

## **Salt Lake Community College**

### **Thayne Center for Service and Learning External Review**

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## **Executive Summary**

The external review team evaluated three programs from the Thayne Center for Service and Learning (Thayne Center). The three programs that were assessed in the review process were the Bruin Pantry, the Civically Engaged Scholars Program, and the Community Partnerships Program. Each program was examined for its: 1) alignment and contribution to SLCC mission, vision, goals; 2) systemic integration of services across departments; 3) quality, efficiency and effectiveness; and 4) congruence with SLCC values.

### **Bruin Pantry**

The Thayne Center's Bruin Pantry is the largest network of emergency food pantries in higher education in Utah. While programmatically titled the "Bruin Pantry," in the singular, it is in fact a dynamic operation with multifaceted oversight and coordination across various, unique pantries at multiple campuses. Thus, we refer to "Bruin Pantries," in the plural, to denote numerous pantries.

Four overarching lessons from the evaluation of the Bruin Pantries are:

- The Bruin Pantries align with and contribute to SLCC's mission, vision, and goals by providing inclusive products and services that contribute to retention, and completion through redressing external factors that might otherwise contribute to departure.
- The Bruin Pantries are systematically integrated across multiple campuses, yet marketing and departmental collaborations might further increase patronage, and external supports.
- The Bruin Pantries would reduce redundancies and burnout in workload with a robust integrated logistics and communication system, as well as more sustainable and ample funding sources for products and staff.
- The Bruin Pantries maintain congruence with SLCC values through consistent training of student staff, thoughtful and inclusive practices and delivery methods, and overall flexibility to meet the needs of the SLCC community. More professional staff to support the pantries is suggested to continue to meet SLCC standards and values.

### **Civically Engaged Scholars**

The Thayne Center's Civically Engaged Scholars (CES) program has transformed into an equity focused and student centric program that has the potential to spread broadly across the campus. Access, inclusion, and ownership are important concepts that comprise the desired transformation and future of CES. Students who participate in CES share overarching satisfaction and pride in their civic involvement. Faculty need more guidance and clarity in connecting coursework and academic research to community-identified concerns that enrich knowledge and inform action on social issues in order to support more student engagement in CES.

Three key lessons from the Civically Engaged Scholars program are:

- The Civically Engaged Scholars Program aligns and contributes to the SLCC mission, vision, goals by supporting learning, community, collaboration across the institution. Students who participate in CES indicate that they are likely to continue supporting their community after their time ends at SLCC.
- The Civically Engaged Scholars Program is only somewhat integrated across departments. As the program has evolved over time, the vision of what participation in CES looks like has also changed. Too few academic departments have integrated service learning into their curriculum for CES participation to be as accessible, equitable, and wide spread as it aims to be.
- The Civically Engaged Scholars Program provides quality mentorship and support. By using canvas as a tool to engage CES participants, there has been an increase in efficiency and effectiveness of communication and competing requirements for the CES designation. That said, many students still miss out on their CES designation simply due to lack of awareness. Additional professional staff to communicate program requirements and forge relationships across the institution would increase awareness and participation in CES, ultimately benefiting SLCC students.

## **Community Partnerships Program**

The Thayne Center's Community Partnerships Program (CPP) takes on an important role at the institution. Salt Lake Community College considers itself to be "the community's college" and CPP helps that sentiment to ring true. The CPP is an organized hub for community partners to find meaningful ways to engage with the SLCC community and vice versa. Not only does the CPP facilitate meaningful relationships between the SLCC community and community partners but it also provides training and support for community partners, regardless of their organization size. The CPP's contribution in creating sustainable relationships between SLCC with the surrounding community is undeniable. That said, there is some confusion about how SLCC staff and faculty get involved with community partners. For faculty, there is still confusion about the Thayne Center in general and the CPP.

Four takeaways from the review of the Community Partnerships Program are:

- The Community Partnerships Program aligns and contributes to SLCC mission, vision, goals by supporting students, faculty and staff to engage in learning through service and collaboration.
- The Community Partnerships Program is partially integrated across departments. The SLCC strategic plan should be used to facilitate a tactical discussion of SLCC's approach to community partnerships, and how the Thayne Center and other units fit into this approach.
- The Community Partnerships Program provides quality, efficient and effective information to its partners and collaborators. In order to meet the needs of an every growing list of collaborators and partners, additional professional support staff would be beneficial to maintaining the complex dynamic information and relationship matrix that exists in the CPP.

