

Community Engagement Fellows Project Report

The WWU Community Engagement Fellows program provided me with new ideas and perspective on current issues on social justice and equity addressed by faculty in various disciplines through lively discussions and keynote speakers from our local community throughout the year.

The purpose of my project, entitled “The Japan Studies Seminars”, was to develop an academic learning community based on local Japan experts and highly motivated learners. The project had a seminar format, including presentation followed by discussion. There were six sessions, starting mid-March through the end-May. Each one-hour session covered a specific topic or aspect of Japan such as Japanese cinema, Japanese internment camp experience, business in Japan, women’s status and family formation, environmental issues in Japan, and history of Japanese immigration to the United State (see the program attached for more details).

The highlight of the seminar was a lecture on the Japanese Internment camp experience of residents in Whatcom County presented by Fumio Otsu, a third generation Japanese-American. The participants showed keen interests in this issue in relation to historical war memories tied to our local community. Other presentations caught several participants’ eyes, because of the large amount of information along with a critical analysis and lively interactive discussions.

The shortfall of the seminar was limited community attendance. All the seminars were conducted on Whatcom campus; consequently the majority of the participants were WCC students, staff, and faculty. There were also a small number of participants. One of the presenters suggested that the seminars should be tied to a course and planned in conjunction with WCC faculty. Thus, time and location of the future seminar should be carefully considered.

However, overall, the project was a big success. The results of the participants’ evaluation have demonstrated that they gained knowledge of certain aspects of Japan and its culture and society within historical and global contexts. Furthermore, they gained more positive attitudes toward Japan. It is critical to gain knowledge of world-wide and domestic issues, to enhance self-awareness of various thoughts and ideas of faculty from various disciplines, and to develop skills needed to solve these problems for human sustainability and world peace. The Japan Studies seminars would help prepare college students to become responsible global citizen in the 21st century.

From the Community Engagement Fellows program, I personally and professionally learned a lot about community issues addressed by other faculty from various disciplines in relation to historical and global contexts. What I have learned a lot through this program is about our community.

The diverse composition of our group certainly was an added value to learning about our community and beyond. Our respect for one another as a group facilitated by Travis, the Center coordinator, helped us stay on track. I shared my positive learning experience of the program with my colleagues and highly recommended that they join the program next year.

The next step would be my continued efforts on organizing the Japan studies seminars and China or East Asian studies seminars in the near future. In addition, I intend to share the

knowledge gained from the seminars and group discussions on community engagement throughout the year.

Finally, I would like to extend my appreciation to Western Washington University executives who made a decision to provide such an invaluable learning opportunity for students, staff, and faculty and our local community as a whole. Furthermore, I also appreciate the hard work of the Western staff to make the Community Engagement Program such a great success.

Setsuko Buckley, Ed.D.
WWU Community Engagement Fellow
WCC Instructor