

Theme One: The Bennion Center's Creation and Early Years

It started, for our purposes, with Lowell L. Bennion. In 1987, at age 79, Lowell was living a life that made his name synonymous in Utah with compassion, service, and commitment. University students facing life questions sought his advice while he headed the LDS Institute of Religion and while he served as associate dean of students at the University of Utah. Supporters of racial equality admired his early statements on African Americans and the priesthood in the LDS Church. Academicians in Europe and the U.S. praised his graduate work, carried out in multiple languages, on the sociologist Max Weber. Young people in his Millcreek neighborhood responded to his regular calls to join him in week-end service projects. Males who grew up in Utah remembered learning about work, play, and talk at Lowell's Teton Valley Boys' Ranch. Hundreds of elderly women whose physical and emotional needs he responded to called him their friend. Those who knew him in his "retirement years" respected his humanitarian work as director of the Community Services Council.

Dick Jacobsen, a U of U alumnus and Palo Alto developer, was one of Lowell's admirers. Dick and his wife, Sue, acted on that admiration after they heard about the creation of a new community service center at Stanford University. The Jacobsens offered an initial endowment gift to the University of Utah to begin a campus community service center named for Lowell Bennion. Dick made a note to himself in his personal journal in 1985 that the University of Utah could "do what Stanford is doing, could do it in the name of Lowell Bennion...and could do it better."

Internal Campus Planning

The Jacobsens' initial endowment gift offer was made to the U through Tony Morgan, who had been Dick's LDS mission companion and was then serving as vice president for budget and planning at the university. Tony took the lead in initial planning for the new center. He secured agreement from President Chase Petersen, the University of Utah Board of Trustees, and others key to the new center's success. He oversaw the creation of a campus-community Bennion Center Board of Advisers. He guided the approval process through the board of trustees, the academic senate, and other formal entities. Dean of Liberal Education Jack Newell was the lead author on the center's mission statement. Drew Petersen, a dentist, father, and active community participant, served as board chair and helped to organize the search for the first director.

Selection of final candidates for the director position was handled by a committee of the advisory board, with a final decision by then Dean of Student Affairs Norm Gibbons. Gibbons, himself a strong and active proponent of service to others, selected Irene Fisher from two final candidates chosen out of a field of nearly 100 applicants.

In many ways, Irene's selection was an unlikely one: a female among largely male administrators, a non-Mormon in a heavily Mormon state, a community activist with little personal experience in academia. But those involved in the selection reportedly sensed her commitment to and experience with community needs, and were moved by her action orientation and her visible belief in the capacity of students to learn while making a positive social and environmental impact.

By November, 1987, the foundation for the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center was in place, with a board of advisors, a mission statement, a director, a place within the student affairs organizational structure, a small office in room 270 in the Olpin Union Building, and an operating budget of \$40,000. It was time for the real action to begin.

When the new director formally met the entire board of advisors in early November, 1987, she suggested the board members operate in the philanthropic tradition by giving first of their own time and energy. She invited board members to join her in attempting to save a non-profit boarding house, the Sugarhouse Living Center, which housed 26 chronically mentally ill residents. The boarding house, threatened with closure by the Salt Lake City-County Board of Health, helped prevent homelessness by providing a stable environment and handling medications essential to the residents' functioning.

The Center's First Service

On the day the Bennion Center's first director began her service, the front page of the *Daily Utah Chronicle*, the U of U student newspaper, carried a headline story about the opening of the center. It included pictures of Jack Newell, Tony Morgan, and other board members lifting a claw-footed bathtub out of the Sugarhouse Living Center, tearing out carpet, and working to make the facility a viable home. Once started, people didn't want to stop, and on successive Saturdays, more board members and students continued the work to completion. This and other early actions of the center caused Tony Morgan to remark that this enterprise certainly didn't operate on standard "university time."

