The Nonprofit Board Leadership Seminar is designed to augment and underpin the Board Fellows program, which is carried out by the Foster School of Business. Board Fellows are assigned to boards of directors of nonprofit organizations throughout Western Washington, and serve with those boards for a year. The Leadership Seminar is intended to assist the student in maximizing their service to those selected organizations by examining the fundamental responsibilities of board members; the challenges faced by board members during these present times; ways boards shape the organization’s strategic direction; ways that board members can strengthen their organization’s financial management and stability; and the strengths and limitations of various board governance structures.

The seminar will meet in two hour blocks twice during the fall winter and spring terms. Attendance is required for participants in the Board Fellows program. The length of time of each seminar session will afford the opportunity to present and discuss findings of researchers and practitioners on strategies to achieve board excellence; carry out case examinations of board performance, and, exchange ideas between the instructor and seminar participants about how they can address specific issues pertaining to boards to which they have been assigned.

Among the questions which will receive attention are:

- Are there specific characteristics of higher performing boards? How is performance measured or demonstrated? To what extent are boards able to gain and sustain high levels of performance?
- What are the separate performance obligations of boards in the areas of due diligence and financial management? Hiring and supervising executive staff? Determining an organization’s longer term strategic direction? Securing additional resources? Seizing upon shorter term opportunities?
- In which of these areas are the greatest challenges faced by boards? What are the specific obstacles to excellence that are encountered, and how are they best addressed?
- What are the additional challenges that have been brought upon by uncertain economic times? How are those challenges being best met?
- What strategic planning techniques can improve board planning performance? How do the principles of strategic thinking reside within a strategic planning framework? What are the specific obstacles to board-led strategic planning and how can they be overcome?
- What governance models are used by boards? Which models match up best to the needs for more financial due diligence? Better planning? Better attraction of new resources?
- In what ways are nonprofit organizations being expected by funders and others to become more transparent, and what are the best ways to respond to these new expectations?

Requirements for the Course

All students in the class have been assigned to a nonprofit board of directors, and all will be expected to utilize the seminar’s discussions to improve their board service. Students will be asked to report their board’s progress and raise specific questions about any improvements that may be warranted.
Students from both the Foster School of Business and the Evans School of Public Affairs are participants. They are expected to understand the specific contributions their academic disciplines bring to the efforts to gain board excellence, and to seek new understanding of the contributions made by the other academic discipline present. Readings will be digitalized and will be available at the beginning of the fall term.

To complete the seminar and receive credit awarded upon completion, students are expected to attend class and participate in the discussions. In addition, students must prepare a 2-page report summarizing their experience as a Board Fellow and complete a board level project.

Course Schedule:

1) Fall: Building Better Boards
   - Introduction to the Seminar
   - Roles and Responsibilities of Boards

   Readings:
   1) Nadler, Building Better Boards
   2) Heiserman, Boards Behaving Badly

2) Fall: Building Better Boards
   - Board Performance and Assessment
   - Case Review
   - Student Review of Board Progress

   Readings:
   3) Taylor et al, The New Work of the Nonprofit Board
   4) Case: NAACP

   Assignment: Board Project 1-page plan due by December 1

3) Winter: Mission and Planning
   - Strategic Thinking and Strategic Planning
   - Guest Presentations

   Readings:
5) Fisman et al. Mission Driven Governance
6) Linnell, et al. Strategic Planning and Thinking

4) Winter: Mission and Planning
   - Overcoming Barriers to Effective Strategic Planning
   - Case Review

   Readings:
   7) Rangan, Lofty Missions, Down-to-Earth Plans
   8) Case Study: East Coast Orchestra

   Preparation: Bring in a current or old strategic plan from your Board Fellow nonprofit. If they do not have one or are not willing to share it, either find one online or see the example I will put on the course website. We will get into groups and discuss the plans in class.

5) Spring: Guaranteeing Financial Sustainability
   - Developing Board Capacity for Financial Oversight
   - Understanding the Balance Sheet and the Principles of Nonprofit Financial Management
   - Reconsidering Revenue Raising Opportunities
   - Case Review

   Preparation: Bring in the most current IRS Form 990 and an Annual Report from your Board Fellows nonprofit. We will get into groups and discuss them in class.

   Readings:
   9) Peters, Assessing Your Organization’s Financial Health
   10) Foster, Ten Non Profit Funding Models
   11) Oster, Structural Analysis of a Non Profit Industry

6) Spring: Seeking an Effective Governance Structure
   - Governance and Change in the Nonprofit Sector
   - Overcoming Obstacles to Effective Governance
   - Student Review of Board Progress
   - Board Governance Activity

   Readings:
   13) Bowen, When Business Leaders Join Nonprofit Boards
Assignments:

- 2-page report summarizing experience as a Board Fellow
- Submit copy of board project (format will vary depending on the project but please submit all relevant PowerPoints, written reports, or research/data analysis you conducted for your board-level project.)

Board Level Project
The project should leverage your skills and knowledge to gain specific expertise on at least one aspect of the nonprofit while addressing a critical need of the Board. This project should be approved by your board and the instructor prior to beginning the project. This project should involve the collaboration of nonprofit board members. Plan on 50-60 hours to complete the project.

Project Selection
Each nonprofit organization is asked to identify projects based on the board’s needs. After the Fellow is placed the feasibility of the project should be weighed based on the Fellow’s background and expertise and an appropriate project that can be completed in six months should be agreed upon. A good project will be one that is important to the board of directors, uses the Fellow’s skills and furthers the work of a board committee or the board as a whole.

When selecting a project consider the following:

- Is it important to the board of directors? The project must be board-level. This is not the type of project that could be assigned to an intern at the organization.
- Will the results be discussed and used by the board?
- Is it clearly defined, have a beginning and an end, and been agreed upon by the mentor, the CEO and the Fellow?
- Is it strategic in nature?
- Does the project use the Fellow’s experience and expertise?

Completion
The topic and scope of the project should be finalized in December and communicated to the nonprofit board. The Fellow and their board mentor should communicate regularly about the project progress and to be sure the Fellow has access to all the resources necessary.

The Fellow should present findings to the nonprofit board before their term ends in whatever format is most appropriate given the nature of the project (PowerPoint, written report, oral presentation, etc.).