Program Request  
University of Utah  
Center for Communication and Community  
In the Department of Communication  
03/08/2012  

Section I. Request  

The Department of Communication seeks the establishment of the Center for Communication and Community to provide the administrative means for enlisting communication scholarship into the service of community needs. The Center would be based on a micro-economics, technology-transfer, community engaged scholarship model to create reciprocal benefits for community groups and communication faculty and students.

Section II. Need  

"The scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems, to our children, to our schools, to our teachers and to our cities." (Ernest Boyer. (1996). The Scholarship of Engagement.)

From the Carnegie Foundation in 1990 to the Kellogg Commission in 1999 to the Brown University initiative of 2006 to the present, the call has been sounded for higher education to move beyond its academic walls and find its place in the community. The University of Utah has responded well to this call with its service learning programs managed through the Bennion Center, its west side outreach located in the University Neighborhood Partners program and most recently applying for and receiving the Carnegie Community Engaged University designation. One next step is to regularize the practice of community engaged scholarship at the department level through the creation of administrative and curricular mechanisms that provide for and recognize its daily performance. As with most—if not all—departments on campus, the Department of Communication has particular expertise, skills, and knowledge that can be leveraged by community members into positive outcomes for their community as well as to provide the site and stage for innovative research and contributions to the discipline. The work of the proposed center would be in the creation of durable linkages between the department and the members of the multiple communities of this state in order to provide alternative routes to achieve both the research and teaching mission of the University and citizen-motivated community improvement.

The 2007 report by co-sponsored by Campus Compact noted that a "central challenge to expanding engaged research is a perception held by many faculty members that it is not valued in the promotion and tenure process." A second effort of the Center, therefore, is to work with faculty and administration to develop the appropriate criteria and assessment tools that will support community engaged research and provide an appropriate route for career achievements for the professorial staff.

This proposal was initiated in a 2007 grant from the Civically Engaged Scholarship Initiatives program funded by the office of the Senior Vice President. That grant supported a study of the feasibility of University Centers of Community Engagement. Viewing departments "as the local communities of the University", the study held that "if we are to achieve a full measure of community engagement by the University, it will have to be supported by the [departmental] communities of the University. The work of each such centers was envisioned as leveraging disciplinary based expertise to connect the experts within a department with the appropriate community needs. The results of the study underlined the necessity of a local to local connection in order for sustained and sustainable relationships between academic and societal communities. This proposal for a departmental center for community engagement within the Department of Communication is a direct result of that study.

Finally, The 2011 report on the *Principles of Community Engagement* authored in part by the Task Force on the Principles of Community Engagement and sponsored by NIH concludes that successful community based research requires sustained person-to-person contact to establish and maintain the necessary relationships in an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. These relationships are not a sometime thing, where researchers drop in and drop out of the community according to their agenda. The establishment of the Center allows for the sustained effort required.

**Section III. Institutional Impact**

The Center has been informally operating as a development site for the past five years based on the findings of the 2007 Initiatives grant. During that time it has worked with faculty and graduate students to produce the policies and procedures that would direct it. It has received approval for the main curricular components that form the heart of the activity. Those components are repeatable graduate and undergraduate courses that allow graduate and undergraduate students to be Center Fellows and Center Interns respectively. Center Fellows are charged with the responsibility for identifying projects that fit the mission of the Center to create durable relationships with the community through scholarship in action. Center Fellows then participate with the community organization to manage the project with the support and mentorship of the faculty. Center Interns assist Center Fellows in the identification and activities of projects. The primary work of the fellows is advisory, consultative, and instructive. They do not do the work of the project; they make it possible for community members to achieve their own goals.

