

## Director's Note

By: Eric Fretz, Director, Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (CCESL)

Last spring, I attended a series of meetings at the Kettering Foundation that focused on the current and future state of the service-learning movement. David Matthews, the president of the Kettering Foundation set the tone for the meetings when he challenged higher education professionals to think seriously about how they engage with publics outside of the university. Citizens, Matthews noted, are desperate to get control of their lives and what, he asked, are we in higher education doing about it?

This lack of control cuts across race, gender and class identities. It's evident in the overscheduled lives of our students (and ourselves), the economically challenging lives of the people in working class and poverty-stricken communities and the challenges of people whose sexual preferences and racial identities are outside of the mainstream of American culture.

Toward the end of our meetings, Matthews circled back to his original point and softly challenged us with these words: "The good intent in this room is overwhelming. But it's not so much what you do with yourselves as much as it is what you do with others." Matthews was challenging us to focus the work of the university toward making a difference in the lives of people in our communities. For instance, as Byron White, Associate Vice President for Community Engagement at Xavier University asked, what does it mean that most of the people within the neighborhoods close to the University of Denver never imagine stepping on the campus, let alone sending their children to our institution?

Who, exactly, are we serving? The careers of our faculty? The economic aspirations of our students? Part of the answer to these questions is evident in the work of DU Political Science professor, Tom Knecht, whose service-learning class on American Public Opinion is highlighted below. Knecht is a part of a growing cadre of DU faculty members who are using their research and their teaching to work with publics and use their academic knowledge to address critical community issues that affect us all.

If you are interested in connecting with other DU faculty who are engaged in public good and service-learning work, check out our [Public Good webpage](#), or our archive of [service-learning syllabi](#).

## Faculty Spotlight: Tom Knecht

By: Eric Fretz, CCESL Director

**Public opinion drives Tom Knecht's interest in public good work.**

Knecht, an assistant professor of Political Science, incorporates a service-learning component into his American Public Opinion (CORE 2455) class. As part of their service-learning experience, students in Knecht's class conduct a public opinion survey for a community organization. Students work in small groups, and each group is assigned a community partner organization that Knecht has an established relationship with.

Students are expected to research the mission and goals of their community partners, interview the community partner to determine survey needs, develop and administer the survey, and present the results to Knecht and the community partner.



*Our mission is to educate, engage, and equip the campus community to accomplish tangible, public work that improves the lives of people in our communities.*

## Announcements

### Public Good Fund 2008-2009 Request for Proposals:

#### Outreach Project

**Grants:** Funding up to \$8,000 for community-engaged projects that have established partnerships and are ready to make measurable impacts in the community.

**Deadline: Dec. 11, 2008**

#### Public Good Fellows:

Two faculty members will be funded up to \$25,000 annually for up to two years for cultivating the capacity of public good work at DU by deepening faculty engagement across campus.

**Deadline: April 2, 2009**

**Public Good RFP Applications are available, [here](#).**

For more information contact Frank Coyne, [fcoyne@du.edu](mailto:fcoyne@du.edu)

**Knecht believes that the service-learning component of the class motivates students to thoroughly grasp course concepts and to work harder too.**

He argues that asking students to write and implement a real-time public opinion survey helps them to more deeply understand the technical and ethical issues of accomplishing public opinion research.

When he teaches this class with the service-learning component students expressed less confusion about basic concepts like question ordering, wording and sampling. Additionally, because Knecht asks his students to produce public, tangible work that directly benefits the community organizations with which they work, he sees students working harder to meet the request of the community partners.

"They are responsible for their own grades and for being accountable to their group members," Knecht notes, "but they also realize that the work they are producing is beyond themselves." Furthermore, the students establish close connections with their partner organizations, and some students even continue to work with the community partners after the class is finished.

**How does Knecht know that students learn better with the service-learning component of his class?**

First of all, test scores are higher when he incorporates a service-learning component into the public opinion class.

Second, Knecht realizes students learn in different ways, and he believes that the hands-on, theory-to-practice component of service-learning gives a wider range of opportunities for students to succeed in the class.

Finally, the projects that emerge from the service-learning class are consistently of better quality than projects in this class that do not include a service learning component.

One of the most notable projects occurred during the spring semester of 2008, when a group of Knecht's students participated in a research project to survey public, private and nonprofit sectors in Fort Collins on perceptions of homelessness in the community. The survey findings have been built into a final blueprint for the community that will guide the city in developing their own plan to end homelessness.

**The students provided invaluable information to guide a more strategic approach to responding to the homelessness in Fort Collins as it relates to community awareness and education.**

Jamie VanLeeuwen, the project manager for Denver's Road Home who asked Knecht's students to accomplish this research said, "Tom Knecht and the work he is doing with the University of Denver is not only advancing important research as it relates to community perceptions of the underserved, but it is also advancing the important partnership that exists between the City and County of Denver and this invaluable institution that exists within this community."

Knecht monitors the service-learning projects through a sophisticated three-tiered evaluation. Students are evaluated by their team members, Knecht assigns a grade for the project that is based on a detailed assignment specifications sheet and the team's community partner provides Knecht with a written evaluation of the students' work.

To learn more about Knecht's service-learning course, click here for his [American Public Opinion syllabus](#).

*Interested in developing a CBL course? Contact us and we'll match you with some of our amazing community partners who have a need for your expertise: [engage@du.edu](mailto:engage@du.edu) or 303.871.3706*

## Service-Learning Pods:

Contact us if you are interested in joining a small group of your colleagues who are pursuing a variety of discipline-based and interdisciplinary questions around CBL teaching, learning and research.

## A Forum on Homelessness:

Thursday, Oct. 30th  
4:30 - 6:30 p.m.  
Garden Room, 1st Floor  
The Women's College

Join a team of panelists for a discussion on what issues will most affect the homeless population in this coming election and with the next administration. Learn more about each candidate's position, as well as, national and local policies.

### Panelists:

- Tom Knecht, DU Political Science Professor
- Jerene Peterson, Denver's Road Home Outreach Team
- Michael George, formerly homeless veteran involved with Denver's Road Home

If you have story ideas for the Public Good E-Newsletter please contact:

Jenny Whitcher  
Associate Director, CCESL  
[Jenny.Whitcher@du.edu](mailto:Jenny.Whitcher@du.edu)  
303.871.4281

