

## *Community Engagement Fellows Program Reflection*

My time working with the Community Engagement Fellows Program this year has been very generative for my intellectual, social, and community development. I joined this program hoping for two things: 1) to develop new connections with people outside my department and outside Western and 2) to develop a Community Engagement component for my GUR on American Indian Literatures. Participating in the CE Fellows program allowed me to refine my expectations for my project while also helping me reconceptualize how I would go about it. I've also begun building connections with faculty members from around Western as well as other institutions in Whatcom County. This has helped me understand better the 'community' with which we ask our students to engage. Lastly, participating in the CE Fellows has also led to the beginnings of the Salish Sea Welcoming Committee, a program that I'm excited to see come to life.

When I began with the CE Fellows program, my goal was to create a 2-credit course to run alongside ENG235 Introduction to American Indian Literatures. In my work, both at Western and beyond, I always attempt to be accountable to Native land and communities. In teaching this GUR course, my goal is not only to provide students with an introductory to the history of Native literatures in North America, but also to encourage them to engage with this literature as a way to understand the myriad ways that Native peoples continue to resist the settlement of Native land and lifeways. I felt a community engagement component would be one way to do this. However, there are long, painful histories of violent intervention in Native communities in the name of 'community engagement' and I wanted to enter into this project carefully, thinking about the importance of not replicating these histories and structures of engagement.

Because ENG235 is a GUR course with an enrollment of about 70 students, I wasn't confident that I could manage a community engagement component with all the students present while also working through some of the complicated relationships between colonialism and community engagement with them. This is where the 2-credit course came in. Because the community engagement component would require additional intellectual and emotional work, I sought to create a credit-bearing course that students could take in order to more responsibly engage these questions. In order to avoid replicating structures of colonialism in this project, I sought to envision a course that wouldn't send groups of largely non-Native students into Native communities in order to 'engage' or 'help' them. Rather, I envisioned a project in which students would be able to assess how well contemporary socio-political organizations and movements were dealing with issues of tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, and decolonization. In this course, students would learn the histories of social movements in the Pacific Northwest since the 1980s and into the contemporary moment, with a final project that focused on assessing how well a contemporary activist campaign in the region engages with issues of Native sovereignty. As a scholar of Native studies, radical social movement history, and contemporary literature, this seemed like a plan that brought together not only interests but my skills as well.

Through my work with CE Fellows, I refined this plan a significant amount. My colleagues provided me with three important observations that have helped to refine and shape my project in exciting ways. First, after presenting our plans in January, I got excellent feedback from my peers who suggested that what I was proposing sounded like a lot more work than a 2-credit

class—both for me and my students. Once I began envisioning what such a course would look like, I realized they were right. This encouragement to value my work was significant. Second, my peers suggested that instead of proposing a new course, I could offer this course as an experimental course. As someone who is relatively new to Western, I wasn't as familiar with all the dimensions of curricular development. This turned out to be a great solution to the problem of how to get this course off the ground. Third, my peers suggested that running this course as an experimental one would enable me to bring in students from other places in the university who were engaged in Native studies, rather than only engaging those from my GUR. These three contributions have provided an immeasurable amount of direction for my project.

I'm now in the process of developing a proposal for an experimental course in which a number of seats will be set aside for students in ENG235. This course will be focused on the intersections of contemporary radical social movements in the Pacific Northwest and Native resilience/resistance. As a final project, students will look at how a contemporary social or political campaign engages with issues of Native sovereignty, self-determination, land, and treaty rights. Students will be required to engage with people and organizations that are part of that campaign and to discuss their assessment with that community as part of the requirements. This project maintains the goals I had when entering the CE Fellows program but has grown into a meaningful, manageable project through the input of my knowledgeable and engaged peers.

Beyond this project itself, the CE Fellows program has also provided me with a new network of people across Bellingham and a better understanding of Whatcom County. Having the chance to talk with other faculty and staff from Whatcom Community College, Bellingham Technical College, and Northwest Indian College has helped me to get a bigger picture of how students are engaging with the Bellingham community and the meaning that the community has in students' lives. This has helped me shape what I understand as community engagement and what role I want it to serve. Through our meetings, I have become better equipped to explain how my commitment to community engagement relates to my commitment to Native sovereignty and self-determination. In this sense, the program has helped me to understand how community engagement can serve as a method through which we can practice responsibility and accountability to the land we're on and to the communities of people who both steward and share this land, rather than only as something that enriches education. Bringing forward how community engagement puts pressure on Western, especially, to recognize its responsibility to the community as a public university has been important to my understanding of my position and responsibilities here. As a new faculty member, this has been invaluable.

Through this process, I've also helped develop the Salish Sea Welcoming Committee, a place-based faculty and staff orientation program. I'm looking forward to helping develop this program more and hope to contribute some things, such as a 'local reading list', that can orient people new to the area with a foundation in Lummi/Coast Salish history and cosmology while also providing space to critically engage with what it means to do intellectual work on occupied territory. I am grateful for the cohort of people with whom I have worked and for the relationships I have built that continue to make these projects possible.