Message from the Executive Director

Dear friends,

Our great state of Utah is changing rapidly. Population increases; demographic shifts; ecological and environmental swings; new federal and state policies; accelerated access to all types of information; evolving economic markets; recently discovered or introduced biomaterials; and emergent geopolitical issues; all explicitly or implicitly affect life in Utah. With these changes come new challenges that must be overcome and also tremendous opportunities to improve life for all Utahns.

The Bennion Center strives to be innovative and responsive to the needs of our state and our local communities. Specifically, we aim to foster a lifelong practice of service and civic participation by engaging the university with the needs of the greater community. In everything we do we believe that service is the most important currency of humanity and the solution to most societal problems. We also believe that community engagement not only makes great impacts in our neighborhoods, but provides the laboratory for exceptional teaching, learning and personal transformation. We believe as John Dewey pointed out a century ago — that our participatory democracy must be born anew in each generation and that education is its midwife. And, we believe in habitually asking Lowell Bennion’s fundamental question: How can I help?

The students and faculty that engage with the Bennion Center achieve their goals largely by creating strong campus-community partnerships. These partnerships bring people together to conduct community assessments, make strategic plans, implement those plans, and evaluate the results. Several of these projects and partnerships are featured in the pages that follow. We hope that you will be encouraged, as we are, by the numbers, the stories, and the amazing people who get important things done around here.

The Bennion Center moves forward this year with optimism and vigor. We are guided by enlightened board members, university administrators and energetic students. Our staff is composed of professionals who have a passion for the work and commit themselves daily to providing support and attention to everyone who wanders into the Bennion Center looking to change the world.

It is a privilege for all of us to be part of such a meaningful and important endeavor. We look forward to riding the waves of change and making some positive changes of our own.

Yours in service,
Dean

Project Youth

April 29th marked the annual Project Youth event. The Bennion Center bussed up over 900 sixth graders and their teachers from across the Salt Lake City School District for a day of fun and learning. Project Youth exposes Title I elementary students to college life and gets them excited about attending college. For many of the students, this was their first time on a university campus.

The sixth graders were treated to an assembly in Kingsbury Hall featuring President Pershing, the University Dance Team, members of the football team and the musical group Infrared, among other speakers and performers.

Following the assembly students went on a campus tour and each group attended two university classes set up just for them by a variety of staff and professors. The students and volunteers were also treated to a pizza lunch on the Union lawn. The energy of the participants could be felt all across campus that day as they toured campus in matching “Imagine U” T-shirts.

More than 230 university volunteers helped make the day possible through planning the event, ushering students across campus, setting and cleaning up or visiting the elementary schools months prior to the day on campus.

Next year’s Project Youth is scheduled for April 27, 2016
Community Engaged Scholars

by Chris Jensen, Community Engaged Learning Coordinator

The Bennion Center awarded 23 graduating students the Community Engaged Scholar distinction. Over the course of several years, each scholar served more than 400 hours with various community organizations, completed at least 4 Community Engaged Learning courses, attended 8 workshops and produced 8 reflection pieces. The year before graduation, they worked on an Integrated Service Project in which they applied their skills to various community-identified needs. This past year we had a very diverse group of projects with more than 2,300 hours of service contributed.

The year before graduation, they worked on an Integrated Service Project in which they applied their skills to various community-identified needs. This past year we had a very diverse group of projects with more than 2,300 hours of service contributed. From developing STEM-based curriculum into the Girl Scouts of Utah’s programming, to the creation of a play-therapy room at the Intermountain Specialized Abuse Treatment Center, scholars partnered with more than 26 different community organizations to foster positive grassroots change.

Each graduating scholar was recognized at the Bennion Center’s Scholars Recognition Banquet. Along with a special designation on their academic record, scholars received a certificate award and special cords to wear at commencement. Each scholar was recognized both at individual convocation ceremonies and collectively at commencement by President Pershing.

