

1. Project Title: Center for Community Engagement

2. Project Description

Currently, I coordinate the Internship Program at UNH Manchester. In this capacity, I have encountered many requests from local organizations looking to utilize the resources of the University to meet their goals; requests the Internship Program is not designed to meet. This has prompted me to consider a new initiative, the development of a Center for Community Engagement (or service), which would house a number of different services such as, internships, service-learning projects for specific classes, volunteer opportunities, and a mechanism for responding to direct requests from local organizations for assistance in solving problems. The “Center” would also assist faculty, staff and students in identifying opportunities for outreach and outreach scholarship in the community. This initiative will help UNH Manchester deliver its urban mission as outlined in the most recent strategic plan, by fostering connections between the College and the greater Merrimack Valley region. In addition, the initiative is consistent with the University’s goal of expanding outreach efforts as stated in the academic strategic plan. The project is designed to provide the data necessary for writing a grant proposal to secure sustainable funding to support the Center.

3. Background Information/Statement of the Issues/Problem

In the strategic plan outlining the vision, mission and goals for UNH Manchester from 2002 - 2007, the introduction discussed the opportunity presented to UNHM to assume its role as the University’s urban college as a result of the successful move to the downtown location. The unique mission of the college was identified as providing academic programs, cultural events, and community based services which would contribute to the educational, economic and social climate of the region. The expectation outlined the reciprocal relationship between the community and the University, each acting as a vital resource for the other. At the present time, this objective is only partially realized. Responses to requests from the community are often inadequate due to the lack of personnel and resources to follow through and members of the UNHM community still struggle to understand what their role might be in the urban mission.

The 2007 – 2012 strategic plan for UNH Manchester identified 8 goals for the college. Goals 2 and 3 speak directly to the need for enacting this urban mission through the establishment of Urban Studies as a field of research and an academic program, and establishing “Campus to Community” outreach and development programs to meet the needs of the communities we serve. The project described here, when completed, will enable the college to move forward in its attempts to meet the goals outlined in the strategic plan by taking an initial step to address the problem of scarce resources.

4. Project Details

Goals and Objectives:

The goal of this project is to produce a draft of the grant proposal to secure funds for the “Center.” In order to make a persuasive case, I have identified the following areas of focus as a starting place:

- Identify and contact campuses such as UMass Boston, Portland Community College, the University of Pittsburgh, who have such centers to find out what they are doing, how they are funded, what they have learned, etc.
- Work with Dean Woolever, Mayor Guinta, UNH Cooperative Extension faculty and staff, and many others to identify potential partners and specific needs in the Manchester community that we would be able to address
- Assess what it is the College prepares students to do, look at our programmatic strengths, and speculate as to how we might develop unique skills to meet the needs of the community
- Research funding organizations to locate those whose record demonstrates support for similar initiatives
- Explore the research on social capital and service learning to help develop the argument for funding needs
- Research and develop an assessment instrument measuring student outcomes to be administered to students currently doing internships, registered in service-learning classes, and doing volunteer work
- Consider writing an initial grant to garner funds to support ongoing work on what is likely to be a long-term project
- Attend two conferences in the upcoming months whose focus is related to this project and for which I will register this summer.

Target Population/Audience:

The initial audience is the funding organizations to whom I will send the grant proposal. However, the intended audience in the long term, will be the communities UNH Manchester serves. In particular, I see the possibility of working with the Manchester schools, Manchester’s immigrant population, local nonprofits, as well as the business community, by building on programs/services currently offered by UNH faculty, staff and students.

Methods:

In the grant writing phase, methods will focus on developing the necessary partnerships, identifying funding sources, developing the grant writing skills required, and exploring the relevant scholarship to persuasively make the case for funding.

Evidence of External Collaboration and Partnership:

I have had an initial conversation with Dean Woolever regarding members of the community with whom I should meet. We talked about creating an advisory board from whom I will seek counsel and with whom I will discuss the needs of the community and the initiatives we might implement to meet those needs. The advisory board members will be identified by the fall semester. I have also had an initial meeting with Lynnette Hentges from the Office of Sponsored Research to receive her counsel on pursuing

funding. Next month I will meet with some of the Cooperative Extension faculty in Manchester to talk about how we might work together in the future. In conversations with my colleagues in the Outreach Scholars Academy, a number of other potential partners were identified, Campus Compact, the UNH Parents Association, Manchester Chamber of Commerce, the Education faculty already doing work in the Manchester schools, and the Carsey Institute, among others.

Expected Impact:

When funding proposals result in funding dollars, the direct impact will be on UNH Manchester by allowing the college to open a Center for Community Engagement thereby meeting the goal outlined in the strategic plan. By providing adequate resources through funding, the staff of the Center would be able to implement specific programs/services that will benefit the greater Manchester community and the University. Opportunities for collaborative projects will be identified and supported.

Scholarly Connection:

Again, in the long run, as programs and services are implemented, the projects faculty, staff and students undertake will provide opportunities to study the impact of University/community collaborations on many factors such as social capital, students' academic success, retention, feelings of well being in the community, and faculty research on urban issues, among others.

5. Evaluation Plan:

In the grant writing phase, I plan on soliciting feedback from Dean Woolever, Associate Dean Reagan, the newly created advisory board and the staff of the Office of Sponsored Research. When the proposal is submitted, evaluation will be provided by the funding organizations to which I have applied.

Once successful in garnering funds, I plan to assess the impact of outreach efforts by developing and administering instruments that measure student outcomes in particular, and the number of projects and services provided by the Center that link UNHM with the local community in general. This is admittedly vague however I plan to build assessment, data collection and publications into the design of future projects. I will have a better sense of how to do so when we get started. In the meantime, evaluation may be a function of observing the quality of the connections developed with partners, the trust built in the community, and the receptiveness of partners to proposals of specific initiatives.