TRI in Culture and Society (TRICS)
Town Meeting—January 27, 2010

Proposal for a Transdisciplinary Research Center for the Study of Culture and Society (CSCS)

Rationale/Current Strengths
- UVM traditionally an innovator in “transdisciplinary” research in Culture and Society (Holocaust Studies, Technologies of the Self)
- Currently strong in a range of traditional and emerging interdisciplinary fields
- Until now, inconsistent infrastructure/support for transdisciplinary research
- Hunger for collaborative opportunities expressed by widely diverse faculty
- A number of organizing rubrics/networks of strength and interest rather than a unifying “program”
- Concerns about viability of Ph.D. programs in “Culture and Society” and discouraging supporting data. Concern about impact on undergraduate education

The Goal
- Promote interdisciplinary research at UVM while maintaining and enhancing undergraduate education and identifying emerging fields for possible graduate study.
- Promote UVM as a proving-ground for innovative research in Culture and Society.

The Philosophy
“Philosophy is criticism; criticism of the influential beliefs that underlie culture; a criticism which traces the beliefs to their generating conditions as far as may be, which tracks them to their results, which considers the mutual compatibility of the elements of the total structure of beliefs. Such an examination terminates, whether so intended or not, in a projection of them into a new perspective which leads to new surveys of possibilities.”
–John Dewey, "Context and Thought"

“It is important for research and teaching to be relevant, for the university to engage with the public culture and to design its investigative paradigms with actual social and cultural life in view. To continue to do this, academic inquiry, at least in some fields, may need to become less exclusionary and more holistic…Academics need to look to the world to see what kind of teaching and research needs to be done, and how they might better train and organize themselves to do it. But they need to ignore the world’s demand that they reproduce its self-image.” –Louis Menand, The Marketplace of Ideas

The Center
- A “Community of Inquiry,” organized around yearly themes
- An “idea incubator,” identifying emerging disciplines
- Each year, 10-12 UVM Fellows (chosen through rigorous peer review)
- 4-6 Visiting/Postdoctoral Fellows (teach one class per year)
• Of the UVM Fellows, 2-4 are “Organizing Fellows” responsible for proposing annual theme, developing potential speakers/seminars, networking, etc.
• Results publicized and promoted through multiple media.

**Successful Models at Other Institutions**
• Kahn Liberal Arts Institute at Smith College,
• The Center for Twenty-First Century Thought at UW Milwaukee
• Institutes for Advanced Study at Princeton, Stanford, and the University of Minnesota.

**Opportunities for Partnership**
• Existing “transdisciplinary” programs/centers (ALANA, Humanities, the Transportation Center)
• The Honors College
• Fleming Museum
• The UVM Libraries
• Existing speaker series

*NB: with each of these TRICS sees opportunities to enhance curriculum, develop cross-promotion and create organizational efficiencies.*

**Resources:**
• Dedicated physical space for the Center
• Course releases for Fellows
• Stipends/living space for Visiting Fellows
• Honoraria/operational funds for visiting speakers
• Staff (Center Director and Assistant)

**Funding**
• Public funding entities (NEH, ACLS, NSF)
• Private Foundations (Mellon, Rockefeller)

*NB: These will likely support seed money and some of the Center’s annual themes and projects. Ongoing operating expenses will most likely depend on:*
• Private Donors (naming rights)

**Results**
• Fellows must submit five annual reports detailing research results and pedagogy that derives from the Center Fellowship.
• Metrics include publications per Fellow, citations per Fellow, etc.
• Enhanced collaboration at UVM across Colleges
• Links to broader community (academic, business, legislative, media)
• Incorporating undergraduates as part of the CSCS mission (as RAs and interns, through seminars and public events, in the development of pedagogy and research)
• Enhancing the reputation of UVM

**The TRICS working group:**
David Jenemann, College of Arts & Sciences (Chair); Kerry Castano, Provost’s Office; Susan Comerford, College of Education & Social Services; Meghan Cope, College of Arts & Sciences;
Peter Dodds, College of Engineering & Mathematical Sciences; Lokangaka Losambe, College of Arts & Sciences; Jeffrey D. Marshall, Libraries; William Mierse, College of Arts & Sciences; David Shiman, College of Education & Social Services; Thomas Streeter, College of Arts & Sciences; Liaison: Dean Abu Rizvi, Honors College