- The Community Partnerships Program maintains congruence with SLCC values by promoting learning, collaboration, inclusivity, and community.

## **Introduction**

The Thayne Center for Service and Learning (Thayne Center), at Salt Lake Community College, focuses on a future where social justice is a cornerstone of society. Meeting people's basic needs, promoting equality, and fostering strong relationships with the community are all part of achieving that vision. The Thayne Center, as a higher education office, actively takes on a role in cultivating students and faculty to become engaged citizens and contribute to positive change in the community. Based on the published purpose statement, the office places high value on empowering the college and community members to cultivate knowledge and skills necessary to affect positive change.

The Thayne Center of Service and Learning is currently undergoing a transformation as it will merge with the Student Life and Leadership office. The Thayne Center currently reports to the Associate Vice President for Student Success. Other offices that report the Associate Vice Presidents for Student Success include: the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs; the Office of Orientation and Student Success; TRIO & PACE Programs; Career Services; and Academic Advising.

The external review team was asked to evaluate three programs in the Thayne Center: the Bruin Pantry, the Civically Engaged Scholars program, and the Community Partnerships program. The external review team was asked to provide additional context to the non-academic program review with consideration for the following:

- Alignment and contribution to SLCC mission, vision, goals
- Systemic integration of services across departments
- Quality, efficiency and effectiveness
- Congruence with SLCC values

## **Bruin Pantries**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the external review of the Thayne Center's Bruin Pantries was conducted remotely, via Zoom teleconferencing software, in lieu of standard visits to the respective campuses. The Thayne Center's Program Review Self Study was made available to reviewers prior to the scheduling of interviews with internal staff and stakeholders. Interviews began mid-March 2021 and went through the first week of April 2021. Interviews of approximately one-hour length were conducted by Tanasia Valdez, Assistant Director of the TRIO & PACE Programs at Salt Lake Community College, and Shannon Jones, Assistant Professor (Clinical), at the University of Utah. Interviews were administered with Bruin Pantries' internal constituents, including:

- AmeriCorp VISTAs: Madeleine Humel, Christina Ordonez, and Lauren Russell;
- Associate Vice President for Student Success, Kathryn Coquemont;
- Basic Needs Coordinator, Mike Braak;

- Bruin Pantries Student Leaders;
- Interim Assistant Director for Campus and Site Services, Susanna Garcia.
- Interim Assistant Vice President for Student Services, Kathie Campbell;
- Interim Assistant Vice Presidents for Student Services, and Director for Campus and Site Services-South Region, Shannon McWilliams;
- Student Services Coordinator, Idolina Quijada; and,
- Thayne Center Director, Sean Crossland;
- Thayne Center Assistant Director, Samantha Collins;
- Vice President for Student Affairs, Charles Lepper;

### **Themes and Findings**

While often referred to programmatically as the Bruin Pantry, in the singular, it is in fact a dynamic operation with multifaceted oversight and coordination across various unique pantries at multiple campuses. Thus, we refer to Bruin Pantries, in the plural, to more accurately denote multiple pantries, which serve various populations within the SLCC community and their subjective needs. Additionally, each pantry has variable logistical considerations, service dimensions, existing infrastructure, and a reliance on ever-fluctuating yet generous donations of time and energy from student volunteers, as well as resources from public and partnering service agencies, such as the Utah Food Bank.

As a nascent, evolving, and fluid operation, there is a high level of complexity and dynamism in the administration and operationalization of the aims of the multi-campus pantry system. Direct administrative oversight and operations management falls primarily upon the Thayne Center Director and Assistant Director, as well as the newer position of a Basic Needs Coordinator.

Reviewers found five central, dominant themes with respect to areas of interest to the Bruin Pantries. While segmented into discrete themes, many of these areas are substantially interconnected. Those themes are: 1) staffing, service delivery, and logistics; 2) financial resources and development; 3) non-student impact; 4) collaboration; 5) student impact. The following sections expand on these themes and elucidates areas of overlap, as well as the subsequent findings and recommendations.

### ***Staffing, Service Delivery, and Logistics***

Bruin Pantries are primarily staffed by non-professional staff, such as volunteers, tuition-waiver recipients, VISTAS, and student staff. The Bruin Pantries operation has only one dedicated professional staff person whose sole role is oversight of the pantries. In this role, this individual must manage all logistics related to the Bruin Pantries. This includes, but is not limited to, taking inventory of stock at multiple pantries on various campuses, including perishable produce that must be constantly monitored to comply with health department food safety rules; submit orders/requests for goods from various partnering agencies and service providers; deliver a variety of unique products to multiple pantries located at various campuses; recruit and train volunteers and non-professional staff on food and basic needs insecurities, cultural sensitivity, as well as inclusive and dignified service delivery; and, coordination of staffing that

includes prioritizing student staff members' class schedules each semester, while meeting service delivery at each pantry location.

