

Aaron Perzigian, Special Education, Woodring College of Education, WWU
Community Engagement Fellows Project Report

Title:

Developing partnerships with community agencies for service learning placements

I began my community engagement (CE) project with the intention of developing service learning placements for the pre-service teacher candidates enrolled in the special education program at Western Washington University. In order to graduate, pre-service teachers must have service learning experience in addition to their classroom-based practicums. Typically, the service learning placements are also classroom-based. This CE project was to go beyond the traditional classroom and expand service learning placement opportunities to include community settings and alternative school placements. For example, a supported employment agency or a recreational program for youth with intellectual disabilities. It is important to me that our students have a variety of experiences working with youth in a variety of settings.

My project changed throughout the year to focus specifically on alternative school settings. These are school placements typically overrepresented by students with disabilities. Previously, our pre-service teacher candidates did not have opportunities to service learn in alternative schools or programs. Through the course of this project, I developed relationships with two alternative secondary schools, and at the time of writing this reflection, I am in the initial stages of a relationship with a third alternative school.

The first alternative school with which I developed a relationship hosted my students for service learning during part of the 2016-2017 school year. The second and now third will be hosting my students in the upcoming 2017-2018 school year. Participating in the CE fellows has allowed me to bounce ideas off community members on how to best facilitate aspects of these relationships and potentially target specific schools based on community need.

I have been able to meet a diverse group of people, with incredibly diverse projects, under the shared goal of strengthening the community experience for our constituents (i.e., pre-service teachers). Especially as a new faculty member, being able to collaborate across campus and across the community has been personally professionally advantageous. Participating in the CE Fellows program has afforded me opportunities to meet with and learn from other members of the community, which in turn has strengthened my own teaching at Western.

It was nice to be part of a group that supported each other in developing ideas and taking risks to bring those ideas to life. Thank you Travis for making this experience happen and for bringing us together for the common good.