

**Shared Reflection, Reciprocal Communication, Collaborative Action:  
Exploring the Role of Dialogue in Bridging Education and Democracy**

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On May 6, 2004, Washington Campus Compact, a consortium of higher education institutions dedicated to connecting education and communities, convened over 140 people from across the state of Washington to engage in dialogue about solutions for the pressing issues in education and communities today. This *Dialogue for Democracy* forum demonstrated how creative, intentional deliberation can build capacity for strong partnerships between campuses, schools, and community partners. This paper will explore – both in terms of ideas and strategies – how dialogue-based forums and campus-school-community partnerships are crucial elements in fostering strong connections between education and democracy.

**Generating democracy**

Even as this nation was born, Jefferson recognized that it would need to be in a continual state of rebirth, saying in a 1787 letter to Abigail Adams (1959, 173): “The spirit of resistance to government is so valuable on certain occasions, that I wish it to be always kept alive.” Resistance can be broadly understood here as any collective effort on the part of citizens to reinvent their government, and it is an especially important element of a healthy democracy. This is because a democracy, more than any other system of government, is something made, not something received. Democracy requires, and is indeed defined by a process of ongoing renewal. We have an obligation always to be maintaining this process, always to be regenerating our system. Dewey saw democracy as societal in scope – “A democracy is more than a form of government: it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (1916a, 87) – and he famously identified education as the key to the process of democracy’s rebirth: “Democracy must be born anew in every generation and education is its midwife” (1916b, 139). The observations of Jefferson and Dewey are hallmarks of a philosophical tradition – alive today in the thinking and practice of service learning and civic engagement – that sees a necessary connection between education and democracy, and that believes that the degree to which we educate each other is the degree to which we regenerate ourselves as a people, and thereby renew our democracy.

Key questions arise from this thinking. How is the connection between education and democracy established? How is it strengthened? And what impacts can a stronger connection between education and democracy have on our campuses and in our communities? This paper focuses on the power of dialogue in order to explore answers to these questions. It will examine both the philosophy and the practice of dialogue in order to elucidate the role of dialogue in bridging education and democracy; and it will assert that it is in within the space created by dialogue that education and democracy most fruitfully converge.

David Bohm, an English scientist first known in the twentieth century for his work on quantum physics, later became interested in applying the key themes of his science (the interconnectedness of all things; and the role of change, or flow, in manifesting that interconnectedness) to the human world, and specifically to matters of human communication. This led him to a longtime exploration of dialogue as a mode of communication, through which he became a groundbreaking voice on the idea and practice of dialogue. For Bohm, the defining characteristic of dialogue was in how it created a communicative flow. He saw dialogue as quite distinct from other modes of communication such as discussion (1996, 6-7):

‘Dialogue’ comes from the Greek word, *dialogos*. *Logos* means ‘the word,’ or... the ‘meaning of the word.’ And *dia* means ‘through’ – it doesn’t mean ‘two.’ A dialogue can be among any number of people, not just two.... This derivation suggests... a *stream of meaning* flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which many emerge some new understanding. It’s something new, which may not have been the starting point at all. It’s something creative. And this shared meaning is the ‘glue’ or ‘cement’ that holds people and societies together.

Contrast this with the word ‘discussion,’ which has the same root as ‘percussion’ and ‘concussion.’ It really means to break things up. It emphasizes the idea of analysis, where there may be many points of view, and where everybody is presenting a different one – analyzing and breaking up. That obviously has its value, but it is limited....The people who take part are not really open to questioning their fundamental assumptions.

For a democracy to thrive, there must be a space for the ongoing exchange of new perspectives. Antjie Krog relates this process to the emergence of truth, a truth she encourages us to see as: “the widest possible compilation of people’s perceptions, stories, myths, and experiences” (1999, 21-22). A wide compilation of ideas tends not to result from debates or discussions. Even though divergent views emerge during a debate, the aim of debate is to, in the

end, reduce a diversity of perspectives to one winning view. The same is true of a consensus-oriented discussion which, though it promotes a wide array of ideas, still aims at moving from a diversity of ideas toward one commonly held view. Dialogue differs in principle from these modes of communication. It encourages an ongoing and open plurality of ideas. It is generative rather than reductive. And it is inherently educative and democratic.

