

Community Engagement Fellows Project Report: Linda Schleef

When I first began my 9-month tenure as a 'Community Engagement Fellow', I assumed that the 20+ hours I was committing to the program would be spent accomplishing tasks that would directly support me in accomplishing my stated goals toward improving the services I provide in the local community.

As the Director of Woodring College of Education's Ershig Assistive Technology Resource Center (E-ATRC), I collaborate, on request, with educational teams and families of P-12 students with disabilities in Whatcom and Skagit Counties to consider assistive technology tools that may benefit the students at school and home.

As the first several CEF cohort meetings came and went, the error of my assumption about the meetings became apparent. Meeting times were devoted to the following activities:

- Reading and deliberation about the effectiveness of university-community engagement projects, in general.
- Presentation and dialogue about individual CEF members' proposed project goals and progress toward achieving them, specifically.

In the fall of 2015, I had proposed that I would accomplish the following as a CEF:

- Create a Facebook page for the E-ATRC to increase the awareness of families and educators about this service
- Create and distribute a survey to users (family members and educational teams) to determine level of satisfaction with E-ATRC services

After periods of discourse and reflection with the resolute support of CEF members from two different cohorts, it became evident to me that 'increasing the awareness of families and educators about' E-ATRC services was not a beneficial, or even a desirable goal, given the limited resources currently available to the center. As director, and sole working staff of the center, I am currently and constantly stretched thin between my two allocated tasks:

- working with WCE teachers-in-training as they learn about the support technologies that may benefit their future P-12 students with diverse learning needs,
- collaborating with local families and educators in the field to consider tools that may benefit P-12 students with disabilities.

Creating a Facebook page to promote the services of the center would only serve to increase the workload beyond what I can possibly accomplish, given current circumstances.

As a result of this realization, I decided to focus on improving the services that we are currently able to provide. I was able to use Google Forms to develop two separate 'user satisfaction' surveys to help gather the data needed to determine the effectiveness of our services.

- E-ATRC Survey for Woodring College of Education (WCE) Students:
<http://goo.gl/forms/1bOIU1JtLV1DA5VR2>

- E-ATRC Community Use Survey: <http://goo.gl/forms/D23WX6UhMQYMO6D3>

While I have not yet disseminated the Community Survey to users, the Student Survey was recently completed by a total of 68 current WCE students in all of the WCE Instructional Technology courses and in one selected Special Education course offered spring quarter of 2016. I am very pleased by the results and am confident that once the Community Survey has been administered and the data from both surveys has been considered and applicable input has been integrated, that the services we offer will be enhanced. Of course this will be an annual and ongoing process of continuous improvement.

Of benefit to me in accomplishing my goal were the following results of participating as a Community Engagement Fellow:

- The step of putting my goals in writing was helpful (☺) since the hardest thing about projects, for me, is just getting started.
- The available and reliable resource of people from across campus with a wide range of related experience whom I could call on if I 'got stuck' was also useful.
- It also helped me to share in the accomplishment of each step as I completed it - even small, 'mini-steps'!