



LUTHER COLLEGE

At the University of Regina

The Voluntary Sector Studies Network at Luther College

Backgrounder for our 'seed' year September 2014 – June 2015:

A document intended to inspire conversation & change

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Introduction

The purpose of this one-year developmental initiative for The Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN), is two-fold: a) to create opportunities for dialogue about voluntary sector studies among diverse groups both on and off campus and b) to advance the implementation of both scholarly and practical programs. The opportunities for dialogue among students, voluntary sector practitioners and Luther College faculty/staff will focus on discerning what elements of VSSN can germinate and grow at LCUR and what it should look like over both the short term and longer term.

This initiative has been shaped by numerous one-on-one and group conversations and meetings since November 2013 when a “preliminary ideas” draft was circulated at Luther College at the University of Regina (LCUR). During this “seed” year, the initiative is being led by a process facilitator who is also an expert in the voluntary sector whose primary responsibilities will be to create opportunities for constructive dialogue and collective developmental work. Following this developmental year, it is anticipated that the VSSN will become largely financially self-sustaining by offering collaborative, mentoring, and training opportunities with the voluntary sector in Saskatchewan.

VSSN at Luther College - a preliminary sketch to get us going

The VSSN, as it is currently imagined, is a meeting place for students, professors and voluntary sector practitioners that is community-based and inherently interdisciplinary¹. In this meeting space, a buzz of activities and conversations unfold daily about the voluntary sector in Regina and across Saskatchewan. This sector provides many public benefits, is woven into the historical fabric of Canada, is active in myriad areas (e.g., arts/culture, heritage, environment, sports and recreation), has \$75 billion in revenues, is found in every community, has thousands of staff, and draws on millions of volunteer hours every year.² While currently the University of Regina has strong linkages to the business community (through the Paul Hill School of Business), to

¹ The voluntary sector crosses all disciplines. The International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations makes this point clear given its 14 categories are related to many academic departments on campus: arts and culture, sports and recreation, education, health, social services, environmental, employment development and housing, politics and political studies, voluntarism promotion, religion, international development, business associations.

² Hall, M., et al. (2004). *Cornerstones of community: Highlights of the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations*. Ottawa, ON: Ministry of Industry, Statistics Canada, catalogue no. 61-533-XIE. http://library.imaginecanada.ca/files/nonprofitscan/en/nsnvo/nsnvo_report_english.pdf.

government (through the Johnson-Shoyama School of Public Policy), and to some sub-sectors such as human services (through the Faculties of Social Work and Nursing) and sport/recreation (through the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies), there is no focused program of study on the voluntary sector as a whole for students. Further, while three pillars constitute our society³ – the government sector, the market sector, the voluntary sector – the voluntary sector lacks a coordinated and comprehensive academic presence in Saskatchewan.

Many provinces have post-secondary education institutions that offer certificate programs, undergraduate degrees and graduate degrees that focus on the voluntary sector; Saskatchewan does not. Both the universities and the colleges across the province offer some courses and/or modules within courses about the sector, but there is no formal program of study per se. Given the size and scope of the sector in Saskatchewan (i.e., more than 7500 registered charities and nonprofits, employs thousands of people, among the highest volunteer rates across Canada) and the fact that the funding and functions of the sector in Canadian society have been under a microscope recently, we believe the time is right to advance a program of study, research and innovation on the voluntary sector in Saskatchewan.

The VSSN concept, as it currently exists in draft form, embraces three inter-related themes – learn, research, innovate. As shown in the figure below, students, voluntary sector practitioners and faculty/staff will become involved in dynamic and mutually beneficial relationships while learning, researching and innovating. We believe that by enhancing connections among these diverse groups that the potential for reciprocal learning for everyone involved is great – indeed, the creation and sharing of knowledge is multi-directional.



³ Mulholland, Mendelsonh & Shamshiri (2011). *Strengthening the Third Pillar of the Canadian Union: An Intergovernmental Agenda for Canada's Charities and Non-Profits*. Toronto: University of Toronto, Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation.

