An 18 month plan for increasing Teaching through Public Engagement in CFANS

I. Identifying existing resources and partnerships

- Create ongoing partnerships and information exchange with CURA and the Office of Service Learning. (done – and highly recommended)
- Meet with CFANS faculty who are known for experiential learning, service learning, and public engagement. We’ll start with the faculty we already know about. Some have been identified by CURA and the Office of Service Learning. (throughout the term of the grant – and beyond)
- Find and share existing print resources, e.g. IAP2 spectrum, National Society for Experiential Learning, SENCER website (recommend: although this website is specifically dedicated to teaching the sciences through community engagement, they have tools that would be useful for anyone teaching with public engagement – assessment tools, course design template) (throughout the term of the grant – and beyond)
- Obtain UROC agreement. Use for discussion to create our own agreement with the community team members.
- Meet with Heidi B. Geoffrey M, Robert Jones and others to learn the lessons of UROC. We intend to invite them to a grant team meeting in August or September.
- Locate and meet with faculty from other colleges known for successful partnerships and student engagement, e.g. Carlson (throughout the term of the grant – and beyond)
- Create database with: 1) community-based projects or activities focused on using and protecting water resources and food and obesity issues, 2) names of community partners and university faculty/staff currently working with these projects or interested in making use of these activities for educational purposes, 3) informational resources on community. It was recommended by CURA staff that we find something fairly simple to keep track of what we already know and not invest a great deal of time on learning everything that is already going on. Fall, 2010.

Assessment of task I

The first phase of identifying existing resources will be understood as successful when the following conditions are met:

- We reach a point of diminishing returns in gathering data;
- People and organizations are coming to us asking for inclusion;
- We need to re-evaluate our planning and implementation because we either have too many or too few participants for any part of the connections (students, UM capacity, community partners)

II. Creating significant public engagement activities for students along with a plan for making these engagement activities an integrated part of curricula centering on healthy foods and water.

- At this point all team members have already been involved in at least two meetings: We’ve had two dinner meetings with all community partners and most of our University
partners, a meeting with all University partners, and each of the ‘sub-groups’ (water, healthy foods) has had a separate meeting. We’ve generated numerous possibilities. Some of the decisions made so far:

We decided that our long term goal is to create an Urban Environmental Research Station located in the community as a way of coordinating our efforts and assuring sustainability for partnerships we are building. While this is beyond the scope of this 18 month grant, this will provide the framework for our projects.

Project one: Get the Lead Out.
Our "Get the Lead Out" project team is going to meet in a few weeks to tour the schools in Frogtown community and start to devise a strategy to approach and assess the potential problem of heavy metal contamination of the soils in the community. In the meantime we are looking for background information on any existing soil testing and trying to learn a bit about the historical development of some of the schools. We’re approaching this as a way to involve the community in the solution if indeed it does exist as well as help educate about the importance of our soil resource. This summer we need to do this background work before we start to involve students in the local schools as well as our students from the University. What exactly the student engagement activity will look like, is still under development, but might involve the capstone courses in the sustainability studies minor as well as ESPM. We will also create a UROP project around this theme for a student as well.

The project will be developed by spring semester, 2011 and we hope that implementation will begin Summer 2011.

Project two: Hanna: Connecting the U of MN Student Organic Farm with Gordon Park High school

Last summer a CFANS student with a significant role in the Organic Farm helped develop the course, taught, and coordinated summer activities for Gordon Parks high school students. Both the students and the H.S. teachers raved about the project. Therefore, this summer we will expand upon and sustain this success by hiring two assistants to Hanna who will be the Hannas in training: one U of MN student and one graduate from Gordon Parks or a community member with commitment to community development through food and urban farming. This individual will further the ties between GP, the U and the community and will be charged with creating new experiential leaning opportunities with community garden and
food justice projects. We will be making a video about this project during the summer (see section III.)

**Project Three: Write a proposal to ConAgra** for the following ideas: (We have submitted a pre-proposal. If we are not invited to write the proposal, we will be developing a less ambitious project connecting agriculture and nutrition classes to the existing grant work around health and wellness in the Aurora neighborhood and/or with the Community Design Center. To add a personal testimony to the power of having partnerships in place: The pre-proposal that I’m including here was written in one day; we learned about it on Friday, submitted this on Monday). This was only possible because our community members were willing to respond with ideas and background information immediately)

Project goals:

- Improve health in the targeted communities
- Promote healthy grains and locally grown ingredients as one tool leading toward enhanced health in the battle against obesity and diabetes
- Promote community ownership of health and wellness plans
- Encourage underrepresented youth to attend college and to enter health and nutrition-related fields
- Enhance University of Minnesota student learning in their field (nutrition, agriculture, applied economics) through experiential opportunities
- Enhance sense of civic responsibility in University of Minnesota students
- Enhance problem solving ability and appreciation of different cultures in both the community teams and U of MN students

**Action item:** Open a stall or small storefront pizza place on University Avenue or on the St. Paul Campus, using whole grains from ConAgra and/or grains grown and processed by the teens and University of Minnesota students. This new business will emphasize the use of quality, locally grown ingredients: it would provide an income and create something that would be economically sustainable; it will also add to the economic health of the community and anticipate increased pedestrian traffic on University Avenue, with the advent of light rail and; it will give the teens and U of MN students a sense of ownership. The pizza joint could be something as simple as a set of tables around an outdoor bread oven on the U of MN campus. It could be a seasonal destination, only open in the summer. The precedent for this is on the West Bank campus in the basement of the Carlson School of Management, where Urban Ventures in south Minneapolis opened a small coffee shop employing teens, called CityKids Java. We would call upon industry to provide training for the teens and University students. In the future this establishment could serve as an opportunity for research on a number of health issues, such as the effect of portion size.
Ideas for the pizza place seem to be growing by the minute: also selling locally grown fruits, vegetables (like yummy pea shoots), starter plants pizza dough, pesto or red sauce.