All of these operational machinations must be managed seamlessly to meet the ever-changing needs of the SLCC community members who utilize Bruin Pantries. Further, studies show that students at community colleges have the highest rates of basic needs among students in higher education, (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018) and that basic needs insecurities correlate with lower grades, (El Zein et al., 2017) poor physical health, (Breuning et al., 2018; McArthur et al., 2018; Payne-Sturges et al., 2017) symptoms of depression (Breuning et al., 2018; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015; Payne-Sturges et al., 2107), higher perceptions of distress (El Zein et al., 2017), with one study finding more than one-third of students accessing campus pantries use them as their sole source of food. (El Zein et al., 2018) An information management and tracking system to manage supply chains and delivery models would assist in reducing redundancies of individuals' workloads while increasing service efficiencies, which would function to better meet the needs of patrons.

During the pandemic, the necessity of additional staff and administrative supports became particularly obvious. Volunteers were harder to recruit, while simultaneously, the demand for goods and services to meet patrons' basic needs increased. This was the case across many segments of the overall population, which saw increases in areas such as food insecurity, including Bruin Pantries' patrons. Yet, while the COVID pandemic presented a singularly emergent and dynamic situation, the ongoing deficit in staffing at the Bruin Pantries simply became more apparent due to the immediacy and breadth of the circumstances. Taken in tandem, these logistical concerns lead to varying hours of operation, inconsistent and time-consuming delivery models, as well as an overall lack of consistency for Bruin Pantries' patrons across discrete pantry sites.

Specifically, the creation of the position of a Basic Needs Coordinator, which encompasses far more than redressing only food insecurity as the title "Bruin Pantry" denotes, requires substantial investment of time and resources. Without further staffing and logistical support for this position, the workload to assist patrons in meeting their basic needs is untenable for one staff person to manage.

Recommendations:

- Increase the number of professional staff associated with Bruin Pantries to better support service provisioning, while increasing efficiencies, to meet basic needs insecurities amongst members of SLCC's community.

### ***Financial Resources & Development***

Access to financial resources to support the Bruin Pantries was a recurrent topic, mentioned by both professional and student staff members. Similarly, staff expressed worries that it is unclear how much funding for Bruin Pantries comes from the revenue stream of Students' Activities Fees. The Bruin Pantries are open and available to all members of the SLCC community, including faculty and staff, and are not limited to serving students. Concerns were expressed that student fees may be the substantial financial support for services that are also being utilized by faculty and staff.

Staff stated there is an overarching need for enhanced, robust, transparent, and a dedicated line of funding, to meet the needs of the broad and diverse members of the SLCC community. In this, the Bruin Pantries are not unique. The scant extant literature on the functionality of campus pantries within higher education demonstrates that while financial, personnel, infrastructural, and physical resources are already being substantially allocated to pantries, which are able to meet students' short-term needs, they are not long-term solutions to complex systemic problems that contribute to food insecurity and hunger among higher education students. (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2018)

Some of the initial questions formulated and asked in relation to the themes of financial resources and development, were:

- What are the mechanisms/protocols in place for requests for occasional, presumably unanticipated expenses?
- From which service lines/sources does the general operating budget come?
- Are other guaranteed, ongoing funds made exclusively available to the BP budget line (student services, student fees, AmeriCorp VISTA, etc.)?
- How far in advance are BP staff aware of their guaranteed budget line and funds?
- What levels and mechanisms of support exist now?
  - How are internal and external funds identified and requested?
- How do support and needs get operationalized and solicited?
  - How are funding requests, grant applications, and so forth documented and compiled?
- Whose job entails requests for funds, and/or support requests?
- What systems are in place for sustainability in times where grants and donations run short?

