Message
From the Director

At the end of a historical fall semester, we at the Bennion Center are de-lighted to share with you some of the recent highlights in student-directed programming, academic service-learning, on-campus collaborations and community partnerships. The mission of the Bennion Center is central to all that we aspire to, promoting lifelong service and civic participation by engaging the University and greater community in action, change and learning. As the new director, I am honored to be associated with the legacy of Lowell L. Bennion and part of all that has come before. As we move into the future, we strive to continue to embed engagement more deeply into the teaching and learning at the University, bridging the opportunity gap by improving educational access and success and preparing students for global citizenship. Thank you for your involvement in the past and we look forward to your support in carrying this important work of community engagement forward.

Bennion Center Helps Disaster Relief in Iowa

This year, the Bennion Center organized the second annual Alternative Fall Break (AFB). The program involved five service trips to Moab, Denver, Iowa, and the Navajo Nation in Southern Utah. About 50 volunteers from the University of Utah donated more than 1,200 service hours while tackling issues like immigration, disaster relief, hunger and homelessness, and cultural exchange.

Earlier this year, Stephanie Ritrievi, Senior Academic Advisor of Undergraduate Student Programming at the David Eccles School of Business, came to the Bennion Center concerned about residents in her home state of Iowa. Disastrous floods left many people homeless and she hoped there was something the center could do. Kristen Bushnell, a Bennion Center student leader with ambitions to go into disaster response and recovery as a career, was recruited to help Stephanie lead the disaster relief trip to Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Needs and wants came together.

The Iowa Disaster Relief Trip consisted of a staff partner, a student leader and ten student volunteers. A local church fed and housed volunteers, helping keep costs down. Airfare prices prevented the group from flying. Driving to and from Iowa took three of the seven days of Fall Break, but volunteers accomplished a lot in the four days there.

The group volunteered with Hands On Disaster Response, a US-based, volunteer-driven, nonprofit organization dedicated to timely disaster response and relief. They primarily helped with the deconstruction of buildings and homes that were destroyed from floor to ceiling. Floorboards were ripped up, sheet rock was removed and piles of deconstruction material were collected. Volunteers also did interior and exterior painting. “We were helping more than just the families who lived there, we were helping the community,” Kristen comments, “Everyone was so grateful. One elderly woman thanked us again and again. Without our help, she would not have a home.”

AFB participants come home with new perspectives and often become more involved in local community issues. This trip empowered Kristen to develop a new program called Special Ops. Her dream is for it to be an intercollegiate disaster response effort. “It will be a quick response team to local disasters,” she says. To learn more about the Iowa trip and future disaster relief efforts, contact Kristen at 801-560-5352 or galadrielscourt@yahoo.com.

By Christy Tobolski

Service-Learning Program Recognized Nationally

Service-Learning continues to enjoy a strong presence at the University of Utah. US News & World Report’s list of Best Colleges 2009 once again recognized the Bennion Center’s service-learning program among the top 25.

During Fall 2008, more than 50 service-learning designated courses are being offered, partnering with almost 200 community organizations. While the center is proud of the program’s sustained accomplishments over the years, service-learning at the U is poised to take things to the next level.

Under the leadership of the Bennion Center’s new director and with the thoughtful advice and direction of faculty, community partners, and undergraduate students in the Service-Learning Scholars program, the Bennion Center is embarking on projects designed to enhance faculty support, strengthen partnerships and create deeper, more meaningful experiences for students and the community.

By Katie Olson

Jennifer Jensen, student in College of Education Service-Learning Course, creates service-learning project with 4th grade students
Bennion Center Takes Service to South America

On August 5th, 12 University of Utah students headed to Bolivia to learn about service beyond their own borders. The eleven-day trip was led by Brent Spencer, Bennion Center Student Programs Coordinator and former Bolivia U.S. Peace Corps volunteer. The group worked with Choice Humanitarian, a local non-profit organization dedicated to ending poverty through sustainable village development.

“Choice requires the villagers to initiate the project by applying for funding and then doing the construction as a village,” Brent explains, “this creates a commitment on the part of the community to complete the project.”