1. Learn – Learning at VSSN is expected to be both formal and informal and encompasses different models of course delivery: semester-long courses, online courses, webinars, block classes, and ‘weekend university’. We expect there will be two main groups of learners at VSSN:

- **Academic courses for students who may be interested in studying the voluntary sector** –Based on a review of curricular guidelines, key course content should include, at a minimum: foundations of voluntary forms and action, ethics and values, comparative perspectives across cultures and contexts, public policy and advocacy for change, governance and leadership, and finally, community service and civic engagement.⁴ A selection of LCUR courses currently offered will be further adapted to incorporate a "community-engaged learning" model wherein student projects serve the needs of voluntary sector organizations; voluntary organizations and students mutually shape the direction of projects. Connections will be fostered with U. of R., First Nations University and Campion College in order to bundle together new courses as well as a collection of courses already being offered, to provide students with a new area of specialization, a Certificate in Voluntary Sector Studies.
- **Professional development for voluntary sector practitioners and faculty** – learning opportunities may be directed at voluntary sector staff (e.g., senior, middle and front-line staff) and volunteers. While there are some training programs currently in place, the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector in Canada⁵ found problems with numerous courses (e.g., there were very few hands-on components). We will explore what is currently available in Saskatchewan and discern what role Luther College may play in supporting this aspect further. Secondly, faculty, through peer-mentorship, will have the opportunity to learn how to build experiential learning activities into their courses as well as learn about community-engaged scholarship and how to apply it.

2. Research – Community-based participatory action research and community-engaged scholarship are intended to be the main paradigms at VSSN. Community-engaged scholarship is a multi-dimensional, systematic, documented and evaluated process of discovery that is entrenched in both theoretical literature and the real-world that results in products that are public, peer-reviewed, change-oriented and made available to others for

⁴ Nonprofit Academic Centres Council (2008). *Curricular guidelines for undergraduate study in nonprofit leadership, the nonprofit sector and philanthropy*. Cleveland, Ohio.

⁵ HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector. (2010). *The state of leadership development: An exploratory study of social service charities in Alberta and Saskatchewan*. Ottawa, ON: HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector.

further use.⁶ These products range from theories about the sector, new legislation and public policies, to community histories and children's drawings. Depending on the nature of service learning projects, teams of students will become engaged in community-based research and work closely with faculty and voluntary organization practitioners. VSSN intends to form active partnerships with the Community Research Unit and others at the University of Regina, First Nations University and Campion College. The potential for VSSN to become an academic clearinghouse of ideas and resources about the voluntary sector, serving the entire province, is great.

3. Innovate – Innovation is an essential component because the voluntary sector is undergoing transformational shifts today (e.g., shifts in the charity, social justice, and social enterprise models) yet Canadian research on the voluntary sector is still in its infancy. Complexity, network and ecological theories – to name but three key theories - will inform our work. We believe when a diverse group of thinkers - old and young, experienced and inexperienced - sit and dialogue around the same table, new ways of looking at problems and their resolution can ensue. Students will have the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and voluntary entrepreneurship skills; new public policies and voluntary sector incubators are but two examples of what students can pursue at VSSN while working with voluntary organizations.

Objectives and activities during this first year

It is noteworthy that given the nature of many courses taught at Luther College and relationships that already exist, the initial and priority focus will be on **arts/cultural/heritage, environmental and faith-based voluntary organizations** for this first year. This list of objectives and activities was derived from a brainstorming session at a meeting of Luther College students, faculty and staff in September 2014:

1. To pursue institutional sustainability of the VSSN. Sustainability is a theme that weaves its way through everything we do! Sustainability refers to financial resources, people skills, partnerships and in-kind resources.

⁶ Adaptation of Jordan, C. (2007). *Community-engaged scholarship review, promotion & tenure package*. Washington: Peer Review Workgroup, Community-Engaged Scholarship for Health Collaborative, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/CES_RPT_Package.pdf and Seifer, S. (2003). Documenting and assessing community based scholarship. In M. Minkler & N. Wallerstein (Eds.), *Community-based participatory research for health* (pp. 429-435). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Boss.

