

Community Engagement Fellows Project Report

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Community, Culture, and Performance

Participating in the 2016/2017 Community Engagement Fellows program was rewarding on many levels. In addition to motivating me toward my goal of being a part of campus-community collaboration, I also developed strong relationships among my current colleagues, with others across campus, and with leaders in our community.

As a fairly new member of the faculty at Western, I started the Fellows Program with an initial goal of learning more about the university and community, and was hoping to explore productive and useful ways that I could play a role in the life of our community. And while the Theatre Program at Western is dedicated to sharing performances and other theatrical activities with the community, I know that sometimes we rely on the community coming to us, and I believe those of us in theatre can work harder to bring our work into the community, and to invite the community to participate in the creative process of storytelling and performance.

After starting the program with some loosely defined goals, our meetings helped connect me with like-minded fellows, and we began to collaborate on a cultural heritage performance project which will combine Western students & faculty with community organizations to gather, explore, and script community stories and memories and share these stories through public performance. It was incredibly rewarding to tap the creative energy and pool the resources of others in the program. I found that our meetings gave us tools to problem solve, overcome obstacles, and brainstorm ideas that will lead to an achievable and sustainable project.

Looking forward, the next steps of our project will be to explore further partnerships, overcome some administrative hurdles, and engage with community groups who are excited about sharing their stories and sharing ownership of this project.

We know that we've created an ambitious and challenging proposal, and there is still work to be done before it is put in action. However, the time we've spent on this has already led to productive discussions and potential opportunities. For example, I have found shared goals among many of my colleagues in the Fellows Program, such as with the City of Bellingham, the Public Library System, and with our community's media, and have already seen some positive results from these new relationships. In fact, one of the unexpected lessons of my time with the Community Engagement Fellows is the way positive thinking, shared problem solving, and an eclectic but committed group can create positive results in unexpected ways.

As a final comment on my time as a Community Engagement Fellow, I'd like to note the inspiration I gained from hearing the many project ideas proposed by my colleagues, and being a part of the conversations that helped develop these proposals. Over our year together, I witnessed an evolution among project ideas as a result of the accumulation of ideas, relationships, partnerships, and projects. The process was inspiring and overwhelmingly positive. Regardless of discipline and approach, there was an endless wealth of ideas to support the goal of campus-community collaboration, and I look forward to our relationships continuing as we develop our projects into the future.