PROPOSAL 6
Students Offering Service – Community Engagement Assistant

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Eastern Washington University Whitworth College
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Project goals:
By focusing on identifying community need, the work of the community engagement assistant will increase campus awareness of community agencies and their programs through a better understanding of their structure, needs, mission and the populations they serve. As a result of this process we will:
- develop deeper relationships with existing community partners.
- establish relationships with new community partners.
The project goals are as follows:

1. Develop service projects across the service “spectrum” – from short term volunteer experiences to co-curricular service, to service-learning and internship/practicum opportunities.

2. Coordinate events such as Service Fest that bring community partners to campus to promote their service-learning, volunteer, practicum and internship opportunities. This event typically takes place two times per academic year.

3. Co-ordinate and participate in the Inland Northwest Service-Learning Partnership’s (INSLP) community partner recognition - an annual event in April hosted by INSLP honoring the community agencies that work with the region’s higher education institutions.

4. Develop targeted service opportunities such as “entry-level” service-learning placements for general education courses and large group volunteer opportunities for the EWU Living and Learning Communities.

5. Oversee, maintain and build the SOS database of volunteer opportunities.

The focus of the community engagement assistant is to further build community partnerships and identify community need. The basis of authentic service experiences should be driven by community need. Strong community voice is essential for these partnerships. This dialogue with the community to identify need yields rich benefits yet takes time - whether developing the smallest volunteer placement or working on large university/community initiatives. We believe that by focusing more on our community partners, we will build stronger relationships, and be better able to involve more students and faculty in these valuable learning experiences.

These increased community service experiences support Goals I and III of the EWU Academic Strategic Plan:

   - **Goal I** seeks to provide a rigorous and engaged student learning experience. Research shows that when students get involved in community issues and challenges, their academic, personal and career development is greatly enhanced. “Carefully designed service-learning experiences can lead to profound learning and developmental outcomes for students, the primary reason that institutions of higher education engage in service-learning” (McEwen, 1996).

   - **Goal III** - Goal III is to support an institution-wide commitment to community engagement that benefits the university, the region and the world. The community engagement assistant most directly supports Goal III of the Academic Strategic Plan. Community voice is essential in reaching this goal. The more responsive the university can be to serving community need, the more engagement opportunities will result.

**Background**

In 2001, there was no community engagement office on campus. For many years, Career Services placed work-study students in community service positions as mandated by the state and federal work-study programs administered by that office. Through these community relationships, the need for student workers in the community was very clear.
The Career Services Internship Office also received a significant number of postings every year from community agencies that didn’t quite fit the internship “mold”. These positions were better suited for volunteers rather than interns. It was very apparent that community agencies were conveying to us a strong interest in our students assisting them in addressing community needs.

Through a needs assessment with Student Life, the Internship Office also discovered that many student clubs and organizations identified community service as a key part of their club’s mission, yet they often didn’t know where to go to find group volunteer opportunities. That year, Career Services received a Higher Education Coordinating Board community service grant to address these needs by developing Students Offering Service (SOS), a community engagement office whose primary focus would be to promote volunteer and co-curricular service opportunities to EWU students and student groups. The grant was renewed the following year as well and the work has continued to grow rapidly with many students and student groups accessing SOS to connect to co-curricular service opportunities. New students now come to the university with the full expectation that community service will be an integral part of their co-curricular experience.

During that same time frame in 2001, Washington Campus Compact provided a “Partners in Service” grant to Dr. Patricia Chantrill for institutionalizing service-learning at EWU. At that time there was no existing service-learning center on Eastern’s campus. The service-learning efforts that took place on campus were fairly departmentalized and there was no campus wide coordination of these efforts. Dr. Chantrill teamed up with SOS to identify faculty interested in service-learning, and provide resources and support to these faculty. Much of the support and resources came through collaboration with other INSLP-member institutions such as Gonzaga University, Spokane Falls Community College and Whitworth College who each had advanced service-learning initiatives taking place on their campuses. Through this grant, service-learning experts such as Barbara Holland were brought to INSLP –member campuses. A community partner forum was hosted at EWU in the winter of 2001. Community activist and educator Paul Loeb was brought in to speak to over 100 regional community partners.

SOS continues to be involved with the service-learning efforts that have taken place at Eastern through the years. Whether working on the Kellogg Foundation grant, serving on the EWU Community Service Advisory Board or participating in the Teaching and Learning Center’s Scholars’ Learning Community, SOS has been a major partner and contributor to the service-learning and co-curricular efforts at EWU. SOS has worked closely with the EWU Faculty Fellow on Service-Learning since the fellowship’s inception. SOS assisted the faculty fellow in a survey of service-learning faculty and projects during the ‘04/’05 academic year.

SOS has worked collaboratively with the Education Department to provide support to faculty interested in service-learning. Under the co-direction of SOS and Dr. Patty Luse in Education, two full-time AmeriCorps positions work collaboratively in the SOS office. These positions are part of a three year grant through Washington Campus Compact’s “Campus Connections” program. The AmeriCorps members’ full-time jobs are to promote service-learning and co-curricular service opportunities to the students and faculty at EWU. The AmeriCorps members also oversee the Washington Campus Compact “Students in Service” program. This program provides individual students up to $2,362 – worth of education awards for their work in the community – whether through volunteering, service-learning or through internship/practicum positions. Last
year, EWU students were awarded almost $100,000 worth of these awards. This year, Washington Campus Compact has over $123,000 earmarked for EWU students.