The Bruin Pantries are the largest network of higher education pantries in Utah. Naturally, staffing is an important aspect of the respective pantries' ability to operate, and one that is directly impacted by financial barriers. One Bruin Pantries' staff member discussed how a reliance on student staffing impacts pantries' ability to properly meet the needs of these growing resources:

*The amazing support that we have all of our student leaders has enabled us to expand to the level that we're at right now but the nature of the support for the pantries, historically, has been like a series of ad hoc solutions to permanent problems... sometimes a little bit of expansion prompts greater expansion without necessarily a realistic plan or strategic approach to staffing.*

## Recommendations:

- The allocation of recurrent, transparent funding lines exclusive to the Bruin Pantries would provide opportunities to hire more staff, functioning to provide additional oversight and professionalization, streamline workflows, and provide the ability to develop strategic planning, such as methods and matrices for assessing areas of impact.
- Increase awareness and outreach for development funds to enhance and increase goods and services provided to meet basic needs insecurities, particularly for SLCC students.
- Create transparency for staff and patrons of sources of lines of funding to ensure there is greater awareness of how and where funds originate, how they are utilized, as well as existing opportunities to increase levels of support.

## ***Non-Student Impact***

Reviewers interviewed Bruin Pantry staff about non-student patrons. Although the pantry was initially designed as a student resource, Bruin Pantry staff explained that it has become a resource for staff and faculty, particularly part-time staff, adjunct faculty, custodial staff, and facilities workers. Moreover, an effect of the Covid-19 pandemic was an increase in non-student patrons. One Bruin Pantry staff person expressed:

*...the financial situation of a lot of our staff members, our adjunct faculty, our custodians and facilities workers... those are our folks who are also experiencing the downturn of the pandemic disruption in their home lives, things like that, and it has been frustrating to see.*

## Recommendations:

- Conduct a study of non-student patrons to better comprehend circumstances leading to frequent SLCC employee usage.
- Report findings to administration and develop potential strategic plans to redress circumstances leading to staff and faculty food and basic needs insecurities.

## ***Collaboration***

The Bruin Pantries maintain meaningful collaborations with external partners for donations of supplies. While the Bruin Pantries tend to function as standalone service points, more time spent establishing collaborations within the student affairs unit would increase efficiencies, visibility, and breadth of the Pantries. Yet, dedicating time to building relationships and innovative collaborations would be difficult for one professional staff person to undertake considering the workload of managing pantries' logistics. Setting time aside to raise awareness of collaboration opportunities at larger events (i.e. Unit or Division meetings) might encourage more collaborations to take shape. An additional professional staff person might be of help in orchestrating unit- or division-wide Bruin Pantries campaigns to increase awareness, engagement, and collaboration.



Recommendations:

- Internally highlight Bruin Pantries across divisions and units to encourage future collaborations.
- Create a survey tool to gauge knowledge about basic needs insecurities and Bruin Pantries resources across the institution. Disseminate findings with administration.

### **Student Impact**

Reviewers asked a series of questions to better understand Bruin Pantries' impact on students. Following are some of the questions asked to gauge student patron impact:

- What are the perceived goal experiences that Thayne Center hopes to foster when students utilize the pantry?
- What are the common student-held perceptions that have been noted by BP staff about the pantries?
- How important is privacy to patrons of Bruin Pantry?
- How effective is the current Bruin Pantry marketing at highlighting this wonderful resource? Does it send the intended messaging?

Interviewed staff agreed that students are unaware of the Bruin Pantries as a resource. Routinely, students stumble across Bruin Pantries or hear of it by word of mouth. Another sentiment shared among part-time staff about student patrons is that students "feel like they really need to have nothing to come to the pantry," as opposed to utilizing the resource prior to feeling they were in a state of despair.

If the intention of Bruin Pantries is to be a vibrant resource for students, and not solely for students in desperate need, improved marketing and visibility efforts should be a focal point for the near future. If Bruin Pantries are to contribute to student retention and completion, broader awareness of the pantries, as well as the external community resources that staff are able to refer students to, should be shared widely before students feel they have no other recourse to meet their fundamental daily needs. In preemptively assisting students before reaching a point of desperation, SLCC could be an institutional leader. Research shows that the reluctance to self-identify as being in need and to seek support is commonplace for students in higher education, though efforts should be made to proactively increase awareness of pantry resources, reduce social stigma, increase pantry hours and accessibility, and encourage students to self-identify. (El Zein et al., 2018)

The second area of student impact that arose from review interviews were the ways in which students working at the Bruin Pantries have been positively affected by their experiences. Student staff expressed that while working at the Bruin Pantries they felt a sense of community, collegiality, and support from the professional staff, other student workers, as well as volunteers. Student workers expressed that the Bruin Pantries are an inclusive and welcoming environment, and that they were connected to additional opportunities and meaningful internal leadership positions. One student worker said:

*I can say we have excellent leaders. They have been supporting us in all aspects about our classes. When I need time to study, we have time off to prepare our studies. And, we have all kinds of support: emotional support; all instructions are very, very clear....I think the environment, working at the pantry, is good, friendly, and empathic. And, for me,*

*working at the pantry has been the opportunity to develop in my language....I have had the opportunity to practice my language and interact with other people. This has been very important for me.*

Another student mentioned that prior to working at the Bruin Pantries they felt they were disconnected from the SLCC community and struggling in their personal life, as well. They stated:

*Before I started in the pantry...I would just go to school, go to my classes, keep my head down. And, I didn't get involved. And, I was struggling a bit, and I was going through a lot of family and home issues, which kind of, like, caused some problems. So, this came at the right time, this opportunity, and it helped to propel me, or helped me progress in my studies. And, just having the experience, and the interactions, and getting involved in the school and in the community just kind of helped me. As they were saying, with the emotional and the empathetic, and the other areas, it all just kind of boosted my experience in the College. And, I feel like it's just been incredibly positive and helped me get to where I am at and to complete, and finish, in my schooling....I hope I can find a way to do even more of this after I finish my college program, in the community....I just think it takes a little bit from all of us.*

Without exception, students shared sentiments that the Bruin Pantries' professional staff created an inclusive environment, with dignified service experiences for patrons, as well as consequential learning and leadership experiences for student workers and staff. Many also mentioned that staff connected them to other events and opportunities across College campuses, as well as within the community. Multiple students mentioned these additional resources helped them to broaden their understanding of a range of issues, from socio-political current events, to barriers that underserved or marginalized community members face, and ways that the Bruin Pantries can work toward addressing systemic inequities. They expressed that these created additional opportunities for them to get more involved and engaged, and feeling more profoundly connected to the College community, as well as instantiating more engaged student-citizens.

Recommendations:

- Consider an additional professional staff person dedicated to outreach, marketing, intra- and external institutional collaborations to increase visibility of the Bruin Pantries.
- Create additional marketing campaigns with Institutional Marketing to increase awareness of the Bruin Pantries across campuses.
- Design and implement marketing campaigns to destigmatize students' patronage of Bruin Pantries and other needs-based campuses and community services.
- Consider additional student staff positions and leadership opportunities within the Bruin Pantries.

### **Civically Engaged Scholars**

Between the dates of April 6 and April 13, 2021, Cynthia Kaufman, PhD, Director of the Vasconcellos Institute for Democracy in Action at De Anza College and Tanasia Valdez, Assistant Director of TRIO and PACE Programs at Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) conducted interviews with various stakeholders in the Civically Engaged Scholars Program. We

also disseminated a survey questionnaire to CES student participants, where 14 CES student participants responded. Interviewees included:

- Thayne Center Director, Dr. Sean Crossland;
- Thayne Center Assistant Director, Samantha Collins;
- Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Charles Lepper;
- Associate Vice President for Student Success, Dr. Kathryn Coquemont;
- CES Program Coordinator, Cristobal Villegas;
- Engaged Learning Coordinator, Lucy Smith;
- Student Writing and Reading Center Program Manager, Clint Gardner;
- Assistant English Professor, Daniel Baird;
- Associate ASL/Interpreting Professor, Connie Spanton-Jex; and,
- CES student focus group.

## **Themes and Findings**

The civically engaged scholars program at SLCC is clearly a high functioning and well respected program at SLCC. It has evolved over the years from a way to give recognition to a small number of already successful students, to being a pathway to support and recognition that serves a large number of students who were not already on the pathway to gaining that sort of recognition. The program serves the college's equity goals well and aligns very well with the RP Group's Six Success Factors Framework. The program helps students be nurtured, connected, and engaged. Through the examination of our data, two major themes emerge and are expanded upon in the next sections. Those themes are: 1) The CES experience as a prism; and 2) program visibility and access.

### ***The CES Experience as a Prism***

The concept of the CES experience as a prism highlights the program's ability to tune into each individual student's lived experiences, identities, and concerns in order to support their growth and development regarding civic engagement. We heard from students in the ESL Mentor program and in the ASL program, that being part of CES has been life changing. They have been able to develop this civic capacity, or sense that they can and should make a difference in the world. Students who are engaged in the program and being mentored by Cristobal feel deeply cared for, understood, and supported in coming to their own sense of agency and in feeling that they have something to give to others.