2. To create opportunities for connections, conversations and commitments to unfold including:
 - hosting public Koffee Klatches⁷ for faculty/staff, students and leaders from the voluntary sector that meets regularly to brainstorm and begin adapting and sketching the VSSN based on evolving conversations and research.
 - building partnerships both on and off campus (e.g., Saskatchewan Network of Nonprofit Organizations, Centre for Continuing Education, Community-Based Health Research Lab at First Nations University, Campion College Community Service Learning program)
 - hosting a year-end public gathering at Luther College in partnership with Saskatchewan Network of Nonprofit Organizations

3. To undertake a co-ordinated marketing and advertising campaign of the VSSN
 - create materials that will capture students' attention and imagination
 - launch a web page on the Luther College website
 - send VSSN material out to the community through voluntary sector e-lists
 - actively market Luther College interdisciplinary studies courses both on campus and to voluntary organizations
 - develop and post monthly e-news about cutting edge issues happening in the voluntary sector in Saskatchewan and Canada
 - post VSSN advertisements in The Lynk.

4. To conduct research focusing on the feasibility/needs/capacities assessment of voluntary organizations and to discern the level of interest in and utility of the VSSN concept (or some variant) at LCUR. Five main groups to be involved are: high school students, current LCUR and U. of R. students, faculty/staff on campus, voluntary sector organizations, and governments that fund voluntary sector organizations.
 - conduct surveys and focus groups with these main groups
 - conduct an environmental scan/research on best practice models implemented at other universities/colleges and jurisdictions in Canada. Focus on cutting-edge ideas that will make LCUR especially attractive to the five main groups
 - based on the results of the surveys and focus groups, make action recommendations regarding professional development opportunities for voluntary sector organization staff and volunteers
 - evaluate both the processes and impacts of VSSN during this first year

⁷ A Koffee Klatch, kaffeeklatsch, is a German word, that is "an informal social gathering for coffee and conversation" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary).

5. To begin a process of voluntary sector course evolution on campus
 - create a baseline inventory of courses already offered on campus
 - develop a Certificate in Voluntary Sector Studies
 - deliver Nonprofit/Voluntary Organizations: Cornerstones of Society (IDS 290AA) as well as Global Citizenship and Agency (IDS 101) as foundation courses in January 2015
 - modify some Luther College courses to embrace a community-engagement model
 - begin a process of peer-mentorship with Luther College faculty regarding community-engaged learning models while ensuring learning resources are readily available. It is noteworthy that some Luther faculty have already adopted this model, thus a peer-mentorship model is realistic.

Expected outcomes by June 2015

The following outcomes are the products that we expect to complete by June 2015:

- ✓ A **showcase event/conference** in May 2015, co-hosted with partners such as Saskatchewan Network of Nonprofit Organizations. The event should include a healthy mix of results from this developmental year, cutting edge work featured by our partners, and celebration!
- ✓ We have an **active network** of practitioners, learners, researchers and supporters generated by the Koffee Klatches, surveys, focus groups, as well as **partnerships** with a variety of faculties on campus and with different levels of government and different government departments.
- ✓ We have a **Certificate** in Voluntary Sector Studies drafted (hopefully finalized!) with partners signed on.
- ✓ Luther College has experienced **growth** in the number of IDS courses and increases in the number of students enrolled in them.
- ✓ VSSN is known as "**the place**" to go
 - for networking and growing practical voluntary sector ideas. Voluntary organizations are coming to LC to work on real-world issues as well as offer their expertise in courses and on research initiatives.
 - VSSN has created the space for some new ideas to begin.
 - VSSN is a stepping stone for high school students to follow their interests.
 - VSSN is a place that University of Regina, Campion College and First Nations University students easily find and thrive in

- ✓ VSSN is the recipient of substantial grants as well as partnerships, people skills, and in-kind resources to continue and grow the Network.
- ✓ A collection of documents that describe where we started and where we landed with this 'seed' money.

Rationale for this initiative

The Voluntary Sector Initiatives (VSI) that were implemented by both the federal government and the Government of Saskatchewan between 1998 and 2005 catalyzed interest and action on the voluntary sector as a critical component of Canadian society. As a result, there has been a major increase in awareness by all levels of government and communities about the importance of the sector in governance, democracy and society.⁸ The following are important:

- In 2004, Saskatchewan had the highest volunteer rate and the second highest number of organizations per capita when compared to other provinces/territories.⁹ Thus, Saskatchewan appears to have some unique features which make the VSSN idea compelling.
- With this growth in awareness about the sector has come interest in educating and training CEOs and program managers as is currently done in both the public sector (through schools of public administration and public policy) and the private sector (through business schools).
- Students should be given the opportunity to see and understand that the voluntary sector is a viable, meaningful, career alternative in the same way that business students learn about working for the private sector and public policy/administration students learn about working in the government sector. Indeed, the VSSN will offer networking opportunities for livelihood options after graduation and reinforces the increasing importance of non-market, volunteer activity in building sustainable livelihoods.
- A scan of university and college programs in Saskatchewan indicates there are no voluntary sector studies programs despite the growing visibility of the sector. There are single courses offered through some faculties at both Saskatchewan's universities, but

