Introduction

The target of this Integrative Seminar was not a particular health issue, but rather the case of health-related education (and in particular, its community-based learning components) here in the Pioneer Valley. We took as our impetus the exponential growth of interest in public and global health studies, along with the growing sense of trepidation that many faculty feel regarding the contours of programs arising to meet that interest. We sought to combine necessary critique of public health education and
practice with working alternatives to effective social change. To do so, we brought together a novel mix of collaborators -- including those who work explicitly on health and those who work with and for the wellbeing of communities outside a standard health framework.

In order to escape the centripetal force of current models, we structured the seminar to unearth root motivations for participants' work and to develop a clear collective vision for community engagement that would address core concerns while nourishing common aspirations and motivating innovative health-related pedagogy and practice. We were at times surprised. We were humbled. And we could not be more pleased with the outcomes.

We originally set out to create specific resources to aid faculty in deepening their health-related community-engaged teaching and research. We anticipated that these resources would include syllabi, bibliographies, new publications, principles, and a taxonomy of community engagement in the Pioneer Valley. What the organizing team found as a result of our semester-long work together, and what came out of the seminar process, included many of these anticipated outcomes as well as a much richer set of resources and insights. For instance, we came to realize through the course of the seminar that a “taxonomy of engagement” was poised to set up a hierarchy of value that prompted unhealthy comparison and impeded people's willingness to embark on community partnerships or to frame their work along such lines. Instead, we elicited themes and developed collective projects that not only eschew such hierarchies but that work toward meeting the wide variety of faculty inclinations, desires, and abilities to engage meaningfully with individuals, community leaders, and institutions to work toward mutually beneficial education and research in health and well-being.

Outcomes, as described below, include several planned projects and curricular resources, two publications in draft, and a series of core insights into ideal bridging between liberal arts education and health-related graduate/professional training and practice.

**Bridging Insights**

1. **We need to promote STEAHM rather than STEM.**
We currently face an unprecedented imbalance between the technocratic orientation of the professions and the broad, deep, critical resources of the arts and the humanities of the liberal arts. Because the weight is tilted so far in favor of the technical, it has a profound effect on student learning and becoming professionals, as well as on our teaching and our ability to give future professionals what they need to be wise (and not just smart). Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics risks a dangerous disconnect from humanity and the social good without the Arts and Humanities -- and this is true not just in terms of the products of these fields' efforts, but for the people who populate the fields as well.

Our seminar made it clear to all of us in new ways how important it is to reclaim the liberal arts -- not through technocratic means, but rather in an integrative wave. We see on our campuses a wide range of course offerings, but students and faculty alike do not really know how to integrate the liberal arts into our work (that is, our work as engaged teachers and researchers, as well as students as budding researchers and professionals). We as faculty are disciplined to separate our technical skills from our wisdom, and so our students learn to do that by extension. This is increasingly dangerous for those who inhabit more fully technocratic worlds that have not figured out how and why to integrate broad critical wisdom.

Seminar participants responded profoundly to our frame for integrating a full range of perspectives into our discussion of health and engagement. As one participant put it, “This workshop has allowed me to breathe again.” We did not allow technical output to trump the important work of excavating our motivations and core commitments. As another participant attested, “The intellectual energy that we put toward thinking of what we need/desire/love.seek envision in terms of spaces, structures, curricular resources, and we need personally is probably the best use of my mental energy that I’ve had since coming to UMass 4 years ago.” We hear this reaction loud and clear, warning that we save the liberal arts through technocratic means alone at our peril!

2. We must create spaces and platforms for novel connections and ideas to emerge.
Seminar discussion revealed a poverty of spaces that allow for novelty to emerge through engagement. This is true for faculty and students alike. We cannot solve the complex problems we face in the 21st century with the tools of the past, including the disciplinary silos that have evolved in our institutions of higher education.

The seminar itself was a step in this direction. As one participant commented, “This has been an opportunity to experience the kind of intellectual engagement that I entered academia for - but rarely, if ever, have experienced within my department.” As another participant expressed it, “The seminar allowed for a space and a process to make connections with new people and gain understanding into my place in relation to them. To me, it has felt important to realize that I am not alone and that many of us share a desire to create a collective space to make working with communities more meaningful and effective in terms of a revolution that can upend the current violent economic, social, and health inequities.”

