to potential employers or admissions committees.

Affinity Groups/Making Early Connections. The themes will be used to form affinity groups to facilitate a cohort experience for first year and new transfer students. Forming connections with other students can be challenging for new students. The affinity groups will be used to facilitate the formation of campus connections.

¹ Practice Based Learning (PBL) captures a broad, more applied approach to teaching and learning, where students put classroom learning and their individual skills/talents into practice; "practice" encompasses a variety of methods of applying learning.

Sample Interdisciplinary Course Projects by Theme

Social and Environmental Justice. Choose a local city or township and examine data on water and air quality to assess areas of concern. Determine the impact of pollution or contamination on residents by race and income. Develop strategies to improve or protect water and air quality, and to move toward greater equity. Communicate these strategies to political representatives and the general public.

Storytelling: Arts, Media, and Culture. Investigate a major event from at least two different perspectives (e.g., the experience during WWII of those residing in Detroit and London). Design a museum exhibit depicting the experience across locations. Include a listing of the items in the exhibit, their description, and placement relative to one another. Include a clear rationale for specific exhibit content; why it was selected and why it is displayed in the way that it is.

Health and Community. Consider the aging process from a physical, psychological, and societal perspective. Interview middle aged and older adults to understand their experiences. Design a personal plan that relies on scientific research to facilitate healthy aging. Be sure to address cultural factors such as ageism and preference for a youthful appearance and how these factors might impact healthy aging. Finally, develop a plan to involve local communities in the development of programs to facilitate healthy aging, and to better serve older populations.

People and Technology (Innovation and Design). How might the development and full scale use of autonomous vehicles change the physical and virtual footprint of a city? How would infrastructure needs change? How would privacy and cybersecurity concerns change? How would parking needs, the delivery of goods and services, and waste management change? How might this result in a loss of certain occupations and the gain of others? Design a plan to convert an existing city into one in which autonomous transportation is the norm. Ensure that the plan includes a transition period from traditional to autonomous transportation as well as a projection of the economic impact of this change.