Donor Panel provides insights on Philanthropy

by Mary Draper, Development Officer

On April 24 the Student Board hosted three donor representatives for breakfast to discuss their perspectives on contributing to the Bennion Center and corporate and foundation philanthropy practices, in general. Guests were Tim Dee of the Lawrence T. and Janet T. Dee Foundation, Greg Hardy of Chevron, and Rick Horne of the R. Harold Burton Foundation.

Students heard great tips on making effective requests for funding and following up with donors. Suggestions included being concise in the “ask” and being specific about how any gift received will be used and how results achieved will be tracked. Results accountability is important and a “post-grant” report or letter summarizing results is appreciated. The Bennion Center is unique in that employees from organizations that donate (along with families and friends!) are always warmly invited to volunteer at Bennion Center service projects. Panel members encouraged maintenance of ongoing contact with donors and providing them with opportunities to be involved in your organization.

The Bennion Center relies on private gifts from individuals, corporations, and foundations for a good chunk of its annual operating budget. We appreciate the generosity of so many who support the Center.
Welcome New Staff

Bryce Williams joined the Bennion Center staff in January of this year as the Student Programs Coordinator. Bryce works with the Special Projects area (which encompasses most of the largest Bennion Center events), advises the Bennion Center Student Board, and mentors office support volunteers. Bryce is a Bennion Center alumnus and loves being back in the center. Bryce has a master’s degree in educational leadership and policy and a bachelor’s degree in social work from the U. Bryce spends his free time with his puppies and working as a trustee on the Sugar House Community Council. Bryce’s previous work experience includes advising, student government and residence life.

In spring 2015, the America Reads program changed its name to Utah Reads to more accurately reflect the scope and impact of the program and welcomed Cassi Simmons as the first coordinator under the new title. Cassi was involved with the program during her four years as an undergraduate student and was a member of the Bennion Center Student Board. She is excited to take on the role as Utah Reads Coordinator after receiving her bachelor’s degree in Operations Management. Although a business major, Cassi was determined to veer away from stereotypes and continue to work with nonprofits. “This is a big moment,” Cassi recalls, thinking of how her example will affect her young daughter for years to come.

Kim Mangun discovered the power of community-engaged learning when she joined the University of Utah Department of Communication in Fall 2006. She redesigned a class to give students hands-on experience with beat reporting of Salt Lake City’s diverse communities. After hearing how the experience positively impacted students’ sense of self, community awareness and civic responsibility, she successfully applied for CEL designation for the class. Kim is thrilled that her passion for CEL has led her to the Bennion Center as the new Associate Director. She looks forward to working with the team to expand opportunities for students and faculty to connect with community partners.

Laura Schwartz is the new Alternative Break Coordinator overseeing an experiential learning component of the Bennion Center where direct service, leadership, inclusion and active citizenship are deliberately fostered. Laura represented the U as an Alternative Breaks staff partner in Spring 2013 and 2014 and is excited to have a larger role in moving the student experience, community and Bennion Center forward. Laura has a master’s degree in higher education administration with a certificate in international higher education from Kent State University. Outside of the Bennion Center, Laura enjoys crafting, reading and exploring the great outdoors. She is proud to be a new member of the Bennion Center team!

Service House 10-Year Anniversary

by Melea Smith, Student Programs Coordinator

Release the balloons! This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Service House and celebrates the 11 successive resident groups who have lived and learned together, while striving to fulfill the Bennion Center’s mission.

Service House residents contributed 780 hours to community engagement projects, dialogues, planning meetings and Bennion Center events this year. They attended 8 Saturday Service Projects and elevated civic learning and discussion on campus with the Service House dialogues series. Working in teams of three, residents researched, planned and co-facilitated programs about relevant social issues. Their dialogue topics included: Sexual Assault and Prevention, Art and Activism, Alternative Energy and Undocumented Students Navigating Higher Education. Each dialogue had a distinct flavor and reflected the interests, strengths and creativity of the student facilitators. Campus and community partners enhanced discussions with their expertise and resources. In total, 84 students, community partners and staff participated in Service House dialogues.