After arriving in La Paz on Independence Day, volunteers were shuttled to Bolivia’s Altiplano. They spent five days in the village of Suriquina, where they slept on floors and learned to live life at a different pace. “I experienced a new way to look at what I can learn from a community,” comments June Hiatt, a Bennion Center student leader, “And even for the poverty, the people of Suriquina are motivated and committed to making their community better.”

Volunteers worked on a school that was mostly built by the time they arrived. The community provided labor, rocks and cement; the municipality provided bricks and hardware; and Choice did the finishing work such as plaster, windows and desks. “Now they have a real school and they can petition the government for a paid teaching position” June adds, “It gave them a push for solidarity.”

Volunteers paid for their own airfare and thanks to generous donations from the Albert and Elaine Borchard Foundation and the U’s Student Affairs department, students paid a program cost of $180.

Bennion Center student leaders, Jordan Menzel and Sabrina King, are currently working with Choice to organize the center’s next service trip to Mexico, slated for May 2009. To learn more, visit www.Bennion-Center.org.

By Christy Tobolski

Bennion Center Wishes Curt Larsen Farewell

On October 24th, Curt Larsen left in October for a new and exciting position as Salt Lake Community College’s Director of Student Life and Leadership. Curt became involved as a student in 1992 and was an integral part of the Bennion Center, working first as a volunteer then making his way through the ranks to Associate Director of the center. He is also recent graduate of the University of Utah’s Masters in Public Administration Program.

The Bennion Center hosted a farewell party for Curt on his last day with the center. He was presented with a memory book containing submissions from students, alumni, staff and friends from his time at the center. The center wishes Curt the best in his new position and hope to have him involved as an engaged alum, valued colleague and trusted friend.

By Christy Tobolski

Bennion Center Partners with Hinckley Institute of Politics

The Bennion Center’s Service Politics and Civic Engagement (SPaCE) group is organizing the forums to address social issues that coincide with Bennion Center service projects. Forums are later aired on KUER.

By Linda Dunn

On the 3rd Wednesday of each month, students, faculty and community partners gather at noon at the Hinckley Caucus Room for the monthly Bennion sponsored forum. These gatherings provide an arena to discuss the service and politics of various issues.

The first joint forum kicked off in September, prior to the 5th annual Legacy of Lowell service day. Panelists discussed how service and politics could join forces to address hunger. Pamela Atkinson, Community Advocate, Gina Cornia, Director of Utahns Against Hunger, and Glenn Bailey, Director of Crossroads Urban Center, shared their insights and addressed student questions about the growing concerns regarding hunger.
The Mestizo Arts & Activism project is an interdisciplinary program integrating community based arts, research, education, and change. It is directed by the recipients of the '07-08 Bennion Center Public Service Professorship, Dr. Matt Bradley of the Honors College, Dr. Caitlin Cahill of the City & Metropolitan Planning departments, and Dr. David Quijada, of the Education, Culture and Society and Ethnic Studies programs.

The Mestizo Arts & Activism project's goal is to support the development of young people growing up on the West Side of Salt Lake as catalysts of change through leadership and active civic engagement. The project draws upon the assets of the diverse communities of the West Side, engaging the resources of community partners like the Mestizo Institute for Culture and Arts (MICA) and the West Side Leadership Institute of University Neighborhood Partners (UNP) & NeighborWorks Salt Lake (NWS).

This year, 20 high school students from the West Side are participating in the program. As part of the program the youth participants develop action research projects based on their own concerns.

In Spring 2008, research teams investigated issues of access to higher education for undocumented students; stereotypes and immigration; and stereotyping and discrimination on the West Side. In this process, young people are re-positioned as coresearchers as they frame the questions to be investigated, as they document and analyze conditions in their local areas, identify priority issues affecting young people, and develop and implement action plans to affect change in their community.

The Mestizo Arts & Activism program also involves U of U students and staff from across various disciplines including: Jennyffer Morales, Yvette Sonia Gonzalez, Mariana Ramiro, and Carmela Dee Willden. The 2008-2009 program is supported by the UNP Community Scholar in Residence Award, the Department of City & Metropolitan Planning, and the Marriner Eccles Foundation.

Dr. Matt Bradley, Dr. Caitlin Cahill, Dr. David Quijada, University of Utah student researchers, and the Mestizo Arts & Activism Youth Research Team will be presenting their community-based research projects at the Mestizo Coffeehouse (631 W North Temple) Wednesday, November 19th from 4:00-6:00 pm. For more info, contact Katie Olson at kolson@sa.utah.edu.

