For your review I am enclosing a letter of inquiry which describes a project in the planning stages at Dickinson College. It links undergraduate education and community outreach through an innovative, interdisciplinary partnership between our Environmental Studies Department (through its Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring (ALLARM) program), our Policy Studies Program, the Dickinson Community Studies Center, and Pennsylvania communities.

Dickinson College, founded in 1773, is a residential liberal arts college offering undergraduate programs in 34 major fields to young men and women from across the country and around the world. Undergraduate research and community outreach remain an important part of Dickinson’s educational mission. Currently, we have several programs which each seek to enhance undergraduate education through service learning and to help communities address issues of concern. In building new bridges across academic divisions and programs, this project, entitled “Partnership for Community Outreach” will strengthen this work and our curriculum, and develop intensive holistic research in communities. Students and faculty will work together to focus on selected Pennsylvania communities that are currently involved in aquatic monitoring programs with the Environmental Studies Department, but which have expressed needs for additional services and assistance to achieve related goals of environmental restoration, cultural preservation and economic recovery.

We believe our project coincides with the goals of the Pew Charitable Trusts to encourage colleges to adopt pedagogies for engaged forms of learning and to help colleges become more effectively engaged with the community. This program will involve our students in service learning and strengthen the college’s links with several Pennsylvania communities. We are seeking $223,500 to fund the Partnership for Community Outreach over three years: Fall 1999 - Spring 2002.

Support from the Trusts would enable us to provide comprehensive services to several communities over the next three years, to involve students in interdisciplinary service learning and to strengthen the college’s commitment to community outreach by faculty and students. If this initiative meets with the Trusts approval, we would be delighted to submit a full, formal proposal with any particular documentation you may require, for your immediate review. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A. Lee Fritschler
President
The Partnership for Community Outreach

The Environmental Studies Department, the Community Studies Center and the Policy Studies Program seek to establish a Partnership for Community Outreach at Dickinson College. Currently our programs each enhance undergraduate education through service learning and help communities address issues of concern. Our proposed project would strengthen and further develop existing community outreach and undergraduate research programs at Dickinson College by creating a common context and focus for projects that would span the academic divisions. Students, faculty and staff in the Partnership will work together to focus on selected Pennsylvania communities that are currently involved in environmental monitoring programs with the Environmental Studies Department, but which have expressed needs for additional services and assistance to achieve the related goals of environmental restoration, cultural preservation and economic recovery.

Background and Proposed Activities

The Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring (ALLARM), a project of the Environmental Studies Department, works with community-based environmental groups providing them with technical assistance, training and support to help document water pollution on a watershed scale and to identify mitigation and restoration options. Established in 1987, ALLARM is a nationally recognized leader in community-based research. Staffed by ten undergraduate Environmental Studies students under faculty and administrative staff direction, ALLARM directly benefits our students by providing an opportunity for them to apply their classroom experiences by responding directly to requests from communities for technical support, training, and assistance. In the past year, as partner communities have begun to achieve the goals of meaningful environmental monitoring and interpretation, they have been looking to ALLARM for assistance in converting the results of their research into economic and cultural development projects for the community. It is to that end that ALLARM has reached out to the Community Studies Center and the Policy Studies Program.

The Community Studies Center at Dickinson College coordinates undergraduate fieldwork research classes in the social sciences, and serves as a repository for student and faculty community research. As part of the Partnership for Community Outreach, students who have completed the initial courses in Historical Methods will work with selected communities to document environmental change, its effects on the changing community economic and cultural structure, and the grassroots response to these changes. Students will conduct research in the local archives and with local community leaders, and will present their findings to community groups. They will receive research credit for this work as part of their junior-level history research requirement. A faculty member will supervise and direct these community-based documentation projects. Research materials will be deposited at local libraries and repositories, and at the Community Studies Center.

The Policy Studies Program provides students with an interdisciplinary major that draws ethics, economics, and political science together under one umbrella. As part of their course work, students in the senior seminar work in the community on a number of exciting projects, including (1) improvement of town-gown relations, (2) cultural enrichment of pre-school education, (3) fund raising for the local food bank, and (4) a number of initiatives related to economic development. In the Partnership for Community Outreach students will help designated groups develop web pages and will use this exercise as a vehicle to initiate and work through discussions about strategic visions,
goals, timetables, and methods of implementation. The resulting web page will help the identified groups document their vision and advertise their interests and activities more broadly.

An Example of Partnership

Under this new partnership, communities which have already established relationships with ALLARM will serve as the sites for collaborative work done by the Community Studies Center, the Policy Studies Program and the Environmental Studies Department.

The community of Apollo in Armstrong County, Pennsylvania is a good case study for how this new partnership will be implemented. This small town is located in the heart of the coal mining region of western PA. As the coal mining industry has declined, jobs have left the area and the town has become economically depressed. Past coal mining practices have severely polluted the local streams such that they support minimal life. Furthermore one of the main employers until the early 1980s was a uranium processing plant that had been in operation since 1957. The community began to suspect that the plant was responsible for a large cluster of cancers in the town and recently the courts have awarded individuals in the town the largest single award against a suspected cancer-causing industrial facility in the history of the nation.

Currently, ALLARM is working with the Roaring Run Watershed Association based in Apollo, to conduct a water quality monitoring program. This grassroots organization believes that if they can restore the streams in the area for white water rafting, fishing and other recreational uses, they will have a path to economic recovery. Under the new Partnership for Community Outreach, Dickinson students and faculty from the Community Studies Center and Policy Studies Program will expand on the current work that ALLARM is doing in the manner described above.

In this model, the community is carrying out scientific research, under the guidance of the Environmental Studies students and faculty. The students and faculty are assuring that the research is both scientifically credible to the traditional scientific community and efficacious in terms of addressing the concerns of the community. The Community Studies Center students and faculty, through oral history techniques and research in local archives, will help the community examine the historical roots of the problem and the context in which the concerns need to be addressed. This historical research also aids the community in its awareness of its own past and promotes pride and self-esteem, two precursors to effective action. Within this context, the Policy Studies students and faculty will then help the community identify and document its goals (in this case, development of a recreational resource for economic recovery) and options for action and to advertise and organize their resources toward that end. We will implement this program with several Pennsylvania communities in this three year project.

Summary

The Partnership for Community Outreach will create a unique collaboration between existing programs redirecting efforts to a single end and thereby establish a program with more power, depth, and opportunity than the mere sum of its parts might suggest. ALLARM is currently conducting innovative science for the public interest which benefits the institution and the community; however, this community-based research can not be utilized for social change without careful discussions of context, strategies and options for action. Furthermore Dickinson’s program will serve as a blueprint for other institutions seeking to involve students in helping communities.