One such way CES supports this type of student development is by building authentic relationships through mentoring. As the program has shifted to a deep mentoring program for a small number of students, the equity impact has grown. Through this style of mentorship, key equity issues have come to light about CES participation. For instance, we heard in the interviews that there was a desire for more ways to pay students for their time doing civic work, so that low income students could afford to spend the time doing civic work. We heard that there is a lack of transparency about how tuition waivers are given and who makes decisions about the allocation funds.

That said, we also heard from administrators that there is plenty of money in the program for this and administrators expressed frustration that the program managers did not simply spend the money that way. This indicates that somewhere there is a disconnect, which will be important to overcome. If the program coordinator is able to spend those funds supporting paid internships that would help more low income students benefit from the CES program. This will be good for those individual students and for the overall equity statistics of the college.

Below are some of the thoughts that CES participants expressed when asked the question “What do you like the most about working with or participating in Civically Engaged Scholars?”

*“The benefit of realizing I'm doing something for more than just myself.”*

*“That I graduate with honors and it looks good on resumes.”*

*“The best part was to be able to engage with the community and learn more about issues that exist and how to alleviate those problems.”*

*“The involvement in the community and it looks good on my resume.”*

*“It's good to connect with the community and see the programs and resources out there.”*

Other thoughts that CES participants shared on the questionnaire included:

*“CES has been a huge part of my journey through SLCC and it had an important impact on my life. I am so appreciative to Cristobal for being an amazing advisor as I worked through the program.”*

*“The wording says “scholarship program.” A scholarship associated with involvement in the program while also earning a 4.0 GPA would have been wonderful.”*

Recommendations:

- Incorporate a broader definition of what satisfies CES program eligibility and participation.
- Provide funding that allows for paid work opportunities for students to be compensated for their time engaging in service and civic work.
- Create better communication pathways with administration to find sustainable opportunities for CES paid internships and other financial requests that create equity in participation for the program.
- Build direct links between the CES coordinator and academic affairs.

### ***Program Visibility and Access***

The CES program has the ability to become more widely accessed and visible at SLCC. Currently, for some students, the program is simply a way to gain a ribbon for graduation and

another bullet point on their resume. For others, it is a way of life and a lifeline to deep and significant mentoring. It is working well at both of these extremes and will be even stronger if a middle path is also developed so that, as Crisboal said, "Civically Engaged Scholars could be everywhere." It appears that some of the barriers to its spreading are some differences of opinion about and a high a level of buy in and program requirements for a department to be a "civically engaged department" and the relationship between that designation and the ability to departments to promote the Civically Engaged Scholar designation to their students and the program requirements. Cristobal has already developed a Canvas shell that makes it easy for a student, who is not benign directly mentored by Cristobal, to do the work and hit the marks needed to receive the designation. All that is needed for it to be more accessible is a mechanism to gain buy-in from faculty across the college.

Special attention and concern should be given to the need for a system that evaluates the impacts and equity statistics of the program. This would support an expansion of the CES program that aligns with institutional values. Existing evaluation instruments appear to not be as well aligned with the program's needs as they could be. Considering equity on all levels of the program, there was also wonder if the program's name might be changed to more adequately express the values embedded in the program, to make it sound more equity minded and yet to continue to be a source of pride in the community and among prospective employers.

The Social Justice Certificate in the Humanities is a great place for the CES program to expand into the curriculum. We see a next step for this to perhaps eventually become an AA degree. The Global Connections and Local Leadership Class can be an important entry point for students into the CES program.

Recommendations:

- As the program grows, funding for additional professional support staff will be imperative to the success of the program.
- Visibility of the program to academic affairs spaces should be enhanced.
- More strategic collaboration could be done between the CES coordinator, Engaged Learning office and Faculty Development office in order to support faculty who aren't sure how to transition their curriculum to one of service learning.

### **Community Partnerships Program**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the external review of the Thayne Center's Community Partnerships Program was conducted remotely, via Zoom teleconferencing software, in lieu of standard visits to the respective campuses. The Thayne Center's Program Review Self Study was made available to the reviewers prior to the scheduling of interviews with internal staff and stakeholders. Interviews took place during the third week of April 2021. Interviews of approximately one-hour length were conducted by Paul Kuttner, Associate Director with University Neighborhood Partners at the University of Utah, and Tanasia Valdez, Assistant Director of the TRIO & PACE Programs at Salt Lake Community College. A survey questionnaire was disseminated widely to Thayne Center community partners. Interviews were administered with Community Partnership Program stakeholders, including but not limited to:

- Director of Community Relations, Jen Seltzer Stit;
- Engaged Learning Coordinator, Lucy Smith;
- Assistant Professor of Communication, Matt Merkel;
- Assistant VP of Strategy and Analysis, Lauralea Edwards;
- Thayne Center Director, Dr. Sean Crossland;
- Student Intern in Engaged Learning, Angel Baingana;
- Vice President for Student Affairs, Dr. Charles Lepper;
- Associate Vice President for Student Success, Dr. Kathryn Coquemont; and,
- The Village Project, Alicia Green.

