

# On being a Community Engagement Faculty Fellow...

I enthusiastically joined this program following the conclusion of my first year teaching Communication Studies at Western Washington University. I have a pedagogical bent toward community engagement, experiential learning, and preparing graduates to be well-rounded citizens with a will to care about the communities they occupy, and after meeting Travis Tennesen from the Center for Service-Learning I knew the program would provide great opportunities to expand my thinking and network as a new teacher. What I could not anticipate, however, is how sharing the table with a diverse contingent of passionate educators would inspire me, challenge me, and lead me to enact programmatic adaptations in major ways.

My experience as a Community Engagement Faculty Fellow is summarized in three parts: development of pedagogy as an educator, development of a program I lead, and development of community relationships.

## Development of Pedagogy

When I first began attending monthly meetings for the program I was pleased to find educators from all four institutions of higher education in Whatcom County. This diversity of ideas, disciplines and positions, experiences, and populations served made for interesting and thought provoking sessions. I became familiar with services and faculty at my institution—one of whom I'd even worked right down the hall from for over a year and not yet met—and learned more about WCC, NWIC, and BTC as well. The sharing of ideas that rose in our collaborative sessions inspired me to seek ways to include more voices in my curriculum, and to build a more inclusive approach to an ongoing program I maintain under a service-learning umbrella. Examples include a wider breadth of representation through guest speakers in each of my classes, engagement with a growing variety of texts different societal sub-sections, and further refinement of my syllabi to include more inclusive language. Simply put, working with my CEFF colleagues encouraged me to become a better educator simply by virtue of sharing their own expertise, experiences, and ideas.

## Development of #WeAreWWU Program

Established in 2014, #WeAreWWU is a student-driven fundraising and awareness campaign supported by the Western Foundation. In its initial design the effort sought to raise money for departmental scholarships through an accessible philanthropy model, and was successfully launched by students in a culminating effort Spring quarter, 2015. To date, this community-based learning experience has raised over \$17k in support. It is through the CEFF program and ongoing discussions with colleagues that the overarching goals of the campaign took a pivotal turn.

Beginning Spring of 2016, the focus of the fund distribution moved from one of myopic departmental focus to one determined and adapted on an ongoing basis by those who work on the campaign each year. With this slight change, the organizational mission changed from 'Easing Tuition for Students' to 'Enriching the Educational Experience,' and now students have even more ownership in the project. Students now determine how and when they want to see the funds distributed, for example whether to support student clubs or campus organizations, buy new equipment, or fund a scholarship. While the inaugural effort led to the development of a \$1500 scholarship, this year's effort and subsequent impact have yet to be fully realized; however, the students behind the Spring 2016 culmination event were pleased to offer WWU's Suicide Prevention program, BRAVE, a donation to support their work on our campus immediately following the fundraiser they hosted. The impact of this restructuring will take some time to understand and track, but suffice to say it is greater than the original campaign structure allowed for.

## Development of Community Relationships

The combination of working with new people who are passionate and informed through the CEFF program, and continued programmatic development of #WeAreWWU campaign led to strong community relationships on and off the campus. This is evidenced by the success of the campaign, the metrics behind the event students hosted, and the 200% increase in social media engagement surrounding the effort over the last AY. From small businesses to large corporations, individual donors to professional athletic teams, my students and I work actively to form and grow relationships with supporters. This process is inherent in any fundraising work, sure, but the awareness part of the campaign—the actual narrative of students, staff and faculty that make our institution what it is and why that is worth supporting—is rooted in these relational interactions. These connections are beneficial for the University in that they strengthen our reputation as a campus of "active minds changing lives" and reinforce an of ethic service and stewardship among our students; for students because they provide impactful learning and often lead to professional connections and opportunities; and for the community because supporters of the effort feel the positive effects of their involvement through increased traffic in storefronts and online and a sense of connection and ownership in the grassroots effort from their support.

For further information please visit:

<http://WeAreWWU.com>

<http://facebook.wearewwu.com>

<http://instagram/wearewwu>

<https://youtu.be/OtpgLPgvxwE>