

For my time in BRIDGE I decided to take on the Professional Development Series within the Arts Administration Program. This is a series of three courses required for all arts administration majors. I embarked upon this project with the goal of investigating course topics: Which topics should I include? What will be of most benefit to students? I quickly realized it was not only important to revise course topics, but that the sequence in which those topics were introduced was also important. While most people pick one course to look at, I realized early in the process that I could not focus on only one course because the overall intent of the series is that it acts as a unit to prepare students for successful entry into the workforce upon graduation.

### **What Did I Want to Investigate?**

Primary Questions for Investigation:

- How do I ensure that the topics I cover best serve my students with regard to preparing them for the working world?
  - How do I scaffold information so that students can be introduced to, retain, and master information in a way that is authentic and useful to them?
- How do I sequence topics so that they are level-appropriate and relevant to students' lived experiences?
- How can I align assignments with my overall goal of the series: To help provide students with the knowledge and skills to actively manage their own professional development and understand how the field of arts administration is progressing?
  - How can I use assignments to demonstrate the impact or value of the series, both each course individually and the group of courses taken as a sequence?

### **Courses under Investigation**

The first course in the professional development series is AAD 225: Arts Practicum I. The student population is predominantly first-semester sophomores, unless they transferred into the program or changed majors – in that case they may be second semester sophomores, first semester juniors, or (rarely) second semester juniors. At our hour-long weekly meetings, we discuss various professional development topics. In addition to the classroom requirements, students are required to work six shifts in the Rider University Box Office. Each shift is 3 hours, resulting in a total obligation of 18 hours outside of the classroom. Many entry-level arts management positions call for experience in a box office and prefer applicants to have experience with the relevant software. While working in the box office students gain some experience with the Seat Advisor Box Office (SABO) ticketing software.

AAD 325: Arts Practicum II – Service to the Field is the second course in the professional development series. Ideally this course is taken in the semester following completion of AAD 225. The student population for this course ranges from second-semester sophomores to second-semester juniors. This class meets for one hour once a week and we discuss professional development topics. In addition to the classroom component, students are required to work a minimum of 47 hours at a cultural institution of their choice.

AAD 491: Arts Administration Internship is the third, and final, course in the professional development series. Students in this class are predominantly second semester juniors and seniors. There is no class requirement for this course. Students meet with me at least three times over the course of the semester – primarily to discuss their midterm and final evaluation feedback from their internship site supervisor. Requirements include a final portfolio and a final paper.

## **How Did I Gather Information?**

My interest in BRIDGE, and the way that I gathered preliminary information about what I would investigate, was sparked by informal conversations with students, workplace partners, and other arts administration educators. Since arts administration programs located in traditional education settings are comparatively rare, many of us operate in isolation. It is because of this that I was unaware that the professional-development curriculum at Rider is unique among arts administration programs, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. As I spoke with colleagues at conferences and other gatherings it became clear that, while the need for universal workplace skillsets is acknowledged among educators, students and workplace supervisors, the skills are often addressed in pieces across the entire curriculum, and it is up to the students to make the connections among seemingly disparate pieces of information.

I strive to create a welcoming environment where students feel comfortable providing feedback, both in real-time and after a course has ended. It is through many conversations with students, as well as course evaluations, that I gained valuable insight about the courses under investigation in BRIDGE. From my students I learned about course topics that resonated particularly well with them in the short-term, as well as which topics they didn't like or that didn't resonate with them at the time, but that became very important later as they progressed within the program or upon graduation.

I also gained valuable feedback from workplace partners. This feedback ranged from information about the course topics students tackled in the classroom to a "wish list" of things that practitioners wish students knew before getting to them. Despite the (very accurate) literature on the Expectations Gap, information that students value and much of the information that practitioners want them to have align fairly well. This alignment is most evident with regard to the hard skills required to complete job-related tasks. These hard skills range from technical writing to working with children in an arts-based environment. This indicates that the disconnect highlighted in the Expectations Gap literature happens elsewhere in the information and application pipeline. Based on the course topics I have introduced to students, I argue that the disconnect happens primarily with soft skills and expectations about what it means to work full-time as an arts administrator. In most academic programs, not just practically-based programs like arts administration, there has been an explicit and implicit shift in focus from preparing students to be well-rounded citizens to ensuring that students can perform the work that they hope to do upon graduation. This leaves more universal soft skills, primarily under the large umbrella of interpersonal skills, without a home in most curricula.

I have delved deeper into the following literatures to not only inform my time in BRIDGE, but also to further inform my practice as an educator:

- Emotional Intelligence
- Expectations Gap
- Hard Skills (for Arts Administrators)
- Soft (Career) Skills
- Transition Courses
- Workplace Socialization

When possible, I investigated these literature bases in the context of the field from which they emerged *and* through the lens of Scholarship of Teaching & Learning.

### What Have I Learned So Far?

I have learned that students learn best across the series when I teach within three concentric circles of focus: individual, organization, field. Practicum I – as the first course in the series – best serves students when course topics are focused on the individual student. Foundational understanding of both hard skills, such as resume and cover-letter writing, and soft skills reached through identification of individual strengths and weaknesses as a worker and communicator lay the internally focused foundation upon which I can build in the subsequent courses. Practicum II focuses on further developing students' understanding of themselves, and couples it with a focus on soft skills (emotional intelligence, conflict management, and conflict resolution). Finally, the Internship allows students to connect their internal and organizational-level understanding to trends and events in the field. This is particularly important to new graduates, as one of the main things that differentiate arts administrators with a traditional education from others is their ability to function at the organizational level and connect that work to both the literature and field.