### **Shaping Dialogue**

With his tireless assertion that “American renewal is predicated on a vibrant public conversation,” socio-political philosopher Cornel West urges us to understand and engage in the connection between dialogue and democracy (1994, 34). Expanding upon this point, philosopher of education bell hooks shows us that democratic dialogue amounts to democratic education, noting that: “Learning is never confined solely to an institutionalized classroom....Conversation is the central location of pedagogy for the democratic educator” (2003, 41-44).

It was out of ideas such as these that, two years ago, Washington Campus Compact (WACC), a state consortium of higher education institutions dedicated to connecting education with communities, began developing its *Dialogue for Democracy* project, a project aimed at promoting the convergence of democracy and education in dialogue-based forums. The first of these was held in May 2004, and convened over 140 participants in a statewide dialogue exploring the public purpose of education.

WACC had several key goals for the *Dialogue* project:

- Promote a cyclical process of shared reflection, reciprocal communication, and collaborative action between and among educational administrators, faculty, students, and community-partners;
- Promote and convene locally-based partnerships to address education and community issues of common interest;
- Deepen participants’ understanding of pressing issues related to Washington state communities and education;
- Promote the development of, and commitment to, local issue-oriented action plans, and;
- Provide opportunities for disseminating partnership work through documentary production, electronic and paper publications, and conference presentations.

These goals point to two factors that are paramount in building a vital democracy: diversity and reciprocity. Early on, WACC identified these as key priorities for this project, and created a partnership-based structure for the *Dialogue* process that aimed at bringing diverse participants together in mutually beneficial, action-oriented partnerships. To begin with, WACC invited each of its member campuses to sponsor at least one five- to ten-person team of *Dialogue* participants, following parameters for the formation of teams that were meant to ensure diversity in terms of both institutions and roles, and at the same time form a solid basis for campus-school-community partnerships.

Some of these parameters capitalized on WACC's status as a statewide, membership-based, higher education consortium. Taken together, the various teams participating in the *Dialogue* represented a full spectrum of higher education institutions – colleges and universities; public and private; two-, four-year, and graduate; secular and religious – from across the state of Washington. Yet, taking the goal further, WACC also requested that each team include representation from other key community institutions, including K-12 school systems, community-based organizations, and local government bodies. In addition, WACC requested that participants on each team be drawn from an array of roles and cohorts:

- *senior administrator* (e.g.: president, provost, dean, school superintendent);
- *faculty* (e.g.: university or college professor, community- or technical- college instructor, high-school teacher);
- *student* (e.g.: graduate, undergraduate, high-school student);
- and *community partner* (e.g.: non-profit director; local activist; business owner, city council member).

Taken as a whole, this structure for participation ensured the diverse representation of various localities, institutions, and individuals. (see Appendix 1)

In addition to this structure for participation, WACC took care to create a meaningful structure for the *Dialogue* process itself, intended to engage participants in a flow process of shared reflection, reciprocal communication, and collaborative action.

This process was designed to go beyond the day of the event itself to encompass both preparatory and follow-up work. To begin with, weeks before the *Dialogue*, all participants were given the same set of preparatory readings and reflection questions. After having completed the readings, participants were asked to come together with their fellow team

members in order to share their thoughts on the readings, and create and submit a team-based set of answers to the questions. (see Appendix 2)

This preparatory process accomplished several important things: it provided a space for acquaintance-making and group formation in advance of the event itself; it allowed all participants to engage in the same set of readings, thereby establishing the basis for common culture and language in the *Dialogue* process; and it required each team to formulate answers to questions addressing the potential of their work as a campus-school-community partnership.

In shaping the day of *Dialogue* itself, WACC sought to create and integrate a diversity of conversations. These ranged back and forth from general forums involving the large community of participants, to cohort-group and team-based dialogues. Participants began the day with a general forum, featuring historian and organizer Ira Harkavy speaking on the power of campus-school-community partnerships to effect creative and substantive social change. At mid-morning, participants proceeded to join with the members of their respective cohorts (administrator, faculty, student, and community partner) in facilitated dialogues to share their thoughts and questions on the connection between democracy and education, and on the prospect of their campus-school-community partnerships. During the earlier part of the afternoon, participants reconvened in a general forum, facilitated by the keynote speaker, to integrate their individual and group perspectives with those of others. Finally, participants came back together with their original teams to work in a “resolutions session,” discussed further below, that allowed fellow team members to begin strategizing toward an action plan for partnership-based work. These different formats, bringing participants together in different affiliations, and going back and forth from large group to small group, allowed for a substantive flow of ideas, questions, and resolutions.