The Service House became the first living learning community to compost! This sustainable effort (achieved in partnership with the Edible Campus Gardens) was championed by a resident inspired by her Alternative Break experience. In December, residents teamed up for a holiday project in their living room, hand-tying two quilts that were donated to the VA Nursing Home. Residents successfully found new ways to engage, forging new partnerships and initiatives on campus and in the community.

The Service House group raised their community to new heights this year. It was uplifting to witness how these 12 residents with diverse interests, backgrounds and academic disciplines formed bonds of respect and friendship through their shared passion for community engagement. They buoyed one another and the community with their energy, positivity and accomplishments. The Bennion Center and Service House residents are extremely grateful for the support from our advisory board members and generous donors who support students as they live and learn as a community.
**Student-Directed Program Spotlight**

by **Hyrum Mitchell,**
Student Program Director

Being the student program director over the International Rescue Committee program has been an eye-opening and rich learning experience for me.

The community partner and I began our year with a very open meeting discussing the current struggles and our desires for the program. Together we set goals and determined to meet monthly to account for those goals. We developed a tracking system to follow up with volunteers, report their hours and receive feedback. We were able to convert 61% more of our interested volunteers into actual volunteers, and volunteer hours increased by more than 300% from the previous year.

Over the past year, 570 refugees were resettled through the IRC in Salt Lake City. 15 refugees became citizens and 40 refugee youth were served through after-school youth tutoring. Of the thousands of volunteer hours that accomplished these results, about 14% of them were provided through the Bennion Center.

More important than numbers are the many lives that have been changed for the better. Here are a few quotes from our volunteers:

“One refugee I am working with lived in a bamboo house without running water and electricity. She moved here to save her dying father and was struggling to adapt to her new life. It helped me realize how lucky we are and appreciate what I have. I’m so glad I could meet her and help her.”

“This month the refugees I am working with completed all 100 citizenship questions. They worked very hard and it has been inspiring to work with them.”

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**First BC Learning Abroad to Cuba**

by **Lyuba Basin,** Student

I have developed a love affair with a country. Romantic and rebellious, I’ll admit that my younger expectations of Cuba were foolish, yet without them I would have never embarked on a dizzying adventure filled with the aromatic complexity of a country shrouded in mystery. Eight months later one word still stands out over the rest, **solidaridad.**

My experience abroad in Cuba during fall break has left me with a drive to continue bridging the gaps between cultures, developing solidarity not only within our own nation, but also across borders that we thought have long been sealed. Being able to experience Cuba in the midst of change and opportunity revealed to me that Cuba is not the expat paradise I originally imagined, nor is it the poverty-stricken communist country I was warned about. I realized the issues we discussed abroad (racial discrimination, gender inequality, community development, etc.) are just as important to discuss here at home.

Every nation has its problems, and no government is perfect, but rather than focus our attention on politics, Cuba has taught me to focus my attention on the people. Solidarity, love of humanity, the recognition of my actions. Who’s to say that a short week can’t change your life forever?

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**Earth Day**

by **Melea Smith,**
Student Programs Coordinator

After a night of steady rain, the clouds parted for the annual Earth Day event, creating perfect soil conditions for weeding and gardening. Ninety-four university and community volunteers contributed 336 hours hours at the Bend-in-the-River and Social Justice Garden sites. Many thanks to our supporters at CIT Bank, Comcast Cares, Rico brand and Parks and Public Lands.

The Bennion Center was proud to receive “gold” certification for sustainability in event planning!

Volunteers worked together to make a big impact at Bend-in-the-River: a 100-foot trail was realigned and refilled, and 75 native trees were restored. Weeding teams delighted in the damp soil, expertly removing/pulling approximately 400 gallons of thistle and grooming the amphitheater area. At the Social Justice Gardens, project impact included: 30 garden beds filled; 50 seedlings planted; 2000 square foot Diversity Garden plants pruned, trimmed and weeded; 1 shed organized and inventoried; 2 plot signs painted; and garden fence line and driveway cleared, weeded and spruced!

We raise our shovels (safely) to all the volunteers who served as wonderful environmental stewards at our Earth Day sites!