Moving forward, some participants plan to adopt some of our facilitation techniques in future classes; some are interested in replicating the seminar with other groups; and all of us are committed to keeping our group together and also “widening our circle” as a source for continuing inspiration and innovation. In the words of another reflection, “I'm inspired and energized because I see that we don't have to settle for just any form of community engagement.”

3. **Health can and must be approached obliquely.**

While difficult to define satisfactorily, health is clearly more than a laundry list of problems to be solved. Yet health interventions are dominated by technocratic conceptions and processes in the domains of public health and medicine. Shifting our thinking of health toward something like well-being and thriving allows for a wider range of foci to count as health promotion, including work on poverty, housing, transportation, food, climate change, and more. Indeed, many in public health would agree - but due to a range of pressures, including institutional structures and funding mechanisms, they are forced to get technocratic very fast when engaging people's health challenges in communities.
We see a focus on community engagement, rather than health, as a means to recenter wellbeing more broadly in our pedagogy and praxis. We feel buoyed by comments like this: “As a participant formally trained in Public Health, I appreciated the chance to rethink meanings of health and possibilities for work around health as it relates to community engagement.” And in the words of another, “Although most of us came at it with an interest in health, this seminar was particularly useful in that it explored questions/problems/principles of community engagement/participation not narrowly defined by medical conceptions of health/disease.” Indeed, we have come to see health most fully from other angles. Integration of core liberal arts sensibilities into professional practices will be one way to push for the community-based margins of public health, which appreciate a more ecological frame, to the center of professionalization and research.

4. Relationality is key.

The importance of relationality, over and above any given content of instruction or desired outcome for community engagement, emerged as perhaps the central insight of our seminar. Critical discussion made clear this need not mean a particular brand of psychologized or normativizing relationality. We came collectively to see how prioritizing relationships and relationship building in a variety of forms could allow for more robust endeavors, from programming and partnerships to professionalization and knowledge production. “There is something powerful about seeing and hearing what set of factors brought people to do the work that they do, particularly in grassroots organizations” - and we see this true both for community-university partnerships as well as inter- and intra-departmental collaborations as well.

Such relationship building does not happen automatically. “Fellow travelers” are not only found but One seminar participant stated that sentiment forcefully: “Importantly, it [the seminar] was an opportunity to build meaningful connections with colleagues - not just on the basis of shared interests, but also a deeper form of relationality that produced trust. These relationships are a strong foundation for the work that this set of collaborators envisions for the future. The process structured by the facilitators was absolutely essential to making this happen.” As another responded comments, “The seminar has also been enormously helpful in modeling a set of practices for actually
building collaborative community.” We outline some of those processes and practices below.

**Seminar Structure**

The application and pre-seminar process was designed both to give the organizers a chance to understand the orientations and goals of the participants and to begin to orient the participants to the narrative mode of the seminar itself.

Once accepted into the seminar, faculty participants were asked to write short narrative anecdotes -- stories -- illustrating their challenges around community engagement. These narratives were circulated to all participants before the seminar began.

Each day of the seminar included two activities. First, we used different brief grounding exercises, brought to us by several participants who had engaged in contemplative practices from various sources. Then, we began our discussions with a core activity of the seminar: structured personal storytelling. Each participant was asked to take ten minutes at some point during the seminar (three people each morning) to share what brings them to care about engagement. The story could begin wherever the participant wished, whether with their ancestors, childhood, or college service projects. They could choose freely what small part of their lives to share, what to omit, what to gloss. There was no further instruction than to share what brings you to this work. After each, listeners were directed not to critique or analyze but simply to note aloud what struck them, what resonated, what they appreciated. The objective of this activity was, first and foremost, to shake us out of the critical/reactive mode of faculty engagement, and to create the conditions for participants to engage with one another more deeply and with greater appreciation for our diverse contexts and motivations. In addition, grounding our discussions of engagement in an awareness of what this work means for each of us gestures toward a desire on our part for greater epistemological parity between university actors and community actors. We often ask community folks to share their stories with students and with researchers; if storytelling is so valuable, we believe that university actors should thus be willing to locate our own work by engaging in such intimate practices as well. Sharing our own contexts and stories, if appropriately bounded and framed, also enables trust to be built quickly within a group.
The flow of the seminar week as a whole was designed to move participants slowly from their own challenges to a sense of collectivity, from their own individual goals to shared vision and projects, and from an awareness of the university/community tensions for their own engagement projects to a deepened connection with community partners’ understanding of these tensions.