### **Making Change**

Political scholar C. Douglas Lummis states that democracy is impossible without public hope: “The state of public hope is in a sense self-causing.... Public hope is itself grounds for hope.... In democratic politics, the art of the possible means the art of extending the possible, the art of creating the possible out of the impossible” (2001, 46-47). Seeking to promote this kind of robust and creative action-orientation on the part of school-campus-community partnerships,

WACC gave the teams worksheet-based guidance during the final session of the *Dialogue* to assist them in formulating an action plan. (see Appendix 3)

The guidance asked that each plan target at least one specific community, and focus on at least one specific community issue; the guidance also provided parameters that allowed for the choice of a more goal-based planning approach, or a more open-ended approach. Encouraged to meet further following the *Dialogue*, each team of participants had a month to develop and submit an action plan for furthering their work as a local partnership. (see Appendix 4)

With his idea of “communicative action” (1979), German philosopher Jürgen Habermas revolutionized our understanding of the power of communication by positing that communication, specifically communication designed to bring about mutual understanding, was the fundamental human action. Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire shared this view that communication is action, that it is change: “To speak a true word is to transform the world.... Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection” (1970, 87-88). By this reasoning, we can be said to best fulfill our humanness when our words and our deeds converge. And we can recognize powerful dialogue as the basis for transformative action.

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**Note** – *Dialogue for Democracy*, a twenty-five minute documentary that captured the essence of the dialogue process discussed in this paper, is available for purchase through Washington Campus Compact. For more information, please visit [www.wacampuscompact.org](http://www.wacampuscompact.org).

## References

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Krog, A. (1999). *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*. New York: Times Books.

West, C. (Summer 1994). Race and Social Justice in America. *Liberal Education*.

### **About the author**

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## APPENDIX 1 – DIALOGUE TEAM REPRESENTATION

### **Campuses / communities represented:**

Antioch University Seattle / Seattle  
Bellevue Community College / Bellevue  
Bellingham Public Schools / Bellingham  
Central Washington University / Ellensburg  
Eastern Washington University / Cheney/Spokane  
Edmonds Community College / Edmonds  
Evergreen State College / Olympia  
Gonzaga University / Spokane  
Heritage College / Toppenish  
Seattle University / Seattle  
Skagit Valley College / Mount Vernon  
Spokane Community College / Spokane  
Spokane Falls Community College / Spokane  
University of Washington / Seattle  
Washington State University / Pullman  
Western Washington University / Bellingham

### **Sample of teams:**

*(university-sponsored team)*

Associate Director, University Housing  
Chair, Family & Consumer Sciences  
Director, Civic Engagement & Leadership  
School Superintendent  
University President  
University Student

*(community-college-sponsored team)*

City Mayor  
Community College President  
Community College Student  
Faculty, Social Sciences  
Manager, Center for Service-Learning

## APPENDIX 2 – DIALOGUE PREPARATORY PROCESS

### Preparatory Readings excerpted from:

Bohm, D. (1996). *On Dialogue*. London: Routledge.

Brown, G. & Harkavy, I. (1995). Making the Connection. In *Service Counts: Lessons from the Field of Service and Higher Education*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact/The Education Commission of the States.

Chomsky, N. (2003). *Chomsky on Democracy & Education*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Goodlad, S. (Ed.). (2001). *The Last Best Hope: A Democracy Reader*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

hooks, b. (2003). *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*. New York: Routledge.

### Preparatory Questions, with sample responses:

1. What key question(s) has your team taken from the *Dialogue* readings?

Spokane Community College / Spokane team –

- What is a shared meaning between the community and the colleges, and how do we achieve this?
- Is American society failing at democracy?
- How can students teach others that education and democracy go hand-in-hand?
- Why are citizens not participating?... Are we too comfortable?

