Nonprofit organizations are increasingly adding younger members to their boards of directors, however, they are rarely investing in opportunities for board leadership development. Our purpose is to directly address this challenge by spending time reading about governance, and sharing among ourselves the challenges of serving on boards to improve board leadership skills.

More specifically, the practicum focuses on distinctive features of nonprofit board governance and uses research and concepts along with students’ current board experiences to illuminate challenges and explore solutions to build board leadership competencies. The course will cover legal requirements of nonprofit boards, their basic roles and responsibilities, important issues of recruitment, composition and diversity, intra-board and board-staff dynamics, life cycle changes, and emerging issues relevant to governance. Other topics may be added, depending on student experiences and interests.

**Teaching Method and Course Materials**

The course's teaching methods will be a mix of discussion, guest speakers, and reflection related to students' experiences on boards. Students will be evaluated on their participation as well as performance on the reflection papers and final paper assignment. Because this course is largely experiential and reflective, students’ consistent attendance and participation are critical to the learning environment. Students must also complete all assignments and have regular attendance to receive credit for this course.

We have a Canvas site for the course, and all course readings are on the site for students to download. There are no textbooks.
Additional resources and tools to supplement the primary readings may be added during the semester based on topics of interest or inquiry. These are not required readings.

Course Requirements
All students in this course must currently hold (or be actively seeking) a position on a nonprofit board or board committee or be a staff person who directly works with a board. The course is graded on an S/N basis. Your final grade will be made up of the following:

- Reflection papers 20%
- Final short paper 20%
- Class attendance and participation 60%

Guests
We will have guests for each class session to provide perspective from the field and to engage in discussion and questions on the topic of the week.

Reflection papers
No later than the Saturday of the week following the class meeting (8 days after class) please upload to our Canvas site a 1-page, single-spaced reflection on the readings and class discussion relevant to your board experiences. No citations or style guide requirements are needed. These reflection papers are required following the February and March regular class sessions (Sessions 2-4).

Final paper
Due no later than 2 weeks after the final class or a date mutually agreed upon by the class, please write a 2 page, single-spaced paper that provides a brief analysis of the strengths and challenges facing your board, based on the most important insights from the course, and a description of recommendations for how the board you are connected with could be more effective.

Feedback on papers
Papers are not graded but the instructor will provide feedback on each paper submitted.

Class attendance and participation
Students’ attendance at monthly course sessions is mandatory (absence from more than 1 class session may adversely affect your S/N grade).

Course Topics

Session One: January 23, 2021, 9:00 am to 4:00 pm [See attached tentative agenda]
Introduction to board governance in nonprofit organizations: Theory, research and practice

Readings


Session Two: February 19, 2021
Governance roles, responsibilities, and representativeness

Readings:
• Review roles and responsibilities in Renz chapter from Session #1
• Sample bylaws [Please bring the bylaws for your organization]
• Case: Ripe for Change: Just Food’s Recovery from Executive Misconduct Hubert Project, View all modules https://hubert.hhh.umn.edu/RipeChange4/index.html#screen/a3b5203a-b014-4e71-918d-3e739d316126

Session Three: March 19, 2021
Board dynamics, power and life cycle differences
Relationship between board members and CEOs/EDs

Readings:

**Session Four: April 16, 2021**
Determining board effectiveness, assessing performance, inclusion and community engagement

**Readings:**
**Session #1, 9:00 – 4:00**  
**Saturday, January 23, 2021**

**Reading required in advance of this meeting – see syllabus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Topic(s)</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 – 9:45</td>
<td>Welcome and Introductions, Syllabus Review</td>
<td>1. Why are you taking this class? What do you hope to learn?</td>
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<td>2. What are your expectations about being on a board? Why do you serve as a member?</td>
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<td>3. What have been your best and worst experiences? [Confidentiality agreement among all members of class]</td>
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<td>9:45 – 10:30</td>
<td>Conceptualizing governance</td>
<td>1. What is governance?</td>
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<td>10:30 – 10:45</td>
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<td>2. Does the work of the board = “governance?”</td>
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<td>3. Why have a board (beyond legal requirements…)?</td>
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<td>4. Deeper dive on your board experiences</td>
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<td>10:30 – 10:45</td>
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<td>10:45 – noon</td>
<td>The roles and responsibilities of boards</td>
<td>1. What are the core functions of nonprofit boards?</td>
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<td>Core functions</td>
<td>2. What do these functions look like in practice?</td>
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<td>Ethical and accountability challenges</td>
<td>3. To whom are boards accountable and how? For what?</td>
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<td>4. When do boards get off track?</td>
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<td>Noon – 1:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 – 1:45</td>
<td>Guests</td>
<td>Discussion with nonprofit leaders TBD</td>
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<td>1:45 – 2:30</td>
<td>Roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>1. What does the research tell us that is especially important about board roles and responsibilities and the division of responsibilities between management and the board?</td>
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<td>What is governance and what is management?</td>
<td>2. Look carefully at Ostrower’s Urban Institute study – what is most/least surprising to you here?</td>
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<td>3. Is it time for new models of governance for nonprofits? Why, and what?</td>
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2:30 – Break

2:45 – Begin to develop your board - Board capacity building model

3:30 – Wrap up comments and questions

1. Putting the theory into practice - class board experiences
2. Work through components of Renz’s model for your board (or your “ideal” board).