**Day 1** - On the first day, we introduced the format of the seminar, built connections with one another, and articulated initial individual goals. The core of the day involved delving into each of our engagement stories (written for the seminar) and articulating the questions and concerns that these stories (as case studies) elicit for each of us.

**Day 2** - The second day was dedicated to concept-mapping and visioning. We used the questions and concerns produced on Day 1 to develop distinct concept maps, and to make meaning of these. What emerged were three rich discussions of the challenges of community engagement in culture, health, and sciences. Insights are listed above, but here is a visual sense of the process:

![Concept mapping images]

We ended the day by discussing together how Day 3 should be organized in order ethically and deeply to engage with the community partners who would be sharing their digital stories with us.

**Day 3** - This day was dedicated to engagement with the community partners who had produced digital stories two weeks earlier. Faculty and community leaders each discussed what this process (the faculty seminar thus far and the digital storytelling workshop) had been for them. We viewed the digital stories, and then discussed various aspects of the work the community leaders do with their members and with our students. Together we outlined priorities and next steps.
**Day 4** - The final day involved pulling together the themes and questions we had developed to work toward specific project visioning. We used an “open space technology” workshop format to brainstorm in free-flowing dialogues, identified the most compelling ideas, and finally spent focused time fleshing out an outline of the project ideas that emerged. We shared our project outlines with one another, and were energized and excited at what we had produced. Here is a visual of the Open Space outcome, before we distilled projects to work on:

![Open Space Outcome](image)

We then spent several hours working on the projects described in the “outcomes” section below. Finally, we spent some time reflecting on the week. Short participant responses are appended below.

**Outcomes**

**Projects**

Participants identified and developed an outline of three projects that came out of our discussions. Each of these projects was designed to address the collective vision of community engagement in culture, health, and science, which is a vision that takes into account the complexities of community (both within and across university settings and between and across community settings and organizations), the structures and resources for community-engaged work, and the desire for a more relational mode of faculty engagement.
These three projects include:

1- Structural Shift: Community-Based Liaisons Project

Alongside the strong desire to put relationality at the center of our work as engaged scholars/teachers, we developed a collective desire to structure engagement around community needs and dynamics rather than around our diverse university/college needs and dynamics.

“We identified institutional and structural impediments to creating community engaged work that is attuned to health. To address these impediments we came up with a plan to make community-based organizations the center of university/community partnerships. We identified the need of community organizations to have one source that they can be in touch with to access all of the resources of each of the colleges. As it stands, community organizations spend a lot of time navigating who to talk with at each of the colleges/universities and working with faculty and students to develop courses, internships, research projects, etc. We propose community liaisons who are well-versed in sectors of need identified by communities who would be the point of contact for other institutions, community projects, faculty, etc. working on the same needs-based sectors.” (from participant reflection)

This project outline includes a significant planning component, an outline of how the liaison project could actually function and be sustained, and a specific potential “slow” and non-compulsory transition plan to shift from the college/university-based engagement structures that currently exists to this community-based higher education liaison structure. At least five participants were interested in potentially continuing to develop this project if there were resources to do so.

2- Resource Development: Online Clearinghouse Project

“We identified the need for an online clearinghouse where resources and syllabi, best teaching practices, point persons, bibliographies, and failures could be housed. This is a resource that could be useful within the academy and without and would be an open source website.” (from participant reflection)
We are well on our way to populating this site, with a growing bibliography (sample appended), syllabi samples, guiding question primers (questions to ask oneself and students about doing health-related / community-based work), and personal health resources. (Two publications are also nearing completion as the direct result of the planning and outcomes of our seminar, geared to fill important gaps in the existing relevant literature.) The platform itself will also function as a platform for continued community building as well as a forum for growing new student projects. Toward that end, we plan to apply for faculty seminar funds to support our working through the contours of this site -- its discussion forums, open access and editing policies, data visualization schemes, project profiles, and so forth. Preliminarily, we intend to model “The Engagement Clearinghouse” on George Mason's Middle East Studies’ “Knowledge Production Project” (http://middleeast.gmu.edu/projects/knowledge-production), and we have put our bibliography and its growing annotations and tags in a spreadsheet format that can most easily be searched and manipulated for data visualization. Integrating with the Culture, Health, and Science certificate program, we also envision this a terrific platform for collaboration between computer science, the digital humanities, and other core CHS disciplines.