2. What key insight(s) has your team taken from the *Dialogue* readings?

University of Washington / Seattle team –

We agreed that one of the most powerful articles was that written by bell hooks. In fact we decided that one of our goals for a partnership between the university and school system would be to “break down the walls between or at least put in skylights” so that every graduating senior would graduate having been the recipient of an education like the one envisioned in the following statement: “*Education at its best – this profound human transaction called teaching and learning – is not just about getting information or getting a job. Education is about healing and wholeness. It is about empowerment, liberation, transcendence, about renewing the vitality of life. It is about finding and claiming ourselves and our place in the world.*” bell hooks

3. What is your team’s understanding of the public purpose of education?

Bellevue Community College / Bellevue team –

- To train skilled individuals

- To create well rounded individuals, regardless of their area of study
- To develop leaders
- To create valuable members of the workforce
- To expose students to multiple perspectives
- To enable students to self-actualize
- To influence students to be informed, active, and civically engaged individuals
- To develop students' reasoning skills
- To make students more skilled at various forms of literacy, including media and technology literacy
- To help people realize their potential

4. Describe your team's sense of the civic impact of education in your community.

Central Washington University / Ellensburg team –

Although our educational systems make considerable contributions to the local communities, we have a sense that the civic focus is fractured by conflicting demands, as well as our current challenges with widespread coordination and collaboration.

5. How would your team explain the nature of a partnership?

Gonzaga University / Spokane team –

It needs to be seen as development – dynamic, and evolving as the result of the expressed voices of all involved. The needs of all partners must be equally addressed and met through collaboration.

6. What pressing issue(s) in your community could be creatively and effectively addressed by campus-school-community partnership?

Washington State University / Pullman team –

The most compelling and resolvable issue is the absence of a coordinated food system between the farming communities – that lack access to grocery stores with low-cost, quality food products – and the university community that has an abundance of food resources and human resources to help in eradicating local food insecurity.

7. What are some outcomes your team's partnership could possibly achieve with respect to this issue/these issues ?

Washington State University / Pullman team –

Provide improved methods of linking food production and delivery systems through the strategic alignment of community and educational resources to better serve the low-income populations in Whitman County.

- Improve access to high quality, locally produced food for low-income residents in Whitman County.
- Link local production and delivery of nutritional food to job skills training and economic development.
- Enhance community awareness and response to food systems and nutritional issues.

8. What outcomes are you hoping to achieve through participation in the *Dialogue for Democracy*?

Edmonds Community College / Edmonds team –

- The team can identify some areas of common interest where the college and Native communities can work together.
- The team can discuss ways that the college can help meet the Potlatch Fund and Native Action Network's needs.
- The team can identify sources of conflict and possible steps to be taken to overcome such challenges.
- A successful partnership between cultures enhances opportunities for new resources for cutting edge work in long term social change.

APPENDIX 3 – DIALOGUE RESOLUTION WORKSHEET



**Dialogue for Democracy**  
**a statewide public forum connecting communities and education**

**6 May 2004**  
**Town Hall Seattle**

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**Resolutions Session Guidance**  
**for formulating commitments to furthering your work as a local partnership**

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- ☞ This team-focused session is designed to provide you with time to bring your partnership’s ideas into action-oriented resolution.
- ☞ *Please use this time to begin developing an action plan for furthering your local work as a partnership.*
- ☞ Following, you’ll find an array of possible elements for formulating resolutions toward an action plan. You’ll note that these elements range from those promoting a goal-based approach, to those encouraging an open-ended approach.\*

<p><b>goal-based planning elements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>statement of purpose (why)</i></li><li>• <i>intended outcomes (how)</i></li><li>• <i>key steps (who, what, where)</i></li><li>• <i>benchmark dates (when)</i></li></ul>	<p><b>open-ended planning elements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>statement of hope (why)</i></li><li>• <i>guiding questions (how)</i></li><li>• <i>key spheres (who, what, where)</i></li><li>• <i>time frames (when)</i></li></ul>
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- ☞ Please combine and develop some or all of the above elements *in any way that best suits the planning style of your team* in order to formulate commitments to an issue-oriented action plan (please use attached sheets).
- ☞ Finally, please designate a person to submit – within the next four weeks – a copy of your team’s plan to Washington Campus Compact (see attached sheet for contact information).

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\* Interestingly, a duality of goal-orientation & open-endedness is inherent in the very word, “resolution” – for although the word denotes a *fixity of purpose*, it comes from the Latin, *resolvere*, meaning *to untie or loosen*.