During the early foundational period, Pat McCabe, who represented ASUU on the board of advisors and was the first student to take action in the name of the center, asked Lowell how he could get started even before a director was hired. Lowell suggested that Pat compile a list of students willing to participate in one-day service projects so they could be ready when the director was selected. Nearly 80 students responded to Pat's ads in the *Daily Utah Chronicle*. Together, Pat and Irene and others planned the first of these "Volunteer Corps" projects for the Saturday after finals in December. Using Pat's list of invitees, the center committed to deliver 34 frozen turkeys and dinner ingredients to elderly and disabled people who lived alone in their homes. The planners admitted to some anxiety about whether enough volunteers would show up the day after finals during Christmas break so that the cars holding those turkeys could actually be emptied. There was no problem. Students came in small groups, took their turkey dinners and the addresses, and went off for a morning of visiting and delivering. The first of what has extended to 20 years of monthly "Volunteer Corps" projects was completed successfully.

Lessons Learned – Take-Away Ideas

- From the beginning, students took the lead in making decisions and shaping the center's actions and organizational structures. These leadership opportunities generated interest among students who saw themselves as potential leaders and those who already had an interest in the community. It is the contributions of students new to community service and leadership that are responsible for maintaining the energy, vitality, and curiosity of the Bennion Center.
- *A bias toward action* was a vital component of the Bennion Center's work from the beginning. The energy generated from this approach proved attractive to students and to community partners and played a major role in the center's early visibility and capacity to get things done.
- The name of the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center had instant "mission recognition" to people in Utah who knew of Lowell and his reputation for service to others. Unlike many institutions that are named for substantial donors, the Bennion Center's purpose was instantly known through its name. This has proven invaluable in earning a recognized place on campus and in the community.
- Tony Morgan's early planning included consulting all entities and individuals on campus who would be potentially impacted by and interested in the center, eased the way for a new campus unit, and avoided possible friction.
- Space immediately became a major concern, as the initial office in 270 Union, with room for only one person, placed threatening limits on a growing center. It was immediately obvious that centralized campus space was at a premium. We also learned that maintaining a central location on campus is key to continued success. This asset is assured through U commitments to the major donors in endowment documents.
- For almost all people involved in the center, the mission, the energy of organizational creation, and the sense of community created by the center's work proved to be a passion rather than just another activity.

Unresolved Questions/ Continuing Challenges

- Observers of and participants in the Bennion Center have questioned how the center has maintained its energy and vitality over the first 20 years and how similar energy and passion can be maintained as it ages. Past experience suggests that the key to maintaining this "newness" and passion comes from assuring that students continue to assume leadership for the programs they direct and for decision-making within the center's student component. The constant renewal that comes with students participating and then graduating and moving on, making way for new, energized, and curious students, is essential to maintaining the *heart* of the center's culture. How will future leaders of the Bennion Center maintain this "newness" and openness to innovation as the center ages?

Daring Visions and Bold Leadership:
Reflecting on the Early Years
By L. Jackson Newell, Founding Board Member

In the beginning, the character, identity, and mission of the Bennion Center were all up for grabs. Inspired by Stanford University president Donald Kennedy's ground-breaking idea for a center for student engagement in humanitarian service (in the very midst of the 1980s "Me Generation"), University of Utah alumnus, Dick Jacobsen, immediately put three and three together: Why not create a similar center at his alma mater, name it for the most dedicated humanitarian he knew, the aging Lowell Bennion, and make it all possible with an anonymous gift from himself and his wife Sue to get the whole thing started? What university president would turn down a proposition like that?

Chase Peterson bought in immediately and assigned his fiscal vice-president, Tony Morgan (an old fraternity brother of Jacobsen), to guide the proposal through the political hoops. He then charged Dean of Students Norm Gibbons to find the right person to serve as the founding director of the center. Gibbons established a search committee on which I served along with Ramona Adams (Assoc. Dean of Students), Boyer Jarvis (Assoc. Academic VP), Eunice Shatz (Dean of Social Work) and a healthy representation of students, faculty, alumni and downtown community leaders. Ours was a crucial task, we understood well, because the person we recommended would play the primary role in shaping the character and nature of this new university entity.

