

Memorandum

To: Provost Myron Allen

From: Francisco Rios, Director
Social Justice Research Center

Date: 17 December 2008

RE: Social Justice Research Center, Five-Year Plan

This document provides details on a proposed five-year plan, consistent with the University of Wyoming's planning process, for the Social Justice Research Center (SJRC; also referred to as the Center). We provide this document and welcome feedback about the direction, level (quantity and quality) of proposed activities, and central next steps to advance the plan. Most importantly, we recognize that the early activities in the formative years of the Center are critical in that they set a "footprint" for future Center directions, and thus see particular significance in this, our first plan.

The Social Justice Research Center (SJRC) at the University of Wyoming is an interdisciplinary center dedicated to the generation of scholarship connected to addressing practical and theoretical questions arising from the pursuit of social justice. The SJRC cultivates social justice oriented scholarship in the belief that when any segment or community experiences injustice, democratic ideals are at risk. The SJRC supports research scholars (faculty, staff and students) by providing opportunities for collegial exchange, professional development, and financial sponsorship. The goals of the SJRC include:

- Production and dissemination of research which has a social justice profile;
- Outreach to research possibilities around the state and region while expressly recognizing the interconnectedness of local, national, and global concerns;
- Intellectual exchange rooted in critical analysis;
- Constructive dialogue undertaken in a climate of respect; and,
- Serve as a catalyst for grant funding related to the purposes of the SJRC and given the problem-based nature of research, the generation of knowledge that will contribute to the development of broad meaningful solutions to systemic challenges.

In accordance with the mission and goals of the SJRC, the Advisory Committee met in late fall, 2008 to discuss future directions in an effort to construct a five-year plan. We provide these ideas herein listed around administration, membership, scholarship, outreach, and finance.

Administration

Dr. Francisco Rios is the current administrator of the SJRC. Two Graduate Assistants, assigned from the Office of Multicultural Affairs, support him in this work. This current configuration is sufficient for the level of activity currently in effect through the Center. However as the SJRC engages in a greater number of projects, the number of GA's will need to increase correspondingly with each GA assigned to lead specific initiatives.

One major administrative concern is related to office and meeting space. Currently, we have been allowed to use space (shared with the editorial assistant of *Multicultural Perspectives* and grant assistant for the ESL Endorsement Program) to the office of the current Center director. However, as the Center grows in number of people working through it, space may become cramped. Additionally, when a new Center director is appointed, the location of the Center staff will be less convenient. In addition, any shift in space makes it difficult to develop a sense of permanence for the SJRC. Finally, the Center lacks permanent meeting space—a potential problem as the Center’s activities expand.

Administration Goals:

- Work with the Advisory Committee to solidify the responsibilities of the Center director.
- Work with the Advisory Committee to recommend a process for evaluating the Center director.
- Work with the Advisory Committee to recommend a process for appointing any new Center director (including guidelines for selection, length of term, etc.)
- Discuss with UW’s Provost potential permanent space allocations for the Center

Membership

Currently, we are approaching 150 persons who are connected, in some capacity, with the Center. This includes Center Affiliates (connected nominally to the Center, networked in to the Center’s initiatives), Center Associates (members with a degree of expertise who are willing to serve in some capacity the Center), the Center Advisory Group, and the current Scholars group. A continual goal will be to double this number within the next five years. Several issues emerge for the Center around membership.

Concerns relative to the Affiliates/Associates is the role of non-UW individuals (i.e., can non-UW individuals become members of the Center?). With respect to the Associates, one concern centers on clarifying the criteria and process for accepting individuals as “Associates.” In addition, there has not been a specific request of these Associates in service to the Center. Given their willingness to offer their expertise, it is incumbent upon the Center to make productive use of what they offer.

Membership Goals:

- Discuss with UW’s Provost the involvement of non-UW members as Affiliates/Associates/Scholars of the Center.
- Meet with the Advisory Committee to discuss criteria and a process for evaluating Associate membership.
- Meet with the Associates to discuss their role vis-à-vis the Center.

Scholarship

The primary mission of the Center is to lead scholarly/research-based activities. We will continue to maintain current activities (scholarly forums and scholarly support) while expanding the number and kinds of scholarly initiatives. This includes bringing a higher profile to the scholarly forums. We also want to assure that those scholars receiving support from the Center

receive not only financial assistance but also academic assistance to advance their endeavors via the development of a professional community of scholars. In addition, we want to push scholars with the Center to address specific policy implications of their work.

