***Fred: A Social Good Summit***

A group of students have been working with Dr. Humphrey in Economics to lay the groundwork for a gathering of Fredericksburg community members this Spring. The summit is intended as an opportunity for community members to meet, network, and share their understanding of what key community needs are. And a key outcome will be identifying a particular community need that all involved, including UMW, can take action on. Longer term, over the next 2 years, UMW community members (and others) will continue to do work on this issue, with annual progress and accountability meetings.

The group that chooses this project will work with the organizers and help disseminate the survey they have designed, to get some baseline information about what residents see as strengths and needs. This group will also help analyze survey data.

However, conducting and analyzing a survey is not enough, and not nearly creative enough. What are some other ways that you could bring your critical thinking and sociological imagination to bear on the planning for the summit? What should organizers and participants be especially thoughtful to? Who needs to be at the table? (In other words, while a great deal of work has been done already – there is always room for and need of your insights as well. Help make this effort the strongest, most effective it can be.)

Learn more. Here’s the Fred website (much is still to come): <http://fredsummit.org/>

Here’s a link to one of the guiding principles Dr. Humphrey operates under – and this is important to understanding how the summit will be organized and conducted: <http://sidekickmanifesto.org/>

Want to know more specifically about Fredericksburg, while the scorecard is being polished/published? Here are a couple of sources:

<https://www.marywashingtonhealthcare.com/Patients-Visitors/Community-Health-Information-Resources.aspx>

<https://www.gwregion.org/resources/demographics>

***Research and Resources on DACA, with Lucha Ministries (and GCC)***

Lucha Ministries provides support and advocacy for immigrant families and individuals in our community (read more <http://www.luchaministries.org/>). Some of the work they do is providing direct support and assistance to folks (tutoring, hunger relief, etc.), but we are working with their legal advocacy team, who provide a different set of resources and support. (read more: <https://www.luchalegal.org> ) They have attorneys who work with those who need legal assistance. They also stay well-informed about changes in legislation, new laws, and other shifts in the legal/policy environment that can impact the community they serve. They use this information both to help people needing legal guidance, and to help determine how they will advocate for policies that are beneficial for immigrants in our community.

My conversations with our partner have resulted in variable descriptions of the project. In large part this is because the issue is large and complex, and the needs shift frequently. I’ll try to distill here the key components, as I see them now.

One way to think about it is that Lucha Legal has *several questions* they’d like answers to:

-what are characteristics of our immigrant population in the region? How many ESL students, how many teachers? Grad rates for ESL students? How many DACA holders in the area? Employment? Health stats? Etc.

-what are effective ways to communicate information about immigration laws to immigrant communities?

This group will work on gathering high quality information about important, current immigration policies (federal & state), and focus on how to disseminate this information meaningfully to people who need it (voters, stakeholders, immigrants, lawmakers). This high quality information should have two main components.

(a) a good understanding of current immigration policies, some information on two laws coming before the General Assembly this Spring. (Lucha can provide a good start point here.)

(b) and it may include some statistics on our local immigrant population. (Perhaps data from DOE, DHS, Dept of Health, schools.) The goal would be to give Lucha Legal info they could use to talk with lawmakers about impacts of immigration and immigration policy.

These resources can be compiled in several formats (in fact, probably should be in several formats) – written, video, sharable on social media, etc. And you’ll need to consider who the audience is – is the audience non-English-speaking immigrants? What does that mean about how you present info? Is the audience Virginia legislators? How could you provide info that would be good for them?

\*How/where will this information be disseminated? Well, this is where there is some fluidity.

Some possible outcomes include: an immigration clinic at Germanna Community College (and UMW if you conclude that is worthwhile); as well as fact sheets/brochures/videos for Lucha to use. Perhaps also a dissemination campaign could be designed as part of this project.

\*The screening Feb 23 at 6pm of “This is Home.” They’d welcome student engagement with the film, participation in small group discussions after, and assistance as “scribes” at that event.

OK, so there’s a lot here. You cannot do ALL of these things. What you can do is think & talk with each other – and perhaps with our partner – about which elements you MOST want to do, feel like would be most impactful. I’ll help you navigate this process.

\*Note: Although Lucha is a faith-based organization, you do not need to be a faith-based person to work with them.

***Food Insecurity at UMW***

We have a growing emphasis at colleges and universities across the nation on addressing the basic needs of our students. Many in higher ed have come to recognize that some of our students (and staff) have difficulties ensuring they have places to stay, and adequate food.

Here at UMW, there are frequent pockets of concern about food insecurity among students, and lots of different people/offices are trying to think through how to best address these needs. This semester, this group will be responding to a recent upswell in concern about food scarcity, brought about by folks in the following offices (they will serve as our “community partners”):

Gwen Hale – Writing Center, and First in Family Initiative

Rita Thompson – Rappahannock Scholars and First in Family Initiative

CJ Porter – Transfer and Off-Campus Student Services

Laura Wilson – Psychology, and Safe Zone

Jennifer Walker – College of Ed

There are two main sets of questions around this issue: how many students (and staff?) are impacted by food insecurity? How can we best address any existing food insecurity? Investigating these questions will entail two different kinds of data collection.

***Retention at UMW, with Academic Engagement and Student Success, and First Year Experience***

President Paino has pinpointed student retention as an issue deserving our attention as a University. We lose students at a number of junctures (we most often talk about freshman – sophomore year as a key juncture), and for a wide range of reasons (financial, academic preparedness, desiring majors we don’t offer, social, health concerns…). Some students leave to attend other universities – some leave higher education entirely.

If we have a better understanding of why some students leave, and why some students stay, we could perhaps figure out what kinds of interventions we would suggest, to try to increase the likelihood that students will stay here.

Example: if people leave solely because parking is challenging (this is hyperbole), we may want to change parking policies. If students leave because they want a school with a football team, we may want to do a better job recruiting students who want to be at a school without a football team. If students leave because of acute or chronic health concerns – we can’t necessarily intervene to stop that (and maybe we shouldn’t!), but we could strive to ensure they feel supported while here, and feel comfortable returning, when possible. Do you see what I mean?

To that end, we have partnered with Dr. O’Donnell and Dr. Rao to work on gathering more information about student retention. We have also partnered with Dr. James’ applied anthropology class on this project. It is not enough to know that x% of students leave UMW before graduating: we need to ask the deeper, juicier (more sociologically interesting) questions – who leaves and why? Who stays and why?

Our goal is to collect some actionable research using methods that may allow us a deeper understanding of student opinions, experiences and decision-making. Some methodological opportunities have already presented themselves. Over 100 FSEM students in the fall expressed willingness to participate in focus groups about their experiences so far at UMW. Additionally, we believe peer mentors are another group of students whose perspectives may be especially valuable.

But this group may have other ideas in addition. As UMW students, there may be insights you have, conversations and debates you are aware of - and students/former students you think we could usefully engage with to get a handle on this question: why do students leave UMW? Are there things we can do differently that could address that?

Here’s a website with some information/data: <https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/university-of-mary-washington/academic-life/graduation-and-retention/>

Blue Gray Press article: <https://blueandgraypress.com/2018/03/01/umw-works-on-its-retention-rates/>

UMW data: <https://provost.umw.edu/student-achievement-and-success/>