

PROJECT TITLE: Improving the Internship experience for Journalism Students

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I had the unusual opportunity to experience my Community Engagement Fellowship from each side of the aisle – half as a Western professor, then half as a member of Bellingham’s off-campus community. From September through December, I taught my sixth quarter as an adjunct in Western’s journalism department; then in January, I returned to professional journalism when I accepted a job as editor-in-chief of lifestyle magazine Bellingham Alive.

The consequences were three-fold. First, my project did a 180. Originally, my proposal was to create a website to showcase students’ work in the newswriting class I taught to an off-campus audience. With my change in job status, my project now involves getting students more prepared for internships, like that offered Western journalism students by the magazine, for instance. From CEF sessions with community members and from direct experience as Bellingham Alive editor, I found that students need help maneuvering some aspects of the internship that are not necessarily covered in a classroom setting, including the interviewing process, communication and other aspects encountered in a professional environment. I decided a presentation on this would be helpful, and a new project was borne. Second, I had the opportunity to hear feedback from community professionals more experienced than I in running internship programs and learn from practices utilized by leaders from the city of Bellingham and Whatcom County Library System, among others. Third, the CEF provided a conduit for both on- and off-campus collaborations that might have never happened had I not been a fellow. For instance, a Western theater professor in my cohort needed to publicize a series of summer theater productions that will take place this summer in the city. We have been communicating on a story to appear in the magazine to advance the productions, a good example of campus-community collaboration. Because of my CEF experience, I have a heightened awareness that communication and community engagement efforts between Western and Bellingham can and should be improved (despite historically notorious parking challenges!).

Overall, I found CEF cohort sessions to be valuable in introducing me to people in different departments at Western as well as those in the Bellingham community. Travis was a skilled, thoughtful, well-prepared and engaging discussion leader. The program helped me take a breath from the day-to-day to see a bigger picture. I come away impressed by the ideas, energy and resourcefulness of my CEF cohort group, and feel enriched by the experience.