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2015-2016 Community Engagement Fellow Summary Report and Reflection

My participation in the Community Engagement Fellowship was a rewarding experience on many levels. The fellowship coincided with my second year as an assistant professor at Western as well as my second year in Bellingham. As a relative newcomer to Western and the Pacific Northwest, the fellowship played an invaluable role in introducing me to the university and our community. The meetings throughout the year not only helped me make meaningful connections with colleagues and community members but helped me work toward a goal of creating a class-wide project that I implemented in my visual journalism capstone course during the spring quarter of 2016.

Advanced Visual Journalism (JOUR 446) is the capstone course for the journalism department's visual journalism majors. Students enter this class with a wide range of foundational multimedia skills such as photography, typography, graphics, video, audio, and web production. A majority of the course is structured around students utilizing their culminating knowledge and skills to develop small group projects.

Inspired by my involvement with the Community Engagement Fellowship, I wanted to help foster a connection between my classroom and our community. Specifically, I encouraged students to narrow the scope of their multimedia projects to Bellingham's downtown core for both its proximity and story potential. We used the general themes of historic preservation and sustainability to focus the various place-based stories to highlight how space has been used over time, as well as how space has been repurposed for our changing times.

While I initially helped students make connections with Downtown Bellingham Partnership and Whatcom Museum Photo Archives, they were tasked with finding other community organizations and individuals who were working to repurpose and revitalize downtown. In addition to Downtown Bellingham Partnership and Whatcom Museum, students worked with resources from the City of Bellingham, Northwest Youth Services, Whatcom County Coalition to End Homelessness, Bellingham Housing Authority, Daylight Properties, four businesses in the Herald Building, and a number of thrift stores.

The class of 13 students created 18 different visual journalism projects related to downtown. In addition, we created and launched a website to house these projects called 48 Degrees North (<http://48degreesnorth.com>). For the final class presentation, we continued our community engagement by debuting the website and multimedia projects at the Pickford Theatre.

My hope is that future classes will expand on this concept and use it as an outlet to further engage students with our community in meaningful ways, and in turn create an inspiring and valuable resource for our community.

Class Website: *48 Degrees North*

<http://48degreesnorth.com/>

Spring 2016 class project: *Repurposing Downtown*

<http://48degreesnorth.com/repurposing-downtown/>

UPDATE: The Fall 2016 class continued creating content for the website and expanded coverage to include parts of rural Whatcom County.

Fall 2016 class project: *Bridging the Divide: Cultivating Connections Between Our Rural and Urban Communities*

<http://48degreesnorth.com/bridging-the-divide/>

There has been much discussion recently about America's ever-widening gap in the rural-urban divide, which inspired students in the Fall 2016 Advanced Visual Journalism course to explore this on a local level. Nine students set out to find stories in Bellingham and rural Whatcom County to better understand this phenomenon. While it is inevitable that some cultural, political and geographic divisions exist, there are individuals, companies and organizations working together in sustainable ways that bridges the gap.