Candidates were many and we struggled to rank their potential to lead in this unique situation. By the time we got down to a short list, those ranked as most qualified were all men, including a former Mormon bishop and an LDS Institute of Religion leader. Except, that is, for Irene Fisher. A seasoned social service leader and activist in Salt Lake City, Irene's record of advocacy and community engagement stood out--and she had an unmistakable glint in her eye. The committee rambled on, as such bodies do, then foundered. It foundered because several of us saw Irene's experience as a peer leader, and her rooting outside the prevailing culture, as ideal qualities for attracting the broad spectrum of students the center hoped to involve. Appoint someone imbued with top-down leadership experience and the participatory dream of a student-driven center might wither before it blossomed.

Irene's backers prevailed, starting as a determined minority and ending with a clear majority. The committee did submit two names, as requested by Dean Gibbons, but we rank-ordered them (contrary to his instructions) with Irene Fisher clearly on top. After additional vetting by the administration, the dean announced her appointment with obvious satisfaction. Irene's leadership of the Bennion Center over the next fourteen years more than justified the trust we placed in her. She took her gifts for leadership by example and democratic decision-making to the level of art.

From the start, the Bennion Center needed a compelling mission statement to position itself within the university and the larger communities of need and service. The newly created Advisory Board, widely representative like the search committee, tackled this

challenge. How fully might students be involved in deciding what to do? How broadly would we envision the community or communities we sought to serve? What kinds of service would we hope to render?

This charter board dreamed in wide panoramas that were inspired especially by the blend of moral vision and practical methods long used at Deep Springs College in California. If students were to do the work, then students should decide what work to do--and organize the projects themselves with staff support. If we defined our "service area" in local terms alone, we would blind ourselves to human needs and suffering beyond the boundaries of our city and state. Finally, if we took a narrow view of humanitarian service, we would not tap the variety of interests, skills, and passions our students might bring to the center's work or offer our beleaguered planet. Out of these vigorous conversations came a composite vision by which we raised each others' consciousness of human needs everywhere. The resulting mission statement captured the imagination of thousands of students as they came to know the joys--and endure the hardships--of rolling up their sleeves on behalf of those who hunger, suffer, and languish without hope.

From the beginning, students flocked to the Bennion Center from every corner of the campus. And they multiplied in near-Malthusian proportions from one year to the next. Their mounting numbers--and enthusiasm--exceeded our grandest expectations and helped put the University of Utah in the national limelight. One challenge led to the next, however, as students began to wonder, "If we are to address homelessness downtown or hunger in Africa with any hope of making a difference, then we need to know a whole lot more about the *causes* and *nature* of these problems." They soon asked if professors who study such issues could help them understand how to serve more effectively. With their needs voiced, the notion of "service-learning" courses dawned. Carol Warner in Psychology and Doug Rollins from Pharmacy were the first to respond with brand new courses designed for Bennion Center student volunteers. Their courses, initially offered during the 1989-90 academic year, prompted other students to pose their service-related academic needs and other faculty to respond. Within two years, the university catalog listed twelve Service-Learning courses, and many more followed. The crucial link between knowledge and service had been forged, and this bond would strengthen immensely as the Bennion Center gathered momentum in succeeding years.

With a special interest in undergraduate educational programs, I have studied American universities throughout my career. Since World War II, few reforms have rivaled the positive effects that have flowed from the humanitarian service movement and, especially, service-learning courses. This movement has elevated students' social consciousness, stimulated teaching innovation, and connected theory with practice. Once a professor takes her students into the field to test--and apply--their theoretical knowledge to real human conditions, the rewards for both faculty and students are addicting. These professors never teach courses in their disciplines quite the same again, and they come back repeatedly to teach Bennion Center students to understand the problems they strive to address as volunteers. Intrinsic rewards have driven and sustained great teaching and, more importantly, learning that endures. Voluntary service has often led to career choices and life-long commitments.

