

Write an abstract of the initiative describing its format, history, clientele, and purpose. 2000 characters.

Dominican University's School of Professional and Continuing Studies launched this one-of-a-kind MA in Conflict Resolution in May of 2012. The program runs on a convenient low-residency model in which students attend two intensive five-day courses on campus and complete the rest of their courses online. The two intensive courses use extensive role-playing simulations to give students practical experience.

The program prepares graduates for careers in professional mediation, which was profiled in "Best Careers 2009" by *US News & World Reports* and deemed one of "America's Most Surprising Six-Figure Jobs" by *Forbes*. The Illinois Department of Employment Security is projecting a 9.7% increase in demand for mediators from 2008-18. This is a lucrative and rewarding field, which is particularly appealing to individuals committed to social justice – the perfect target audience for Dominican University, which "prepares students to pursue truth, to give compassionate service and to participate in the creation of a more just and humane world."

The program is geared toward working adults who either want to enhance their conflict resolution skills to further their current careers or launch new careers in mediation. Professional mediation is largely a "second career," one in which the experience of an older professional is viewed as an asset, not a liability.

Explain how the initiative is innovative, unique, and contributes to the purpose of ICCHE. 2000 characters.

The innovative low-residency model offers the personal touch of face-to-face instruction with the convenience of distance learning. Students come to campus for two intensive five-day courses and then complete the remaining courses online. Working adults can complete the program in two years by taking one course at a time. Our student population ranges in age from 25 to 65, with the majority in their 30's

and 40's. Because the students only need to be on campus for a total of ten days, we have expanded our geographic reach beyond the Chicago area to attract students from around California to Washington, DC, and as far away as Nigeria.

Another unique feature of the program is its interdisciplinary faculty. We have attracted brilliant teachers from a wide range of professional and academic backgrounds, including professional mediation, law, theology, psychology, social work, education, business and international relations. This diversity of backgrounds in the faculty encourages students to explore different perspectives and go beyond disciplinary boundaries.

This is the only master's degree in conflict resolution offered in Illinois. Dominican's program therefore serves a vital local need as a training ground for a rapidly-expanding professional field that is particularly well-suited for older professionals.

Explain the outcomes of the initiative, including its significant impacts on participants, the institution, and the community. 2000 characters.

This program is offered in cooperation with the National Mediation Board, the oldest and most prestigious mediation agency in the United States. We have now trained every NMB mediator with fewer than five years of experience. One student, a student affairs officer at Dominican University, has enlisted the aid of a classmate in addressing racial conflict on campus through two town-hall meetings. Another student presented a paper on religious conflict at a conference in South Africa.

We have partnered with the Cook County court system and an agency of the US Department of Defense to offer practicum experience to our students. Members of the community receive pro bono mediation services from students looking to gain experience resolving real-life disputes. Our students have collectively logged over 2,000 volunteer hours so far.

Describe how the initiative was evaluated for its effectiveness, and explain/illustrate the ease of replication for use by other institutions. 2000 characters.

Perhaps the best metric of program effectiveness is the student retention rate, which stands at 98%. We regularly survey our students about specific courses, but we also sent out a survey on the program as a whole, which included questions on career preparation, convenience of educational delivery for working adults, and integration of University mission into the curriculum. Students responded with satisfaction ratings of 90% or higher for each question.

There are a number of features of the program that can be replicated. The low-residency model combines the best of both worlds by allowing for face-to-face interaction and a connection to the physical campus, while offering convenience and a greatly expanded geographic reach. Intensive role-playing courses can be used in a wide range of programs to help students develop practical skills under faculty supervision. The diverse faculty also blends practical experience with traditional scholarship across a range of disciplines.

Our community mediation center experience should be of particular relevance to overworked higher education administrators. In order to develop a new initiative to support the program, we delegated responsibility to the students themselves, who worked for graduate practicum credit. This provided them with valuable experience developing and managing a nonprofit experience while freeing University administrators to focus on other projects. The end result is an initiative closely tied to students' needs and one in which they feel a strong sense of pride and ownership. It also reinforces the importance of students taking an active role in their academic careers.

Describe the human and financial resources available for this initiative. 2000 characters.

Dominican University has been very supportive of this program. We received a \$55,000 new initiatives grant, which covered course development costs and hiring new adjunct professors. In addition, several existing faculty members have agreed to teach a course overload in order to be part of the program. Our Borra Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence also provides training and support for online instructors.

The University has also entered into a very fruitful partnership with the National Mediation Board, a federal agency that handles labor disputes in the airline and railroad industries. Federal mediators from the NMB team-teach our introductory mediation skills training course without compensation, and in exchange, the University offers free professional development training to the NMB and discounted tuition in the MA in Conflict Resolution program. A number of NMB mediators have enrolled in the program and enriched class discussions with their experiences.