## APPENDIX 4 – SAMPLE TEAM ACTION PLANS



### ***Dialogue for Democracy*** ***a statewide public forum connecting communities and education***

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#### **Central Washington University Team Action Plan**

##### **Team members:**

Lorinda Anderson, Director, Civic Engagement Office, Central Washington University  
Jan Bowers, Professor, Family & Consumer Sciences, Central Washington University  
Richard DeShields, Associate Director, University Housing and New Student Programs,  
Central Washington University  
Jerilyn McIntyre, President, Central Washington University  
Gretta Merwin, Superintendent, Ellensburg Public Schools  
Jennifer Richards, Student, Central Washington University

##### **Communities to be impacted by team:**

City of Ellensburg, CWU campus community, Kittitas Valley

##### **Issue focus:**

Using the topic of high risk drinking issues and alcohol abuse challenges, we hope to:

- Develop a *case study* that will address the issues of civic initiatives from multiple perspectives
- Develop/deepen community/institutional partnerships in the region
- Address educational and social support for diverse target audiences

##### **Foundational Ideas from *Dialogue Preparatory Questionnaire*:**

*What pressing issues(s) in your community could be creatively and effectively addressed by the campus-school community partnership?*

Some pressing local issues that our team felt could be addressed by the campus-school-community partnership included:

- High risk drinking issues and alcohol abuse challenges
- Educational and social support for diverse target audiences

*What are some outcomes your team's partnership could possibly achieve with respect to this issue/these issues?*

To develop a master strategic plan that addressed the issues from multiple perspectives and meet regularly to ensure efforts are made to actualize the anticipated outcomes.

*What outcomes are you hoping to achieve through participation in the Dialogue for Democracy?*

As a direct result of the Dialogue for Democracy forum, we anticipate that our team will direct efforts that will:

- Develop a master plan for the strategic development of campus/community civic initiatives
- Create a more seamless structure for the coordination of service efforts
- Augment the web-based electronic service platform to incorporate the participation of community-based volunteers, organizations, and regional service sites
- Develop/deepen the region's community/institutional partnerships

**Framework for action:**

- Statement of Hope:

We acknowledge that institutional change is a slow and difficult process – a long-term goal – but we are taking steps to move toward greater goals of community/institutional partnerships and civic initiatives in our community. We want to strengthen the community-CWU bond that will move us from discussion to implementation to ACTION.

- Guiding Questions:

Do we want to lay framework or create a model for tackling issues, or does it need to be more organic? Will a case study lead us slowly towards institutional change?

- Key Spheres:

*Underage, high-risk drinking, in both the Ellensburg High School and CWU communities.*

May 11: First steering committee met. Community action group decided to break out into three key issue teams, including education and product availability. The three issue teams will meet again June 15 for further discussion.

*Form advisory committee for civic engagement.*

What is it and what will it look like at CWU? What will it look like in Kittitas County? We need to hear the voice of community, students, faculty, and administrators—all partners. If we choose to use the Furco model as a framework, what does that look like for our team? Do we make adaptations/changes within the service learning model? It has been recommended that we present the Furco model of Service learning to the Civic Engagement Advisory Committee at the September meeting as a benchmark assessment for where we are and where we want to go. June 7: First meeting to review forum responses, and look at where we go from here.

*Enhance the Faculty Fellows Program.*

This in order to include a civic engagement piece as part of professional development promotion and reward, which ideally will prove incentive for staff to include civic

engagement in planned coursework. Faculty Fellow members have rated themselves using the Furco model, and have been provided with example syllabi of what civic engagement looks like integrated with coursework.

- Time Frames:

We will meet again June 3 to discuss Furco service learning model as a potential framework for our strategic planning, and discuss further issues of underage drinking and the vision for civic engagement on CWU campus and in the greater community. Next year, an advisory committee will be addressing pressing issues using the designated framework established as a result of the Dialogue for Democracy team resolution.

\*During our June 3 meeting, we discussed this resolution, as well as brainstormed the following ideas. Having seen the model for a Civic Discourse class that will begin at WWU next year, the question was raised, Is this a direction in which we would like to move? President McIntyre suggested the idea of a Civic Responsibility general education course. The team agreed that there is potential for tying this topic in with our Univ. 109 Service Learning courses, where students discuss theory and then put it into practice. We also envisioned a “Civic Engagement Living Learning Community” in the future: a residence hall specifically for those who want to serve, such as we now have for education, healthy living, and the Douglas Honors College. A final idea was presented that we could adopt the theme of Civic Engagement for our 2005-06 Presidential Lecture Series. The individuals brought to campus that year would all speak on topics of civic responsibility and engagement. Information will be discussed with Libby Street, Executive Assistant to the President, who coordinates such events.