By: Katie Olson

Bend-in-the-River Serves as Educational Resource

Bend-in-the-River Urban TreeHouse and Green Space is probably best known for volunteerism and environmental education, but the Bend also offers a rich blend of service-learning opportunities.

The Bend’s staff, which is funded through the Elmo R. and Frances Bennion Morgan Fellowship and the AmeriCorps Program, is a great example of service-learning in action. The staff, who are also U of U students, are looking to build experiences in environmental education, ecological restoration, volunteer leadership, or any other related field.

Thus, the Bend often takes on students completing internships. These students not only gain important experience but also serve the community while doing so. The Bend often works with the Environmental Studies Program and the Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism here at the U to provide these important learning experiences for students.

Collaboration with departments and students on campus does not end there. The Bend also serves as a service-learning resource to any department or class who may be able to use what the program has to offer.

This fall, students from Professor Stephen Goldsmith’s Planning Workshop consulted with the Bend and other community agencies to learn more about what it takes to heal, repair, and transform a place so that it can become a vibrant part of the community and the natural world. The Bend’s latest brochure was developed, created, and completed by a student group in Maximilian Werner’s Professional and Technical Writing service-learning class.

By Tara Poelzing

Bennion Center House Hosts Monthly Dialogues

Each year 12 students are chosen to live in the Bennion Service House on Officers Circle. The house was made a reality five years ago by a generous donation by the Katharine W. and Ezekiel R. Dumke, Jr. Foundation. Residents work together throughout the academic year to foster a sense of community and lifelong civic engagement among students living on campus through action, dialogue, education, and outreach.

In its fifth year, the Bennion Service House added a new program to its repertoire – a monthly dialogue series revolving around specific service topics and Bennion Center events. Civicly engaged members of the community lead these dialogues, sharing their experiences in Salt Lake and beyond.

The Service House Dialogues bring together roughly 30 students, board members, staff, and community members and create connections between what students learn and the volunteer work they do. Some students have even found opportunities with the Hinckley Institute of Politics and ASCEND Alliance because of the opportunities the dialogues present. “The Service House Dialogues fill my head with visions of the future, exciting me for the paths that I am soon to take,” says Carly Rawlinson, a freshman resident in the house.

Service House Dialogues are free and open to the public. They are from 7 to 8 pm on the third Tuesday of every month. The November dialogue will bring Terry and Ruby Chacon, owners of Mestizo Café, to the house to discuss engaging with the diverse SLC community. For more information, visit www.BennionCenter.org.

By Sabrina King

Lisa Harris, Elmo R. & Frances Bennion Morgan Fellow, teaches environmental science lesson to students at Riley Elementary
Bennion Center Celebrates Lowell L. Bennion’s Legacy

On September 20th, the Bennion Center invited volunteers to celebrate Lowell L. Bennion’s legacy with service. The annual event in Lowell’s honor was established to educate students about his commitment to service and to energize students, alumni and friends to carry on his legacy through community service.

The fifth annual Legacy of Lowell Service Day started out at Parkview Elementary. Volunteers were then transported to one of five service sites throughout the community where they did volunteer literacy tutoring, home repair projects for seniors, environmental restoration, food delivery, or dental kit assembly. Volunteers then wrapped up the day up at Parkview for the Community Service Awards Luncheon.

This year’s sites were selected to capture the range of service to which he dedicated himself. Parkview Elementary volunteers did a literacy project where more than 200 books were given away to local children.

Bennion Center Helps Launch Tennis “N” Tutoring Pilot

In the pilot program, ten fifth and sixth grade students from Lincoln Elementary were selected by their teachers and matched, one-on-one, with tutors who help with homework, math and reading skills. Additionally, students participated in on-court tennis lessons which teach good sportsmanship, promote a healthy lifestyle and develop discipline and social skills.

The Boys & Girls Club of Greater Salt Lake provided program coordination and academic tracking while trained tutors were provided by the Bennion Center’s America Reads program. Utah Tennis’ Junior Tennis Foundation provided equipment and the Liberty Park Tennis Center offered court time and tennis instruction.