The Center can also add to this mission by exploring a couple of other initiatives. One is for the Center to lead specific research projects. This would entail identifying a specific problem for the city/state/region, and then inviting an interdisciplinary group of scholars from the Center to come together to initiate a research project. A second would be to develop a yearly publication series from the Center which highlights research projects sponsored by the Center. A third project will be a visiting scholars program that would bring one scholar (either an assistant professor or recent PhD) to work with the Center for one year. The stated intent would be consideration of this individual for possible future employment at the UW. A final new initiative is a new faculty mentoring network.

Scholarship Goals:

- Expand the profile of the Center's Speaker Series by raising the stature of those individuals who are invited to come and speak on behalf of the Center. Meet with UW's Provost to discuss the possibility of working jointly with Academic Affairs to co-sponsor this speaker series.
- Develop, with those receiving funding for scholarly projects, a "professional community scholar" culture wherein scholars support and strengthen each others work.
- Include in all scholarly activities of the Center structuring scholarly work so that "policy implications" is part and parcel of scholarly products.
- Consulting with the Advisory Committee, identify a critical issue each year. Bring together those members of the Center, with attention to an interdisciplinary team, to develop a research initiative intended to understand that issue.
- Working with the Advisory Committee, explore the development of a yearly publication containing the work of the members of the Center. Exploration should include feasibility, format, and function of the publication.
- In consultation with the Provost, consider the development of a visiting scholar program for Assistant Professors and/or recent PhD's. The stated intention would be the potential recruitment of scholars for whom social justice is a central part of their scholarship.
- In consultation with the Provost, develop a new faculty mentorship network initiative. The initiative would bring up to 8 new faculty (in their first three years of the professorate) together with 4 senior (Associate/Full) professors for the sake of supporting the research, teaching, service, and social justice commitments of the new faculty. The group would meet monthly and would be supported in some new project.

Outreach

The SJRC must continue its outreach efforts. This includes garnering greater attention to the Center's activities, and strengthening connections to other departments/programs at the UW. In addition, new initiatives might revolve around reaching outward to other potential groups (with special attention to community college faculty) around the state, connecting with other diversity centers around the US, and developing a social justice/diversity awards program.

Outreach Goals:

- Develop a communications plan to promote the activities of the Center.
- Connect with other departments on campus, but most especially the “interdisciplinary programs” to identify possible collaborative efforts.
- Working with the Advisory Committee, consider the development of a social justice conference targeting faculty of the seven community colleges in the state as a professional development initiative.
- In consultation with the Provost, plan for hosting a nation-wide diversity/social justice conference of center directors and their associates.
- In consultation with the student multicultural council, re-vitalize the social justice/diversity award program (perhaps as an every other year event).

Financial

The SJRC currently receives \$50,000 annually from a social justice endowment account. While an important foundation, the Center needs to explore additional funding sources both from within and outside of the UW.

To begin, the Center needs to create a development plan which would make explicit the financial options available and lay out specific steps to garner funding. In addition, new initiatives for the Center might best be pegged to some specific revenue stream (grant or program). Finally, the Center needs to be part of options available in UW’s fundraising plan.

Financial Goals:

- As new initiatives are advanced, seek funding for some of these from internal sources (for example, pegging the “new faculty mentoring network” to a specific request for funds from the Office of Academic Affairs).
- Contract a Financial Development Officer to help develop a tangible and concrete plan for seeking additional funding for the Center.
- Develop a data-base of possible funding sources (the Gates Foundation, for example) and grant agencies seeking calls for proposals for possible projects. Use the members of the Center as potential teams to develop proposals and submit them under the auspice of the Center.
- Host grant writing workshops for members of the Center.
- In consultation with the Provost, meet with UW Foundation staff to assure that the Center is one potential target for gift giving.

Summary

In sum, the intention of developing such a five-year plan is to envision where the Center might be in the near future. We see the Center as being an active leader in the university and state around research initiatives related to social justice concerns. We seek to develop a stronger socialization role for faculty, staff, and students who wish to pursue scholarly work with a social justice lens. Finally, we seek greater diversification of the funding elements of the Center. We welcome opportunities to discuss these initiatives further.