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**Edmonds Community College**  
**Team Action Plan**

**Team members:**

Andrea Alexander, Member, Potlatch Fund  
Richard Asher, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, Edmonds Community College  
Joey Ketah, Community Connections AmeriCorps Member, Edmonds Community College; and Administrative Assistant, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians Economic Development Corporation  
Amy Markishtum, President, Potlatch Fund  
Thomas Murphy, Anthropology Instructor, Edmonds Community College

**Communities to be impacted by team:**

Students at Edmonds Community College  
Native American Community

**Issue focus:**

Improving education regarding Native American communities at Edmonds Community College  
Facilitating the success of Native students at Edmonds Community College  
Providing service opportunities for students in the Native community

**Framework for action:**

• Statement of Hope:

We hope to improve the quality of its education regarding Native Americans, enable Native American students to succeed at our campus and beyond, and to offer service opportunities to the Native community that would need community-defined needs.

• Guiding Questions:

How can Edmonds Community College respond more effectively to the needs of Native students and the Native community? How can we ensure that the needs of the Native community play a primary role in developing service opportunities in Native organizations and communities?

• Key Spheres and Time Frames:

This dialogue emerged out of the involvement of Native students and speakers in campus events such as the Powwow and our Brown Bag Lecture Series. Andrea Alexander of the Potlatch Fund has helped EdCC organize a panel discussion on Makah whaling and spoken on philanthropy in Native communities. She has expressed an interest in recruiting volunteers and/or interns from EdCC. Joey Ketah has been an important student leader who has played a central role in organizing these events on campus and is now a part-time AmeriCorps member. She also works with Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians.

One of the suggestions that came out of the *Dialogue for Democracy* was the need for more community-college curriculum on tribal government and business.

The question now is: Who else should we involve in this dialogue?

Adrienne Manson de Jesus approached the American Indian Student Association about reviving Winterhawk, a support group for Native students in Edmonds School District.

Gail Morris, Indian Education Program Assistant for Edmonds School District, approached Tom Murphy about getting more involved with Edmonds Community College. Joey has suggested (and I would echo that suggestion) that we invite Adrienne and Gail to be involved in future dialogue.

Ann Paulson, Chair of the Business Department at EdCC, has approached Tom Murphy and the Teaching and Learning Diversity Committee, about her interest in recruiting a more diverse faculty in the Business Department. I have invited Ann Paulson to participate with Joey and me (plus other AmeriCorps members and faculty members working on other projects) in Washington Campus Compact's Summer Institute and Self-Reflection and Renewal Activity, June 28-30, 2004.

Claudia Kauffman, Native Action Network and Board of Trustees for Evergreen State College, participated with Antioch at the Dialogue for Democracy and is also interested in developing service opportunities with Edmonds Community College. Claudia has played a key role in several of our powwows and will be invited to speak on casinos as part of our Brown Bag Lecture Series in the fall. We could use her visit as an opportunity to continue dialogue in a formal setting here on campus.

Joey has suggested that we make government-to-government contact with our local Tulalip Tribes. We will draft a letter and ask the college president Jack Oharah to send it to the Chairman of Tulalip Tribes. The letter may include an invitation to attend Claudia Kauffman's lecture and campus dialogue events associated with it.

We have also dedicated one of our full-time AmeriCorps members (beginning September 1, 2004) to working on developing and sustaining this dialogue, facilitating service opportunities in the Native community and with Native students in Edmonds School District, and assisting faculty members in developing service learning (including helping with the powwow production course) opportunities.



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**Washington State University**  
**Team Action Plan**

**Team members:**

Jennifer Boie, GroundWorks Institute  
Trevor Bond, Pullman Community Gardens at Koppel Farm  
Melanie Brown, Community Service Learning Center, Washington State University  
Kim Freier, Service-Learning Coordinator, Washington State University  
David Gruenewald, Assistant Professor, College of Education, Washington State University  
Scott Hallett, Council on Aging and Human Services  
Erika Kroll, Student, Washington State University  
Barbara Mays, Information Coordinator, Community Action Center, Washington State University  
Amy Marie Robbins, FD Program Manager, Community Action Center, Washington State University  
Jeff Sellen, Faculty, College of Education, Washington State University  
Paul Sturm, Assistant Superintendent, Pullman School District

**Community to be impacted by team:**

Whitman County, WA

**Issue Focus:**

Increased food security and nutrition for low-income residents through collaborative community-based education, practical gardening and food preparation projects, jobs skills training, and economic opportunity development.