At this time, these SOS initiatives are “add-ons” to the responsibilities of the Internship Office. Although there are a number of outstanding work-study student staff who coordinate a wide variety of volunteer opportunities such as Habitat for Humanity and the Cheney Hang Out, there is currently no staff position dedicated to this work. Also, as of this writing, Washington Campus Compact did not receive a renewal for the grant that funds the “Campus Connections” program that supplies EWU with two AmeriCorps members. After July 2006, there will be no more “Campus Connections” program. The community engagement assistant would help bridge the gap vacated by the departure of the AmeriCorps positions and be a strong support and contributor to this vital campus-wide engagement effort.

The Initiative

The importance of spending time identifying community need cannot be overstated. “Responsible and responsive partnerships with community service agencies take time, intentional effort, and consistent attention” (Jones, 2003). It entails meeting with community partners and spending the time necessary to identify what the community partners need, how that need can match learning outcomes, and communicating that information to faculty, staff and students.

It also involves recognizing and honoring the relationships that we have developed. “In addition, the university should recognize and reward community service agency staff who function as teachers, trainers, and on-site supervisors for their contributions to the service-learning experience” (Jones, 2003). Dialoging with our community partners also sends a powerful message that the university truly cares about its partnerships. Historically, this has not always been emphasized enough. Often, the focus has been on what the community partners can do for our students. However, these agencies are providing more than a “life-lab” to our students. They are providing a rich training ground of how to be civically engaged – a framework that hopefully our students will continue in well beyond their college years.

The community engagement assistant will begin with the agencies listed in the SOS database of volunteer opportunities and work to expand it. Contacting and meeting with the agencies that currently post their community service positions with EWU will be the starting point for developing more and varied volunteer, service-learning and internship opportunities. By meeting with these partners face to face, we will be in a much stronger position to connect their needs with campus initiatives.

The community engagement assistant will also work with the Living and Learning Communities in Residential Life to identify specific volunteer and service-learning opportunities for those students. Many of the students living in the residence halls are freshmen and sophomores and have had little previous experience working in the community. These volunteer opportunities represent an important “first step” training experience for these students for this community work. Often, these entry level volunteer positions require the community partner to be more involved as a teacher to set expectations for the students.

The community engagement assistant will work with the EWU Faculty Fellow for Service-Learning on a number of initiatives. The community engagement assistant will
notify the faculty fellow of community needs and initiatives as they arise. Both will be involved in INSPLP. The faculty fellow is involved in collaborative faculty development efforts such as bringing service-learning experts to INSPLP-member campuses for workshops. The community engagement assistant will work with INSPLP in hosting the community partner recognition event in April.

The community engagement assistant will also work with the Scholars Learning Community on Service-Learning (SLC). The SLC is working to develop general education courses with service-learning components. The community engagement assistant will be vital to assist the SLC in identifying appropriate “entry-level” service-learning opportunities for freshmen and sophomores who may not have much experience working in the community.

Outcomes
One outcome of the community engagement assistant will be an increase of volunteer, service-learning and internship/practicum opportunities. Another outcome will be a deepening of the relationship between EWU and our community partners. At present, SOS has served as a volunteer “clearinghouse” with an array of community service opportunities being promoted to students, faculty and student groups. However, as more specific community need is identified, more collaborative, enhanced community-based learning experiences will become available to students, faculty and staff.

Matching Resources
The resources for the community engagement assistant will be matched in order to sustain the position. First of all, in addition to the $ 7,760 requested from the Academic Strategic Planning Pool, Career Services and Student Affairs together will contribute $10,000 towards this position. This will help increase the hours available for the community engagement assistant.

The community engagement assistant will also be aided by one of the AmeriCorps members through July of 2006. This will provide the engagement assistant with much-needed assistance and support.

It is the intent of the Career Services unit to upgrade the community engagement assistant to the 50% administrative exempt position of community engagement coordinator effective during the ’06/’07 academic year.

Timetable for Implementation
The search for the community engagement assistant will begin immediately. The position will be a part-time position – 25 hours per week over the 39 weeks – January through September. As previously mentioned, Career Services intends to upgrade this position to a 50% administrative exempt community engagement coordinator once the grant period has expired.

Budget
The position of community engagement assistant will be 25 hours per week at $16.55 per hour over 39 weeks: $16,140.01
Benefits: $ 1,619.00
Total: $17,759.01

Evaluation and Assessment
The partnerships that develop from the work of the community engagement assistant will be documented. The assistant will keep data on all of the community agencies they have met with and the types of service positions the agency is requesting. A survey will be sent out to all of the community partners that met with the assistant to follow up whether or not the meetings were helpful and what kinds of results the community partner experienced as a result of the meetings. Special documentation will be kept regarding those service opportunities that resulted from the work of the community engagement assistant.

Because this position will also be involved in annual events such as *Service Fest* and the INSLP Community Partner Recognition, journals will also be kept describing their participation in these events.
References
