

Participatory Action Research (PAR) in Class to Improve Teaching Across Campus

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Motivation for the Project



Higher education
learning &
teaching
needs change to
prepare (climate)
leaders

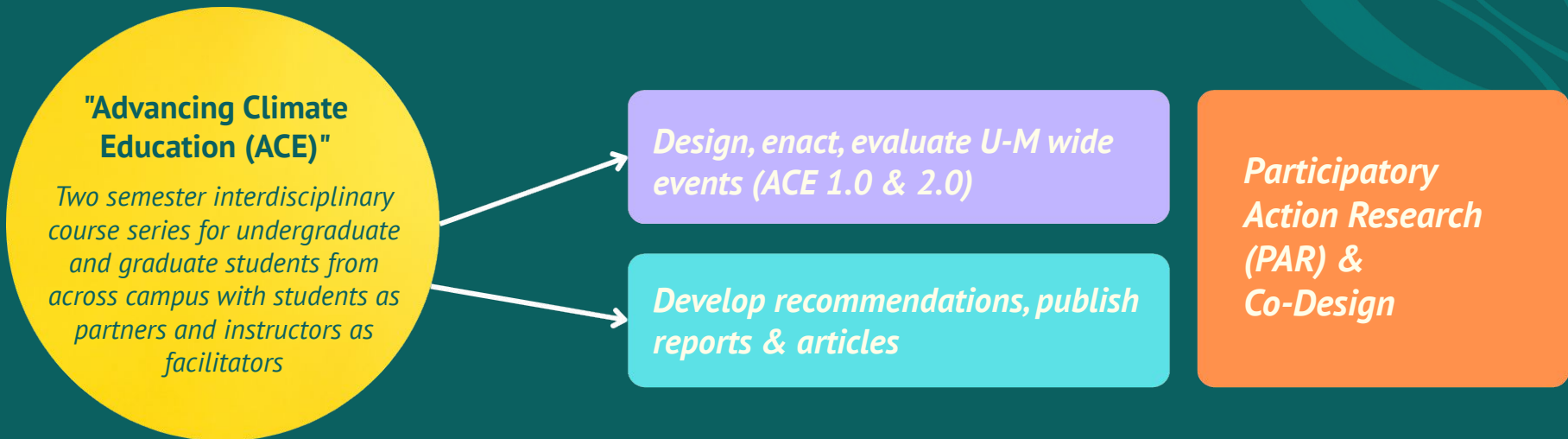


How can students
become
empowered climate
leaders
who can bring
about change at
U-M and beyond?



Advance
research/evidence
-based climate
education across
U-M

What is the project?



It's education for change—by students, for students & the university

Student Outcomes & Quotes

“In most classes, we learn about change. In this class, we created it.”

Increased Confidence & Self-Efficacy

“Before this class, I doubted whether I could contribute anything meaningful to climate solutions. But through our projects and the trust you placed in us, I realized I’m capable of leading change, even as a student.”

Enhanced Engagement & Motivation

“I’ve never been so engaged in a class. The way we connected climate science with real-world action made the material come alive. I found myself researching topics beyond the readings because I genuinely wanted to understand more.”

Student Outcomes & Quotes

Critical Thinking & Problem Solving

“You pushed us to question assumptions, examine systems, and not just take information at face value. Working on our community-based project taught me how to navigate complexity and think across disciplines.”

Collaboration & Communication Skills

“Our group work was different from what I’ve experienced in other classes. We weren’t just dividing tasks; we were co-creating ideas. I learned how to really listen, adapt my thinking, and communicate across different fields and experiences.”

Appreciation for Diversity & Inclusion

“Through this course, I realized how critical it is to bring in voices that are often left out of climate conversations. The emphasis on environmental justice and community knowledge completely shifted how I think about solutions.”

Schneider et al.'s (2012) PAR framework component	U-M ACE Initiative Alignment with Schneider et al.'s (2012) PAR framework
<p>“Commitment to the participation of ordinary people as co-researchers involved in every aspect of the research”</p>	<p>The course was deliberately inclusive, <u>open</u> to all U-M students regardless of discipline, embodying PAR's commitment to involving "ordinary people" as co-researchers. Recognizing students' varying climate change and CCE knowledge, the course incorporated readings, discussions, and guest speakers to expand their understanding and support meaningful contributions. Enrolled students at various academic levels (undergraduate to PhD) actively co-designed the ACE event, taking on critical roles like <u>grant writing</u>, <u>facilitation</u>, and <u>reporting</u>—demonstrating full engagement across the research and action spectrum.</p>
<p>“Respect for the knowledge of all participants”</p>	<p>The teaching team positioned students as collaborators rather than subordinates, respecting their knowledge from academic, institutional, and lived experiences. Student input significantly shaped course direction and event planning particularly based on their experiences as students <u>including</u>: thoughts based on readings, experiences being immersed in the U-M community, and lived experiences growing up in the current climate (as well as other social, political, and economic crises). This reinforced the PAR principle of honoring all participants' expertise.</p>
<p>“Mutual learning among participants”</p>	<p>Learning was highly collaborative, with students working in groups, sharing <u>progresses</u>, and <u>giving/receiving</u> peer feedback. Additionally, students were often given the floor to express how they felt about certain aspects of the event planning, which the instructors used to adjust plans moving forward. These structured opportunities for dialogue and co-learning fostered deep engagement <u>CCE</u> content and process.</p>



“Attention to the needs of marginalized or disempowered groups and people”	The course challenged the STEM-centric narrative of CCE. Climate change cannot be meaningfully addressed <u>though</u> only technological progress, and <u>that other</u> ways of thinking and types of knowledge of action are needed (IPCC, 2023). Therefore we intentionally assigned readings and course materials written by scholars from other disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, emphasizing the value of diverse epistemologies and ensuring a broad range of perspectives were centered <u>in</u> learning and eventually in action.
“Action to promote social justice for those marginalized people and others like them”	Building on what students learned about in the class, the report (Zint et al., 2023) shared concrete social justice recommendations, including a call for institutional changes to advance CCE with a focus on contributing to U-M’s DEI goals. In particular, one of the five recommendations in the report was as follows: Adopt C/SE for student success, aligning with PAR’s goal of actionable change for marginalized communities.