



Community Outreach and Engagement Strategies

Exchange of ideas between UW Extension and Cardiff University

Summary

This project supported Mandy Marney, Senior Associate Director of Extension, visiting Stuart Allen, Head of the School, Computer Science and Informatics at Cardiff University. A key component of the success of this trip was open dialogue and exchange of ideas surrounding outreach and engagement, with special emphasis on youth development as well as community vitality and health. Mandy was provided a tour of various learning environments in which environment and behavior designs were adapted for small group work, lab work, and individual projects. Topics discussed were focused on health, wellness, and youth development. A key difference between University of Wyoming and Cardiff is due to infrastructure as the UK has no extension system; therefore, engaging the public through various educational programming and activities falls to the universities. For example, during National Science Week, all universities open their doors and provide experiential learning opportunities, while at the same time highlighting key research and educational programs of the various universities. Strategies like this could be tailored to the UW system. Could we, for instance, work with community colleges in the state to offer a day in which we open our doors to interface with the public in the same manner? This has the potential to expose youth and their families to various degree programs in which they may not have background knowledge. It could aid in recruitment for the entire university.



Exploring Community Vitality and Health

Several Cardiff University programs are germane to UW Extension's Community Vitality and Health Program, as outlined below:

Tackling loneliness with mixed reality technology, Daniel Finnegan. This technology was utilized during COVID quarantines to help keep seniors connected. VR headsets were utilized, people joined together in online "space", which combated loneliness. We discussed the potential for usage in our frontier state, which has a high percentage of mental health illness. The concept could be utilized for multiple age groups who may face isolation-related loneliness during harsh winter conditions. We also discussed how fortunate we are in Wyoming to have county-based offices, which allow all age groups to access extension programs and activities. This research points to the importance of staying engaged in some capacity.

To note, VR is also being utilized to help people with low vision enjoy and appreciate art in new ways. Headsets are being utilized at museums to increase a sense of community and belonging. Another interesting project undertaken by researchers are low-cost wearables for those who have had strokes in rural areas. The wearables help the participants grasp objects and remain in place on their farms. Addressing these topics in Wyoming represent potential partnerships with Wyoming Center for Aging and WIND as we build our Community Vitality and Health team.

A very interesting report was given by frontline health workers who went to Karnataka to deliver pre-natal and early childhood education for women. Personnel were not connecting well with families; therefore, they stopped teaching and brought in a focus group to talk about what wasn't working for young mothers. The artwork they had utilized in teaching materials were not appealing to young mothers, who said the mothers illustrated were not like them. Therefore, they re-illustrated all materials and started anew with great success. I have shared this with our CNP team as they begin to evaluate curriculum as it may be a good practice to regularly have our clientele evaluate resources to ensure we are culturally sensitive.

A great session was a hands-on demonstration of robots that are being tested in healthcare settings to take people to the correct locations. The robots are programmed to respect personal boundaries of people they meet on the way and keep track of participants behind them. There is still much work to be done in this area, but a very interesting use of Artificial Intelligence. We discussed the application of this type of coding that could be transferable to museum guides, etc.

Youth Development Partnerships

In addition to science week activities, I spoke with a team that has an after-school coding group for youth. They have held classes online post COVID. We discussed the potential to have an international coding group with participants from the Wyoming 4-H program, which could lead to international exchange trips for everyone. We discussed the benefits of learning more about each other's culture as well as learning to work internationally. Ideas generated: Exchange trips, demonstrations of work in each country, and perhaps a competition.

Additional learning opportunity

One unique aspect of the day was a visit to the CyberSecurity lab. I was able to see the many types of products found within our homes with AI, and their ability to be hacked. I believe the recognition of this type of technology is increasingly important here in the U.S. as well, and would like to explore workshops (perhaps in conjunction with Cardiff colleagues) that could be used in county officer trainings, etc.

Special Thanks

A sincere "thank you" for the funding from Global Perspectives to begin dialogue on the ways we can partner with our colleagues in Wales. Without this funding source, this type of collaboration would not have been possible.