

Grad Challenge Project Design

Picking a Topic and Project

Step One – Oh, the possibilities

While some students have difficulty narrowing down their choices, others are faced with the challenge of thinking of the possibilities. Either way, it is a helpful exercise to write down *any topic area that is of interest to you*. Think of what you like to do

1. Think of what interests you:

- a. Art
- b. Craftsmanship – building, making, sewing, drawing, designing, etc.
- c. Music –writing, singing, playing, DJ-ing, promoting, etc.
- d. Sports
- e. Organizations – non-profits, international, regional, political, humanitarian, etc.
- f. Careers
- g. Companies

2. Think of classes you like

3. List people you know who do interesting work

4. Look in *Burlington Free Press, Seven Days*, individual town newspaper publications

5. Visit United Way web site to see lists of non-profit organizations

6. Consider local events

7. Think of jobs

Step Two – Who's out there in the community

With a list of what interests you, begin to think of who you know (people or organizations) who work in your area of interest. To find someone who might guide your project, ask for suggestions from others, such as:

- **Your CVU Advisor**
- **The Grad Challenge Coordinator**
- **Other CVU faculty/staff**
- **Family – although a family member cannot be your Community Consultant, parents may know someone who works in your area of interest**
- **Friends**
- **Friends' families**
- **Neighbors**
- **People in your community**

Refer to the notebook of past Community Consultants and past Grad Challenge projects in the Direction Center.

Step Three – Narrow your lists to new learning

We all tend to choose topics that we know. Your list of interests may be in areas that you are already familiar with. Grad Challenge requires you to pick a project that is a challenge: *one that presents you with new learning*. Take a look at your lists from the above two steps and now narrow that list based first on which ones present you with a new opportunity.

Step Four - What to consider when picking a Grad Challenge topic

Assess your topic ideas based on the following criteria.

Newness

Your Grad Challenge project must be something that is *new learning* for you. If you choose a project that is in a topic area that is already familiar to you, you will need to address in your Letter of Intent exactly how this project presents you with new learning.

Passion

Choose something that you care about rather than something that you perceive will be easy. Students who do so are usually happier and more proud of their resulting work. More importantly, it is reportedly easier to feel motivated to get the work done and to accomplish the paper and presentation if the topic truly interests you.

Location

Think of where you could spend your Community Learning hours. Would you need transportation? *Caution: Do not rely on getting your license or getting a car at some future date. Plan for what you can do presently.* For example, a student will take the test for his license in a month and knows, in the meantime, his mother can drive him to his Grad Challenge site.

Schedule

Is there any flexibility to the schedule? Is there too much flexibility? Students need different levels of flexibility in their schedule. Some of us thrive on having a schedule while others appreciate being able to decide when to be somewhere. Flexibility, however, can sometimes encourage procrastination. For example, volunteering at a local day care center, one student knew she had to be there for two hours every Red Day morning, while another student was told she could come any time she had free. For the latter student, homework, other responsibilities, sleeping in, or lack of motivation came into play when deciding whether or not to go to this volunteer position.

Cost

Is there a cost to your project? Often if there is a Tangible Product being made, there is a cost for materials, studio, workshop time, class instruction, etc. Other hidden costs may include:

- Clothing – for example, working with Youth Conservation Corps, a student needs appropriate outdoor clothing
- Materials
- Transportation

Time

Check your calendar to make certain there are no conflicts. For example, working on a major fund-raiser, a student didn't realize it would be held on Saturday of spring vacation. Refer to the

schedule of deadlines; the draft of the Grad Challenge paper is due in early March so your project and research needs to be nearly completed by then.

Weather

If your project is weather dependent, develop with your Community Consultant a back-up project plan should the weather not cooperate. Talk your plan over with your CVU Advisor.

Step Five – How will you actually be spending your time

Think this through. If this project is successful, how will you have spent your time? Be clear and specific in your conversation with your Community Consultant about what you hope to learn and how you hope to spend your time. If a project idea does not appeal to you, talk about it and see if it can lead to another idea. If you want to create something tangible, see the section on Defining a Tangible Product.

Creating a Working Relationship with a Community Consultant

Your Grad Challenge Community Consultant is someone in the community who knows a considerable amount about what it is you have chosen to learn. Your Community Consultant guides you in developing a project plan, directs you to helpful resources to read or accessible people to interview, helps you set up learning experience hours, and, in the end, verifies for CVU your work. It is strongly recommended that this be a new relationship for you.

The **responsibilities** of the Community Consultant are to:

- offer support and resources throughout the year
- verify the accuracy of the paper and the research the student referred to
- verify the student's Community Learning Experience hours
- verify that the Tangible Product represents significant learning (if applicable).

The Community Consultant will complete and sign, over the course of the project, the following forms:

- ❖ Grad Challenge Contract
 - ❖ Midyear Report
 - ❖ Community Consultant Verification Form
 - ❖ Tangible Product Critique Form, if applicable.
- (See due dates in Schedule of Activities and Deliverables)

The Community Consultant must be an adult who:

- is an “expert” in the area you wish to explore; his/her established expertise may be the result of a job or personal and/or educational experience.
- is at least 21 years old
- has five years experience with your chosen topic
- resides, ideally, in Chittenden County, or is easily accessible to you.

Note about accessibility:

This is your project and your graduation requirement. Getting information, getting documents signed, meeting deadlines, and making changes are your responsibility. Be careful to choose a

Community Consultant who is easy to get in touch with, completes things when s/he says s/he will, shows up on time, responds to emails, or returns phone calls. If this doesn't seem to be true, and you still want this person to be your Community Consultant, you must take these behaviors into consideration when managing your project time and deadlines.

Your Community Consultant cannot be:

- a relative
- a CVU faculty/staff member
- under 21 or a college student

Finding Your Community Consultant

When you think of a topic or specific project first, your next task is to find a Community Consultant.

First Be clear about what you want to learn.

Second Ask your Advisor, Grad Challenge Coordinator, other teachers, parents, and friends if they know anyone who does what you want to learn.

Third Look through the notebook of Community Consultants who have participated in Grad Challenge in the past. This is located in the Direction Center.

Fourth Resort to the telephone book or internet to find someone local. For example, if you are interested in working to organize a marathon, you may look for athletic clubs or local marathons.

Fifth Prepare to contact possible Consultants. With names and contact information for possible Community Consultants, plan your conversation. Write out your introduction and questions.

Sixth Contact possible Community Consultants. See list of considerations below to help you with your selection. You may ask a possible Community Consultant if s/he would consider advising you on your project. It is okay to say you will call them back with more details after you speak with your CVU Advisor.

When choosing a Community Consultant, consider:

- How easy is it to talk to him/her?
- Does s/he seem to know what you want to learn? For example, a digital photographer has different expertise than a 35mm art photographer.
- Is s/he accessible? Can you get to their studio/work/home to speak with them?
- Will s/he be on vacation or away for a significant time?
- Does s/he usually charge for this? Recognize his/her generosity in that case. For example, you wish to learn pottery but rather than take a class with your Community Consultant (she usually teaches and charges students), you will work in her studio during non-class time.

Seventh Promptly get back in touch with the person you think has the expertise, accessibility and willingness to advise you through your Grad Challenge project. If you spoke with others about the possibility, please remember to call them back, thank them, and tell them you have found someone to advise you.

NOTE: Of course, if you already know someone who does something interesting but are not sure what your project could be, you can simply ask him/her to guide you on a Grad Challenge project. Your first conversation, then, is to figure out exactly what you want to learn and how you will spend your hours.