

University at Buffalo, The State University of New York *Institutional Initiatives*

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In fall 2010, the University at Buffalo formally launched the Civic Engagement and Public Policy research initiative (research initiative) after a year of planning and pilot programming. Led by faculty members, the initiative has been incorporated into the university's strategic research strengths; it supports community-based research and engaged scholarship that address social and policy challenges. A faculty advisory committee for the research initiative has developed two fellowship programs as well as public and university-community events to build capacity for community-based research, to advance engaged scholarship, and to develop community-university relationships and collaborations.

Community Scholars-in-Residence: An Innovative Model

One of the research initiative's most innovative programs is the Community Scholars-in-Residence Fellowship (launched in 2010), which supports a non-academic community research partner to work with faculty members, and to use the university's resources. The research initiative's advisory committee members solicited nominations from faculty members conducting community-based research projects who had a pre-existing relationship with a fellowship nominee. Community scholars spend a month on campus working with faculty on community-based research, education, and grant activities. A \$3,000 stipend gives the community scholar time away from the day-to-day activities of his or her organization. The program encourages creative proposals from nominating faculty (e.g., discipline-specific alternatives, options for out-of-region community partners, flexible timelines).

The first community scholar was Eric Walker, director of organizing for People United for Sustainable Housing Buffalo. He was nominated by an interdisciplinary consortium of seven faculty members in the fields of American studies, architecture, arts management, history, and sociology.

The goal of their research project was to develop a supplemental education program called Pushing Youth Power. In his

words, “our project [was] to create an empowering, open, safe, and productive community space for neighborhood youth” (*Eric Walker, personal communication, December 20, 2011*). Extending beyond the initial single month, a multifaceted and multidisciplinary project evolved and included three workshops held on Buffalo’s West Side, each attended by over 40 people, including scholars, community organizers, youth educators, and others.

Reflecting on the fellowship, Walker commented,

Being a Community Scholar-in-Residence at UB [University at Buffalo] allowed me to explore ideas that brought together the best elements of community power building and academia. That initial partnership has led to the formation of a standing faculty advisory group that will help to inform the evolution of the space to become increasingly youth driven. (*Eric Walker, personal communication, December 20, 2011*)

The second community scholar was Kevin Connor, director of the Public Accountability Initiative in Buffalo, New York. A faculty consortium (representing the fields of political science, American studies, history, law, and urban planning) nominated Connor. Their project, titled Citizen Participation, Public Authorities, and Buffalo’s Waterfront, examines the history of public authorities in state and national contexts, evaluates citizen participation in developing the Buffalo Waterfront, and reflects on the role of citizens and community organizations in relation to public authorities.

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