## **Themes and Findings**

Four central themes were established as dominant with respect to areas of interest to the Community Partnerships Program. These include: 1) partner relationships; 2) Thayne Center vs. SLCC partners; 3) faculty understanding and engagement; and 4) matching and preparing students. The following sections expand on each theme, the subsequent findings and recommendations.

### ***Partner Relationships***

Across stakeholder groups, interviewees stressed the importance of building and maintaining strong relationships between the Thayne Center and community partners. Partners expressed appreciation in particular for the Community Partnership Coordinator's work — having a “consistent point of contact with the college” who can work with them to connect with faculty and students and to find the best way to partner to the benefit of all involved. That relationship becomes a launching point for partners to build valuable connections with SLCC staff, faculty, and other partners — relationships that partners are eager to have more of.

Partners who took part in the review were overwhelmingly positive about their relationships with Thayne. They said that Thayne's clear, proactive, and informational communication has been critical to maintaining these relationships. As one partner put it, “I've never heard ‘Where are those Thayne volunteers’ or ‘Nobody is answering my message.’” Partners also said they appreciate the three-tiered MOU system, which makes them feel that Thayne is “safe” for them, their clients, and the volunteers. They also expressed appreciation for the workshops Thayne runs for partners, and how the collaboration has helped them and their organizations grow.

The following are some thoughts that partners shared on the survey questionnaire about their positive experiences with the Community Partners Program:

*“I enjoy being able to connect with a multitude of different organizations and hearing how they operate.”*

*“My goal in the partnership is to recruit volunteers for our nonprofit. SLCC has the best student volunteer fair of any college we've worked with. We only go to one each year, though, as we've learned the health majors (nursing) are most interested in our program. I also know that the SLCC portal for posting about our organization/opportunities is the*

*best. So- I appreciate that the CPP provides access to a well organized way to recruit. I've also appreciate the little emails from other organizations saying "We have this excess thing. Would anyone like it?" I love that it fosters sharing resources."*

*"It is a great space to grow, recruit volunteers, and connect with other organizations."*

Interviewees also spoke to some of the challenges of building and maintaining strong partner relationships. Some newer partners say they have difficulty understanding how to engage and would like more orientation. Thayne staff note that the system works better for larger, more established organizations and can be intimidating or inaccessible for smaller community-based organizations, particularly in terms of the MOU and liability. Interviewees also noted that relationships can be tough to maintain when individual contacts leave an organization, when faculty partners change their curriculum or priorities, and when partners don't get the volunteers they need. It was also noted that there is a lack of understanding outside the Thayne center about the importance of the relational work of the Community Partnerships Coordinator.

Partners expressed the following feedback about getting engaged with the Community Partnerships Program:

*"I think it would be helpful to talk as a group more!"*

*"I want our organization to attend more workshops and have regular meetings with the Thayne Center."*

*"Somehow we aren't reaching the students in the way we'd like."*

*"Since I am a newer Partner, I've had a difficult time orienting to the Partnerships programs. I'm not quite sure how to navigate which workshops I'm supposed to attend, who to contact, how to engage my company etc."*

In the survey questionnaire, partners indicated some confusion regarding how to use the newly incorporated software platform, Campus Groups, to connect with students and promote events. Some of the thoughts that partners have shared about the Community Partnerships Program are:

*"I am still finding the new software challenging to use. I don't completely understand how to connect to students through it."*

*"We have not been very active on the Campus Groups site since the initial virtual fair. We have not had any events that we could post."*

*"No comment but will send email about personal help to me on technology"*

*“More utilization of new online platform (we haven't gotten any signups through new bulletin board function), more connecting with staff as volunteers, more service-learning connections with faculty.”*

Recommendations:

- Develop ways to better tell the story of relationship building, the work of the CPC, and the importance of these long term relationships to the college at large.
- Consider additional support for the CPC, whether through additional staff or student support.
- Work with small community-based organizations to analyze and adapt the MOU process in ways that will make it easier for them to engage.
- Improve the system for maintaining up-to-date contact information for all partners and connecting partners with annual orientation resources, perhaps using a student volunteer.
- Increase opportunities for partners to connect and build relationships with one another and with faculty and staff, in person and through the new platform.
- Provide more workshops or training opportunities to build partners' understanding and utilization of Campus Groups.

