

Project Title: Connecting my Classroom to the Community

Chris Califf, Economics, WWU

Fellow from 2016-2017

Overview

I set out to improve my classes at WWU. I teach courses at WWU on how technology impacts business. For example, I teach a class on data analytics in which the students learn various techniques about how to analyze various types of data and make practical recommendations based on their findings. I also teach a general class on technology management in which students learn various ways technology and business are inexorably linked.

Goal

My goal for the project was to increase student-centered learning in these classes through community engagement and experiential learning. Overall I wanted to connect with the Bellingham community so that can learn more about how businesses are (and are not) using technology, and local businesses can benefit from the knowledge being taught to students. My hope was that could connect with these businesses potentially through a class project, class assignment, or an independent study.

What I Did to Achieve Goal

After several months of engaging with the Fellows, I eventually connected and met with Western's Small Business Development Center. Thus far I have met with several representatives of the SBDC who have suggested several projects that could be a match for my courses. Such projects include analyzing and evaluating a website, analyzing business data, and evaluating data visualizations. These projects will provide students with unique real-world experience not gained in a traditional, lecture-based classroom, and will undeniably enhance their learning and potential

to secure employment upon graduation. Having students interacting with their community will benefit not only them, but also the community.

Reflection on Fellows Program

I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the Fellows program. The best thing about the Fellows program is that you have several peers encouraging you to see your ideas through. You are surrounded by a community of people who genuinely care and are actively pushing themselves forward. The fellows give you the confidence you need to bring your idea into reality. Without the program and the support from my cohort, I am confident that my desire to connect my classroom to the local community would have been put on hold.

Advice for Future Fellows

My advice for those who join the program is to keep your options open and stay patient. Some of your cohort members will do big projects and others will do seemingly smaller ones. Some will know from Day 1 exactly what they want to do. Others will find their project in the last few weeks. Projects will also change, and change again. So be open to change. Oh, and have fun!