Action item: Creating teams of community youth and University of Minnesota students to design and implement health and wellness programs for underserved communities. These teams may be working with the pizza place, but may be taking other action as well.

Team one: We propose funds to hire 5 Hmong high school age interns through the Community Design Center who will work with students from a nutrition class to create and implement a plan for bringing more healthy grains into the diet of the Eastside community. The Community Design Center of Minnesota is a Saint Paul-based organization whose mission is to help revitalize low-to-moderate income communities by providing technical assistance and operating programs that will enhance the physical, economic, social, ecological, and spiritual well being of the community and its residents. This is a primarily Hmong community with a median annual income of under $34,000 a year and a large number of families earning less than $20,000. This program would be building on an existing very successful internship program for Hmong high school students. They currently have a Conservation Corps and a Garden Corps. A recent past partnership with the University of Minnesota resulted in the creation of the rain garden in the Bruce Vento Nature Preserve. We propose to add a Food and Nutrition Corps to the CDCs current internship offerings. (Note: I’ve since learned that they already have a food and nutrition corps, so we can still partner, but won’t be creating a new corps.)

Team Two: We propose funds to hire 5 high school age interns from the Aurora and/or Frogtown communities who will work with students from nutrition, agriculture, and applied economics class(es) to create and implement a plan with community members for bringing more healthy grains into the diet of the community. This neighborhood is about 70% African-American with a history of disenfranchisement. The median income in 1999 was $26,179. This will build upon an existing small grant for enhancing health through gardening and local foods.

In a food survey currently being conducted by the non-profit Community Stabilization Project, both communities indicated that low availability of healthy foods and the price of healthy foods are significant barriers to eating healthy. The survey also indicated a strong interest in learning to cook with healthy foods (100% of African Americans indicating a very strong interest and 83% of the Hmong community indicating a strong or very strong interest). The survey also indicates the presence of both hunger and obesity in both neighborhoods.

Both teams will select their own projects each year under the guidance of one or more U of Mn faculty and adult members of the community. Each year will end with a culminating event involving the community and include an introduction to careers related to health and nutrition. We believe that working in teams with University students will encourage community youth to pursue higher education. Towards this end, we also will propose that half of the salary earned be in the form of scholarships.

Project 4: Engaging U students and communities with the Mississippi: Many specific ideas are under consideration, but the sub-team hasn’t made a decision yet on the next steps. They’ve promised to have a specific project under construction by Fall, 2010 and ready to be piloted in Fall, 2011.
Assessment of Task II, the community engagement opportunities for students: We intend to work with an evaluation specialist at the Center for Teaching and Learning, Eric Moore, to design a long term evaluation plan that addresses the following questions:

- What are the intended and unintended learning outcomes for the students?
- Do the learning gains justify time & resource investments?
- Are we serving needs in the community through these projects? What are the intended and unintended outcomes for the community?

III. Learning “Best Practices” for developing learning opportunities through community engagement and sharing what we’ve learned.

a. Interviews with CURA and Service Learning staff, faculty, students and community partners (done)

b. One or more team members attend the SENCER workshop Teaching Food through Community Engagement conference in Madison on the 23rd of this month. (done)

c. Intentional reflection on process as a part of each meeting with community, How did we do? How could we be more effective? (done for the first two meetings)

d. Obtain UROC community agreement; learn from the UROC work done thus far.

e. Create a workshop in partnership with the new faculty development person in the Office of Public Engagement, CURA, Service Learning, the Center for Teaching and Learning and CFANS faculty meant to inspire faculty to incorporate public engagement into their teaching. The workshop will be followed with opportunities for individual consultation. Staff from CURA and Service Learning have offered to work with interested faculty in creating and nurturing community partnerships. CTL has offered to consult on with faculty on ways to maximize the value of the experiences for the students. (Create workshop Fall, 2010. Offer Spring 2011)

f. Documenting Hanna: Hanna is an undergraduate student in CFANS who has been working on a partnership with a CFANS faculty member and Gordon Park High School through a CURA grant. The partnership has been extremely successful in the opinion of our high school partners. This summer we will be creating a video of Hanna in action which includes interviews with students, Hanna, high school teachers, and the CFANS faculty involved with the project. This video will become both an inspirational tool for involving additional students and faculty as well as an instructional tool. This has also become an “engagement activity” itself. This will be created by CFANS students and Gordon Park interns guided by the Gordon Parks Artist in Residence Tobechi.
g. Work with the CFANS capacity building task force on the creation and implementation of a plan for on-going capacity building on a long term plan for building capacity (May - August/Sept)

h. A cohort from this grant group will complete a program through Powderhorn to build our capacity in working with the community. (Fall and spring 2010-2011)

i. C-CSEEL will create a strategy for promoting teaching through community engagement and for assessment of partnership viability (Fall, 2010)

Assessment of task III

- The team will be able to identify important steps in creating successful community partnerships.
- The team will communicate to their experiences to others in the college.
- C-CSEEL will develop a strategic plan for out-reach and in-reach activities focused on developing and sustaining educational opportunities that engage communities.