⁸ The Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation recently released a paper titled, *Strengthening the Third Pillar of the Canadian Union: An Intergovernmental Agenda for Canada's Charities and Non-Profits* (Mulholland, Mendelsonh & Shamshiri 2011), which makes this point very clear. The Mowat Centre at the University of Toronto has partnered with the Ontario Nonprofit Network on numerous research projects – a similar entity could be created at Luther.

⁹ Ibid., Hall, M., et al. (2004). *Cornerstones of community*.

there is not a coordinated program *per se*. Luther College will be able to attract yet another group of students through the development of such a program.

- There are many experienced and talented voluntary sector senior staff and volunteers from our Saskatchewan communities who could be become actively engaged in teaching, researching, and innovating.
- The focus of the voluntary sector on causes aimed at advancing human well-being in its many dimensions is reinforced by the scholarship of Luther College grounded in the humanities and liberal arts and science more generally.
- The current cohort of students appears very interested in interdisciplinary approaches and programs that allow them to explore real-world problems from multiple perspectives.¹⁰
- Finally, VSSN will add value to the student experience because it moves students beyond simply academic experiences to engagement with voluntary organizations and real world issues.
- In Saskatchewan, given both our current and projected demographic profile, LCUR will have to pay particular attention to Aboriginal communities and their voluntary organizations as well as voluntary organizations that serve seniors.

Links with Luther's vision and mission

As currently conceived, the VSSN's three main themes (i.e., learn, research, innovate) are directly linked to community-engaged scholarship (CES) and experiential learning, which are movements growing on campuses across Canada. Given LCUR's vision of students 'deepening their understanding of the world and engaging with the wider community' as well as its five key principles (i.e., global citizenship, social justice, sustainable environment, high ethical standards, values reflection), both community-engaged scholarship and experiential learning appear to be natural fits. At the same time, the VSSN allows LCUR to connect with voluntary organizations working on these themes. CES involves faculty members and students in a dynamic process of

¹⁰ *Five Bold Predictions for the Future of Higher Education* <http://www.fastcoexist.com/3029109/futurist-forum/5-bold-predictions-for-the-future-of-higher-education>

"mutually beneficial partnerships with the community and results in scholarship deriving from teaching, discovery, integration, and application".¹¹

Engaged learning methods create students who have a sense of agency, are empowered to build their own livelihoods and those of others, become active in their communities and have a sense that they can change society – to make it a better and more socially just place for everyone. Indeed, community-engaged learning and research opportunities encourage a shift “from knowledge as self-interest and private good to knowledge as civic responsibility and public work” (p. 543).¹²

This initiative serves to enhance the liberal arts and sciences agenda by further supporting the skills and knowledge development work already underway at LCUR (e.g., critical thinking skills, communication skills) as well as additional meta-skills advancements for students including understanding:

- the complex messy real world,
- volunteerism and altruism with a social justice orientation,
- what it means to be in diverse relationships including building trust and reciprocity,
- cross-disciplinary cooperation and problem-solving in order to work on and resolve contemporary challenges (e.g., poverty, living heritage, First Nations land claims) that are not constrained by academic silos,
- the degrees of unpredictability and ways forward in community processes,
- the salience of leadership skills, and
- one’s sense of agency to change society to make it a better place for us all.

Given the scope and scale of this Luther initiative, networking and relationship building will occur with other groups on campus (e.g., Faculty of Arts Community Research Unit, Campion College Service Learning).

¹¹ Jordan, C. (2007). *Community-Engaged Scholarship Review, Promotion & Tenure Package*. Washington: Peer Review Workgroup, Community-Engaged Scholarship for Health Collaborative, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/CES_RPT_Package.pdf.

¹² Hicks Peterson, T. (2009). Engaged Scholarship: Reflections and Research on the Pedagogy of Social Change. *Teaching in Higher Education* 14 (5), 541-552.