***Thayne Partners vs. SLCC Partners***

Interviewees described a lack of clarity around the College's overall approach to community partnerships, and how Thayne's work fits into that. Is the Thayne center the hub through which all partner relationships and MOUs should be facilitated? Is Thayne just one hub with its particular group of partners, separate from department or institutional partners? What are the pros and cons of centralized vs. decentralized partnership management, when it comes to questions of relationships, capacity, liability, etc.? Interviewees connected this issue to a lack of clarity around the relationships between staff working in the Thayne Center, Service Learning, and Community Relations, as well as limited two-way communication and understanding between the Thayne center and upper administration.

Interviewees suggested ways to strengthen coordination between Thayne and other parts of the college, such as having a community engagement point person in each academic area, who would collaborate with the Thayne Center around that area's particular needs and partners; rethinking the Thayne advisory board structure to include people across the institution working with community partners; and even hiring a special assistant for community engagement who could drive and coordinate a college-wide vision.

Recommendations:

- Use the SLCC strategic plan as a springboard for a strategic discussion of SLCC's approach to community partnerships, and how Thayne and other units fit into this approach.
- Create a space in which people across the college who are working in community engagement can regularly connect, share experiences, and find ways to collaborate.



- Produce a clear description of the college's engagement-related staff positions and how they do or do not overlap and relate to one another.

### ***Faculty Understanding and Engagement***

Deans and Administrators are pushing more community engagement, and many faculty are getting interested or are already doing it on their own. Thayne can be a supportive resource for those faculty. But interviewees said that many faculty do not know much about the Thayne Center and how they might work with it. Increasing faculty understanding of how Thayne works and what it can offer, they suggested, would take faculty talking to other faculty rather than a top-down push.

Recommendations:

- Identify a Thayne staff person to take on the role of spreading the word about Thayne across the institution.
- Survey faculty to find out what they know about Thayne. Use the survey itself as an awareness tool.
- Work with Institutional Marketing and Communications to develop a PR plan with a clear story and message about Thayne.
- Convene existing faculty partners and support them to become Thayne ambassadors in their academic units.
- Work more collaboratively with the Engaged Learning department to connect community partner opportunities and needs with faculty and academic departments.

### ***Matching & Preparing Students***

Current partners expressed a strong appreciation for the student volunteers that come to them from SLCC, and how this helps them to increase their community impact. They noted the diversity of SLCC students, and that it is valuable to have students who share racial and ethnic backgrounds with the communities they work in, especially for young people who can see someone of their background in college. Some SLCC students have stayed on at partner organizations after their initial volunteer time is up, leading to longer-term volunteering and internships. Partners spoke very positively of the new web portal as an avenue for sharing opportunities and connecting with students, as well as networking events. It is important to partners that, when students do come, they come with some level of cultural competency/humility, a willingness to learn and be uncomfortable, and a trauma-informed approach.

Partners said that it can be difficult to recruit volunteers, particularly during COVID. While some partners have had success connecting to students through the web portal, others have seen very few and would like more support looking for additional ways to connect with students, staff, and faculty. Some also said they need more support learning how to use the portal itself. Staff explained that it can be hard to match the pressing needs of community partners with student and faculty interests. Partners, similarly, said that students are often interested in short-term projects, and not in the more in-depth and self-directed work and

training that some partners desire. Some of the approaches that were said to have worked best to connect with students include:

- Working through existing faculty relationships.
- Recruiting students into work they are passionate about and which align with their career interests.
- Working with the Community Partnerships coordinator to adapt their volunteer requests to things that students are more likely to be interested in or able to do.
- Connecting with students through an intensive program like alternative spring breaks, and having them continue on afterwards.

Recommendations:

- Provide examples of diverse models of partnerships so that campus and community partners can expand their ideas of the many ways that partnerships can look.
- Create ways to share curricular and student goals with the community, and vice versa, in an easily accessible way.
- Analyze existing partners and look for issue gaps. Reach out to new partners in those areas.
- Continue to build up trainings for using the web portal, Campus Groups, and other ways to connect with students.

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