3- Support Development: Engaged Space(s) Project

During the course of the seminar, there developed an expressed desire for spaces (similar to the seminar itself) that could nurture faculty and community work within the university/colleges on an ongoing basis.

“...the goal of which would be to create spaces for people to actually be in community not only between the Five Colleges but also with the other colleges in the region. Many of the centers that currently exist are quiet silos that people do not actually visit to be in community. They tend to go with a purpose or quietly do their individual work.” (from participant reflection)

The desire for space to house and nurture faculty members’ personal/professional relationships with one another and with community partners became framed ultimately as a desire for the conditions for a healthier form of engagement than most of us feel is possible under current university conditions.
Initial specific plans are for the Engaged Anthropology Lab at UMass Amherst to serve as an incubator of this idea, although ultimately this project would require resources to create a much larger working, meeting, and potentially living space for the variety and depth of health engagement relationships that we currently enact and anticipate. There are at least four seminar participants who are expressly committed to this project’s realization.

**Curricular Resources**

In addition to these three projects outlines, this grant has resulted in important concrete resources for and shifts in faculty participants’ engaged teaching. Please see the attached full bibliography, produced in part out of our semester of planning work. Participants annotated particularly salient citations following our seminar. These will serve as starting points for the Clearinghouse Project (see 2 above).

Several faculty participant reflections included commitments to enact syllabus changes and structural innovations in their own work based on the discussions and work that came out of the seminar. The breadth of specific commitments reflected include curricular innovations in Native Studies, Education, and Anthropology, as well as modal or structural shifts in community-engaged work in Afro-American Studies, Global/International Studies, Anthropology, Education, and Communications.

There are also existing and proposed innovative engagement projects and structures that may serve as bridges between the insights and outlines produced by the seminar and concrete implementation plans. One notable such project is a proposed 1-year applied/engaged MA program in the Department of Anthropology at UMass, which after this seminar we are tentatively exploring in terms of “Community Health and Justice.” The other is a plan to reinstate a more substantial humanities component into the Five College Culture, Health, and Science certificate program.

**Community of Engaged Faculty**

Perhaps the most notable outcome of this seminar is the deep sense of community and commitment/vision developed over the four days among participants. While concrete outcomes of this community and vision are summarized above, we wish to report the
sense of community as an outcome in itself. This sense of community is not simply a sense of enjoying one another's company; it is tied in with a vision grounded in our work and our lives. One participant connects these two nicely: “I gained colleagues, relationships, practical ideas for teaching and research, theoretical insights, direction, inspiration, clarity about next steps in my research trajectory. I wish I had an opportunity to participate in something like this annually…”

The “community” outcome of this seminar was a demonstration of the possibility of intervention to address some of the deep challenges of doing engaged work well in/from the academy. One participant put it this way: “I leave wondering why departments don't do this work themselves to better build a sense of community and camaraderie. I am excited to be in a position and have an opportunity to do this type of community building. This is what departmental retreats and even faculty retreats should be. I leave this space with a feeling of possibility, which I had not felt in a long time, and that the work I do matters…” This sense of possibility is productive; it actually makes new work possible, and is thus an outcome.

One caveat to this outcome is its quick ending, and the anxiety many participants expressed regarding the resources and time to carry this community/vision forward. One participant noted that “ultimately, though, this feels like the beginning of a much larger endeavor related to supportive and transformative educational practices, which is precisely why we need fellow travelers.” There was a strong awareness that the “outcome” of community and an awareness of its importance in each of our work is a vague one indeed, and that it would take concerted effort to institutionalize and carry forward.

Under Separate Cover:

Budget

Seminar Participant Reflections

Bibliography