The pilot program officially began September 23rd and ran every Tuesday and Thursday until October 30th. Evaluation and further development of the program is underway thanks to the enthusiastic participation of all the partners involved.

Bennion Center Receives Service-Mobile

Bennion Center The Bennion Center now has its own wheels, thanks to the generous donation of a ‘92 Toyota 4-Runner from the family of Eugene England. Charlotte England, wife of the late Eugene England, approached the Bennion Center in August to see if a truck could be useful to carry on the legacy that Lowell Bennion started many years before.

Of course the students, staff and board members all agreed that it would be very useful for students engaged in local projects to have a vehicle to haul tools, supplies, food boxes, etc. to help those in need in the community.

Eugene England passed away in 2001, but will always be remembered for his own commitment to creating community. Eugene was a critic, essayist, teacher and scholar and was a student of Lowell’s at the University of Utah. He is editor of The Best of Lowell Bennion; Selected Writings from 1928-1988.

By Linda Dunn
The Associated Students of the University of Utah (ASUU) drafted a proposal that would add a co-requisite for community engagement to graduation requirements. The effort has been supported by the Bennion Center, as it would encourage a more direct connection between campus and community by identifying the many ways that academic coursework is tied to community issues.

This type of community engagement is already happening in departments through service-learning courses, research, internships and in programs such as LEAP and Honors. The co-requisite broadens engagement across the entire campus.

ASUU student leaders Patrick Reimherr, Jon Hayes and Yevgeniya Kopeleva, initiated the co-requisite due to the transformational experiences they have enjoyed as service-learning scholars at the Bennion Center. They decided that getting out the vote was a first step, but encouraging students to get off campus and tie engagement to their courses of study is another way to enhance an undergraduate degree and effect change in the future.

During November, the initiative will undergo a student survey to identify the level of support and then be introduced as a bill to the student Assembly and Senate. If it passes, the proposal will go onto the Academic Senate for approval. This initiative is an ambitious and admirable effort by student leaders to focus more intentionally on the role of citizenship in higher education's public mission.

By Linda Dunn

Advisory Board for the Bennion Center Adds an Executive Committee

The Advisory Board for the Bennion Center recently established an Executive Committee. The goal of the committee is to help give the board more comprehensive leadership of projects within the Bennion Center.

The Executive Committee members are: Barbara Murdock, Kathryn Lindquist, Sheila Walsh-McDonald, Zeke Dumke, Kim Paulding, and Karen Hale. Each member acts as chair over specific subcommittees.

During the past several months the committee has been active in planning the 5th Annual Legacy of Lowell. This year's event had five service projects, with each of the committee members overseeing a service site.

Committee members recently began working on specific goals for their subcommittees which are: student programs and events, academic and service learning, public relations, alumni relations and community partnerships, and nominations.

By Debbie Hair

You’re Gifted Program is Reinstated

Give a gift that keeps on giving this holiday season! The Bennion Center’s You’re Gifted cards are available during the holiday season and throughout the year. They provide an opportunity for you to make a donation to the center in a Special Someone’s honor. If you are interested in more information about how you can use these cards as gifts for family, neighbors and friends, please contact ctobolski@sa.utah.edu.

By Linda Dunn
Every year the Bennion Center awards AmeriCorps education scholarships to students willing to make a significant commitment to serving the community. In the past, these awards were only offered to America Reads tutors and Bend-in-the-River interns. Roughly ten student leaders enrolled into the program and received a total of about $11,000 in scholarships annually.

This year, the center opened the award opportunity up to all Bennion Center student leaders. “We estimated ten new members from this population, in addition to the ten scholarships reserved for America Reads and Bend-in-the-River,” says Elsa Gustavson, America Reads Coordinator and Bennion Center AmeriCorps Representative. “But once the school year began, applications came flooding in and students were asking about AmeriCorps even after the deadline.”

The center ended up with 33 applications. “We didn’t want to turn deserving students away,” Elsa adds, “so I managed to acquire ten more scholarships from UCAN Serve and we offered an award to every student that applied.”

By the end of the year, Bennion Center AmeriCorps participants will log 11,250 hours of service and will be awarded a total of $35,250 in scholarship money to help pay for things like tuition, books and loans.

By Elsa Gustavson