**Framework for Action:**

• Statement of Purpose:

The Palouse Food Project aims to continue its ongoing work in providing improved methods of linking food production and delivery systems through the strategic alignment of community and educational resources to better serve the low income populations in Whitman County. This project will provide an opportunity to link the two cultures as earlier described for the benefit of addressing food insecurity and sustainable food production.

We are proposing the parallel development of: a dynamic, strategic plan for increasing the food security of residents of Whitman County through new and existing local production and delivery systems; and a network of community gardens constructed, maintained and promoted through education-based initiatives.

The foundation of the Palouse Food Project is the collaboration of many agencies to address the food security needs of low-income residents of Whitman County. Using the loosely adapted

adage “Rather than just give a person a tomato for a meal, teach her to grow many --that she will never go hungry” the PFP strives to provide fresh organic food through the local food bank, senior meal sites and school systems as well as to cultivate a love of gardening and a taste for nutritious food products throughout our community.

By learning about food security issues and community-based solutions as well as developing practical skills in organic gardening and marketing of produce, WSU and K-12 students will gain marketable job skills and life-long awareness of the food security needs of the community. Providing resources to help develop production of specialty foods and finding market opportunities through local retailers provides entrepreneurial opportunities to motivated individuals. The re-creation of the Farmers Market will bring fresh organic produce that is difficult to access in our county and provide local gardeners and craftspeople an opportunity to market their goods. The additional option of EBT units and WIC coupons for payment at the market will aid low-income families in making healthy food purchases. This is a valuable opportunity to explore and align our county resources to meet the nutritional needs of all residents and to nurture the development of entrepreneurial projects.

- Principal Goals:

Goal 1. Improve access to high quality, locally produced food for low-income residents in Whitman County.

Goal 2. Link local production and delivery of nutritional food to job skills training and economic development.

Goal 3. Enhance community awareness and response to food systems and nutritional issues.

- Key Spheres:

Whitman County, a rural area spanning 2,059 square miles in southeast Washington, is the backdrop for “two cultures” that are vastly different --- the world of mechanized, dry land wheat and dry pea farming and the academic world that revolves around Pullman, Washington, the home of Washington State University. Employment for low-income residents, who comprise over 25% of the county’s population (Census, 2000), is limited to minimum-wage farming and ag-related labor or employment at low paying service jobs. People are often denied more lucrative employment by a highly educated labor force in Pullman.

Whitman County bears a close resemblance to many other no-growth rural counties. For example, the county reported a net loss of 109 persons between the 2000 Census and July 2002. Local schools report 15% to over 60% usage of USDA school lunch programs, however, only two out of ten school districts offer a summer food program. Roughly 4.4 percent of the total population, or 1,800 persons, access the Basic Food (Food Stamp) Program - compared with the 25% poverty statistic. As reported by the Washington Children’s Alliance (2002), typically rural counties report much lower participation in food assistance programs than their urban counterparts. Whitman County, nestled in the corner of a state that ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation in food insecurity (USDA, 2002), demonstrated a 38% increase in food bank participation over a 3 year period (2000-2003). This is because in a conservative rural area it is still considered less stigmatizing for people to access food from a food bank rather than apply for public assistance.

For this proposal the most compelling and resolvable issue is the absence of a coordinated food system between the farming communities---that lack access to grocery stores with low-cost, quality food products---and the university community that has an abundance of food resources and human resources to help in eradicating local food insecurity. The history of this county, not

unlike other rural counties containing “urban villages” with more abundant resources, is one of virtually no population growth, very slow assimilation of change, the denial of persistent problems, such as hunger, poor nutrition and related health issues, and the limited, if nonexistent sharing of information and food resources between the small towns and larger trade centers.

These additional statistics show the incidence of poverty and rural food insecurity in Whitman County. Over the past 10 years county personal income has remained stagnant compared with increases at both the state and national levels. Whitman County currently reports \$15,298 in per capita income as compared with \$22,973 for Washington State (Office of Financial Management, 1999). Likewise, median household income in Whitman County was reported at \$28,584 while the state average is \$45,776. Of the 15, 247 total households in the county, roughly 30 percent have less than \$15,000 annual household income. Census data (2000) shows unemployment in Whitman County to be 10.8%, not including full-time university students. The majority of the unemployed reside in the farming sector and small towns with few employment options simply because their housing is affordable. Pullman, in comparison to other places in Washington, ranks within the top five areas that report persistent housing affordability problems. A typical profile of Whitman County poverty: rural white females with less than \$20,000 household income, a disabling condition or persistent unemployment, sedentary lifestyle and poor diet speaks to the food insecurity in this rural area. A random mail survey of 1500 Whitman County Households in October 2003 (Community Action Center ‘Quality of Life’ Survey) summarizes the problem: roughly 10% of respondents answered that they had been concerned about having enough food for themselves or their family in the past year.

