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UI class aims to reinvigorate downtown Las Vegas

BY [STACEY MURRAY](#) | OCTOBER 01, 2012 6:30 AM

Students at the University of Iowa have an opportunity to head to Las Vegas next semester for spring break, but they won't spend their time gambling.

Reimagining Downtown, a new class taught by Dave Gould, and associate director for student professional development for the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, will begin in the spring of 2013.

It will meet twice a week during the semester, as do many classes at the university. However, in this class students will travel to Las Vegas, once during spring break and for a longer period of time over the summer, to create a proposal for the downtown Vegas area.

"This is an opportunity for 20-somethings to build something valuable to a community," Gould said. "The ideas you have, they won't fade or go away. With this class you're leaving something behind."

Gould partnered with Zappos Chief Executive Officer Tony Hsieh to help fund the class, as part of Hsieh's initiative, Downtown Project — a program to reinvigorate downtown Las Vegas. Hsieh will provide room and board for the students in Las Vegas, as well as a \$50,000 grant to the final proposal the class comes up with. Gould says the only part of the project that still needs to be covered are the tickets to Nevada.

"The plan is to give students scholarships to cover [airfare]," he said. "But we can't guarantee that yet. Students may be responsible for airfare and incidental costs in Vegas."

Garry Kline, the assistant director of academic programs and assessments at the Pomerantz Career Center, said the class is unique at the UI.

"[Reimagining Downtown] is a great opportunity for a group of people to see a proposal happen," he said. "I see it as Extreme City Makeover."

Reimagining Downtown will require applications for the course and will only enroll 10 to 20 students. However, Gould hopes to have a wide variety of majors represented.

"The goal is to create an interdisciplinary group that can all take its strengths and work together in a workshop environment," he said.

While the students will work together throughout the process to create the final proposal, there is a competitive aspect: only one idea will be selected. However, Gould said the class isn't focused on that approach.

“It’s about doing social good with entrepreneurship skills,” he said. “It’s not a competition; everyone plays a role in making the idea.”

Kline said the selection process is good for students.

“We think often students don’t get a chance to fully develop and defend their ideas and have to create implementations for them and be held accountable,” he said. “From a career preparation standpoint, that’s very valuable.”

Reimagining Downtown opens for student applications today, and the deadline is Oct. 26. The course is only open to juniors and seniors at the university, and Gould will make the final application decisions.

UI senior Andrew O’Bleness said he plans on applying for the class and has met with Gould to brainstorm ideas for it.

“We’ve got this opportunity to do something special and really make a difference,” he said. “It’s about so much more than building a résumé; you have to be responsible and committed to a project. By the end, we’ll really have our fingerprint on it.”

O’Bleness said he hadn’t heard of any other students that plan to sign up for the course yet and thinks the time commitment could be an issue for some.

“For seniors, it’s tough to make commitments with graduate school looming,” he said.

Gould hopes to continue Reimagining Downtown beyond the first course in spring. However, Kline said, he wants to see how the semester will play out.

“We see it as a pilot,” he said. “We’ll learn a lot, regardless of what happens, and we’ll find out if a course like this is possible in the future.”