Resulting Topics List (in order of presentation):

<b>Practicum I</b>	<b>Practicum II</b>	<b>Internship</b>
Personal Assessment	Management Styles	Connection to the artistic discipline
Strengths Finder	Dealing with Conflict	Connection to the organizational function
Exploring Careers	Intern Rights	Connection to the overall field of arts management
Informational Interviews	Career Advancement	
Short-Term Goals	Myers Briggs Type Indicator	
Searching for Internships	Long-Term Goals	
Resumes	Skill Building	
Cover Letters	Resumes & Cover Letters, Part II	
Preparing to Enter the Field	Researching Organizations	

Due to limitations of time – the first two courses meet one hour, once a week – I have limited course readings to those that are pithy and academic-related, but not necessarily scholarly. This places the emphasis of the course on the application of knowledge in the classroom and in the associated working experiences.

I also restructured the assignments in each course to be more useful to students as they start their career. All courses will now require a double-entry journal (a Course Assessment Technique from the BRIDGE readings), a final reflection paper, and a course-appropriate network-building assignment:

<b>Practicum I</b>	<b>Practicum II</b>	<b>Internship</b>
Double-Entry Journal	Double-Entry Journal	Weekly Journal
Strengths Finder Assessment	Myers Briggs Type Indicator	Article Review: Discipline Example: History of Dance Company Management (may be style-based – ballet, modern, jazz)
Career Exploration Presentation	Organizational Interest List	Article Review: Job Function Example: Career Paths and Considerations for Artistic Directors; Investigations into the Division of Labor between Artistic & Executive Directors
Informational Interview	Professional Profile	Article Review: Field Trends Example: Community Outreach in Dance Organizations; The growing space issue for rehearsals and performances for Modern Dance Companies.
Resume & Cover Letter	(Final) Reflection Paper	(Final) Reflection Paper
(Final) Reflection Paper		

### **Where Will I Go From Here?**

As a result of my work with BRIDGE I further developed a rationale for transition courses in arts administration curricula. Preliminary investigations into the impact on students, workplace partners, and my program's relationships with arts practitioners indicate that each course individually, as well as the series collectively, meets its primary objective of benefitting students. However, the benefits to the program's relationships with arts practitioners as well as the ability of the program to help with the overall treatment of interns are also important.

I have learned that there is a growing body of literature advocating for transition courses in professional fields such as medicine and law. I have begun applying the theories from this literature to the field of arts administration, resulting in a book chapter (Heidelberg, 2015) and presentations at the 2015 European Sociological Association in Prague and the 2015 Teaching and Learning Cultural Entrepreneurship conference in Duluth, Minnesota.

In order to assess the impact of the Professional Development Series I am going to conduct a more formal, research-based investigation. The purpose of my investigation is to assess the impact that the series has on students: whether it diminishes the expectations gap, increases the ease with which they enter the workforce, and whether or not the information and skills learned in the series increase in value for the students over time. I would also like to assess the impact of the series on workplace partners. Given the time I take to educate workplace partners on effective practices for intern supervision, I would like to know if this work has any sort of ripple effect on the way workplace partners interact with Rider Arts Administration interns and/or other employees. Because the series spans 3 separate courses and includes not only the students and me as the teacher, but staff from other departments within the university as well as arts administrators from outside institutions, there are a lot of moving pieces. My current plan – to be submitted to the IRB in August 2015 – involves

a theoretical framework developed from the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning, as well as the fields of Evaluation and Organizational Psychology. Specifically, I am looking at theories of professionalization and workplace socialization through the lens of teaching practices used in professional academic programs.

#### *Data from course assignments*

Data include student responses to specific writing prompts given throughout the series – assigned as a double-entry journal, surveys for both the students and their site supervisors, and final papers (treated as open-ended survey responses).

#### *Longitudinal data collection*

This study will be conducted over the course of three academic years – the amount of time it will take for 3 cohorts to work through the entire Professional Development Series. This will allow me to investigate three sets of data from each course individually, while also building space into the investigation for replication of the impact of the series as a whole.

All data will be analyzed through NVivo (qualitative data analysis software) and I will track student self-evaluations, evaluations from their site supervisors, my notes on their development through assignment feedback, and interview data from their midterm and final meetings with me each semester.

#### **Conclusion**

My time in BRIDGE has been invaluable – it has helped me to better align my desire to continue growing as an effective educator with my goal of being a thought-leader in the training and development of early and mid-career arts administrators. I will further this work with a book proposal that addresses various aspects of Experiential Learning in the Arts. This work will allow me to continue to allow my research activities inform the way that I interact and engage with students in the classroom and through advising.

#### **Reference:**

Heidelberg, B. (2015). “Transition Courses in the Arts Management Curriculum – Development of a Professional Development Series” in *Teaching and Learning Cultural Entrepreneurship: A global comparative analysis of course and program content in university - and community-based education for the cultural and creative industries*. University of Chicago Press.