Student participation in community service projects such as the Palouse Food Project is on the rise at Washington State University. The Community Service Learning Center has witnessed a dramatic growth in student participation in recent years in both curricular and co-curricular service learning. Participation grew 16% between 2001-2002 and 2002-2003, and a further 65% to date in 2003-2004. Faculty interest in providing meaningful learning experiences for students has also grown, demonstrated by a 22% increase in academic service learning courses in the last two years.

Low-income individual and family interest in gardening has been documented carefully through a recent point-in-time survey (April, 2004) of Women, Infants and Children, Pullman Food Bank and My Family enrichment program clients. In fact the response to the survey was overwhelmingly positive. Out of 32 respondents, 26 or 81% are interested in receiving fresh produce because of the cost to their household. Only 5 of these households had received fresh produce last year through the food bank which is consistent with the relatively small amounts of produce available. Exactly half of respondents (12) who use the Pullman Food Bank are interested in planting a garden at the Koppel Farm. Out of 32 respondents, 22 or 69% are interested in growing vegetables in a container garden and 21 or 66% are interested in a scholarship program for rent, water and tools at Koppel or another community garden for the summer.

As for interest in self-employment, eighteen survey respondents or 56% of respondents were interested in selling surplus produce at a local farmer’s market. Several of those who said no were elderly individuals or couples. Finally, the data on clients who currently garden tell the story: only 6 respondents or 19% currently garden, mostly due to living in small, multi-family apartments or not having the tools and materials. This information validates the need for

gardening instruction and access to materials to assist in changing the habits and lifestyle of low-income individuals and families in Whitman County.

- Key Steps:

Conduct a Community Food Assessment to identify the needs and weaknesses throughout the county food system. Utilize the results to develop innovative ways to provide access to food, especially fresh fruits and vegetables, to all communities. Apply special attention to the needs of elderly, homebound and children.

Continue and expand the involvement of Washington State University students in the Palouse Food Project through a variety of service learning experiences. Faculty, students and staff of the Community Service Learning Center currently manage and maintain two 20' x 20' garden plots at Koppel Farm. Produce harvested from these lots is distributed to low-income residents of Pullman and adjacent communities through the Pullman Food Bank at Community Action Center.

Involve Pullman School District (K-12) in the Palouse Food Project through community garden programs at Koppel, Tukey and Higgins Farms, and utilize the land and greenhouses available to the Pullman schools. Include other county school districts in planning and implementing community garden projects.

Involve low-income families in growing their own produce in existing community gardens or in their family garden to increase opportunities for high-quality food and to encourage self-employment by selling surplus harvest through farmers markets.

Develop food based marketing and entrepreneurial opportunities for low-income people in the county.

Re-establish a weekly farmers market at Koppel Farms and explore expansion into outlying communities.

Hold annual spring and fall events at Koppel Farm for the purpose of education and promotion of the Palouse Food Project Assist K-12 students in developing a business plan for producing and marketing cut flowers, seedlings and other products to provide vocational job skill training.

Implement "farm to table" and nutritional education for P-6 grade children.

Continue Hunger and Homelessness Awareness activities on the WSU's campus. Expand educational efforts to county school districts.

Provide training on organic gardening practices, food preparation, marketing and finance to low to moderate-income people.

Promote the Palouse Food Project throughout the county.

- Key Stakeholders:

Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at WSU  
Community Colleges of Spokane  
Community Education and Training Center  
Community Food Security Coalition  
Food Research and Action Center

HeadStart/ECEAP  
Higgins Farm  
International Programs at WSU  
Kiwanis of Pullman: Key, Builders Club  
Moscow Food Coop  
National Association of WIC Directors  
National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness  
Neill Public Library  
Oral Health Coalition/Community of Hope  
Palouse Alliance  
Pullman Chamber of Commerce  
Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute  
Palouse Conservation District  
Palouse Discovery Center  
Second Harvest Food Bank  
Whitman County Library  
Whitman County Master Gardeners  
Windermere Realty Community Projects  
WorkSource  
WSU Cooperative Extension