The impact of this development site has been to provide students and faculty with the opportunity for their scholarship and expertise to make a difference. Center Fellows have worked with Alliance Community Services to help that organization produce a book, in Spanish, with pictures and illustrations that helps Latinas in the community learn about breast cancer. The book focuses on the stories of Latinas, their struggles with breast cancer, and the changes in their lives. Center Fellows also worked with Guadalupe Schools to train the small administrative team in public communication and civic engagement in order that the administrators could then train parents to make better use of the local media through press releases and news stories. Center Interns have worked with the Ronald McDonald House to help develop their Internet social networking practices, provide research services for its capital campaign, and to develop a video archive of client stories.

The work to date has been a series of one-off projects that are significant—at the high end of service learning if you will—and that create bursts of good will toward the University in the community, but they are not developing durable relationships, and they are not returning sustained value to the archive of communication scholarship. The purpose of the proposed Center is to provide the institutional impact of those latter achievements. Establishment of the Center would advance those goals by providing a visible symbol (albeit virtual) for the community of its long-term commitment to community members, by becoming an institutional participant in the professional associations and publication venues of the discipline, and by working with funding agencies to put both communication and community engagement on their agendas. Members of the department have a long history of an advanced presence within these disciplinary associations and can achieve both national and international results.

The purpose of the proposed center, then, is to assist in managing the community engaged research (CER) process at the disciplinary level by:

- Establishing and maintaining durable relationships across the diverse communities of the state
- Helping these communities to identify and articulate needs that can be met by communication research and scholarship
- Assisting faculty to recognize the research potential within the communities of the state
- Brokering the relationship between communities and researchers/scholars
- Facilitating research activities by connecting faculty with graduate and undergraduate students
- Conducting original research directed at developing theory and methodology appropriate to community engaged research
- Being a recognizable presence on the nascent national CER scene
• Participating in the development of venues of presentation and publication
• Supporting and leveraging at the disciplinary level the CER work of the Bennion Center and of Neighborhood Partners
• Becoming a partner in the Muse Project
• Providing students and faculty with opportunities for transformative experience
• Making a difference in community members’ lives

Section IV Finances

The Center of Communication and Community is currently fully funded by the Department of Communication and needs no additional financial support. The Center works from a two-way “technology transfer” model and is based on the principles of micro-economics. Every department has particular expertise, skills, and knowledge that can be leveraged by community interests into positive outcomes. Every community has particular practices that mark it as a distinct community and that can be leveraged into scientific and scholarly contributions.

Micro-economics has demonstrated that it does not take a large investment to produce significant results when the community itself is the driving force. The Center does not require money, collect money, or disburse money. It does not run programs; it provides the expertise to achieve them. Because The Center does the ordinary work of a faculty member—teaching, research, and service, but in alternate locations; its primary costs are a sign on the door, letterhead, and business cards.

Center Fellows are supported by the instructional staff and the available credit in the course: Communication 7310 Communication and Community Engagement, and the Center Interns are supported by Communication 5380 Interdisciplinary Applications in Community Engagement. Both courses will be repeatable once the Center is in operation.

Like its curricular foundation, the Center is a commitment, not a place or a portfolio of programs. The Center creates the opportunity for programs, assists in their development, enables them to be better—but always by following the lead of the community—and then assists in the creation and publication of the resulting scholarly work. It is an administrative device that provides the connection among the department, the communities it can serve, and the body of knowledge within the discipline.

The Center, then, works entirely within the margins of existing resources by assigning a faculty member to supervise already established course activities and to mentor graduate and undergraduate students in learning experiences that fit inside and are appropriate to existing graduate plans of study and undergraduate degrees. The supervising faculty member is teaching the theory and practice of communication and engaged in communication scholarship that in turn benefits the community.

In its developmental stage, the Center has developed close relationships with The Bennion Center and University Neighborhood Partners. It looks forward to being a partner to the Muse Project. The Center does not duplicate the work of any of these initiatives but rather intends to extend their effectiveness by raising departmental consciousness of community involvement, by putting more “boots on the ground” in the community, and by creating the avenues of scientific and scholarly contributions.