The final sentence in the Bennion Center's original Mission Statement read: "In a society of material plenty, those who participate in the Center's activities and projects will find meaning through community service and pleasure in the improvement of life around them." Pleasure indeed. The most profound lesson I learned from my years on the Bennion Center board and as a volunteer was to take students' (and others') voluntary service at face value. No doubt, many enlisted with self-interested motives--hoping to gild their resumes for medical school applications or gain an edge in competitive fields after graduation. But serving others in need seems to change us. Motives evolve. Those who signed up for the wrong reasons usually stayed for the right reason. People change, younger ones especially, and so do career goals and avocational interests. More than anything else, this phenomenon has been the magic of the Bennion Center. May it endure, adapt and grow as society's problems change--and as the university's students themselves evolve from year to year. Onward!

Bennion Center Beginnings
By Dick Jacobsen, Founding Board Member
From the Bennion Center's First Five Years of Caring

Growing up as young high school and college students in the Salt Lake Valley, Sue and I had an opportunity to become familiar with Dr. Lowell Bennion, his writings, his philosophy, his teaching, and his example of simple Christian service quietly rendered to all segments of the community. Our lives were touched by Dr. Bennion, and our way of looking at the world profoundly influenced. Service became an important ingredient in our lives. In our own small way we tried to render service according to those same simple Christian principles, visiting widows, painting homes, and trying to bring some warmth and comfort where we could see it was needed most. We hoped and dreamed for the day when we might be able to do more.

In the early 1980's a nationwide movement centered in community service took root on a few pioneering campuses across the country. The political activism of the 60's followed by a more apathetic and inward turning bent in the 70's eventually gave way to a genuine concern among university students and faculty for the welfare of the local, national, and global communities of which they were a part.

As a result of our personal involvement with the California Family Foundation working on local issues of education, employment and housing, we became aware of the Stanford Service Center and its efforts to provide service opportunities for Stanford students.

Thinking of Stanford's activities in the area of community service and remembering Dr. Bennion's lifelong association with the University of Utah, it occurred to us that it might be possible to create a community service center at the University of Utah naming it after Dr. Bennion, and thereby giving it a set of values and a philosophical foundation on which to build. In early 1986 I visited with Tony Morgan, a good friend of ours and a vice president at the university. I asked Tony if he thought the idea had merit and if the University might be interested in such a venture if I would take the responsibility for finding the initial funders.

Tony discussed the matter with University President Chase Peterson and a few other key people among the university faculty and staff. The response was not only encouraging but enthusiastic. Everyone seemed to feel that the idea of a community service center was timely, and they all knew and loved Lowell, and concurred with the idea of associating the center with his name "if we thought it would be helpful."

From that point on the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center seemed to take on a life of its own. Tony was very instrumental in moving the idea through the required review and approval process within the university, assisted by other members of the faculty and staff, and solidly supported by President Peterson. The idea seemed to catch fire throughout the University. It was almost as if we had touched a match to dry grass. Everywhere we found enthusiastic support for a community service center in general and great love and admiration for Dr. Bennion in particular.

Theme Two: The Role of Student Leadership

In the fall of 1987 the University publicized the planned creation of the Bennion Center through press releases to local newspapers. Irene Fisher, soon to become the successful applicant for the position of director, read about the plans for the center in *The Salt Lake Tribune*. The article mentioned the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL), a new national organization created by two recent Harvard graduates to encourage college students to become engaged in service in their communities. She called COOL and told them what she was doing. The COOL response: “Be sure you use the student-directed program model, not the clearinghouse model.”

This sound advice proved central to the Bennion Center’s development. It meshed with Fisher’s desire to emphasize student leadership development in the center’s programs. Fisher had observed that many community problems go unaddressed because those who see the problems lack the personal belief that they can do something about them. She wanted the Bennion Center to change that. She wanted the university to graduate the community leaders of the future.

The First Student Leaders

In 1987, shortly after the center opened, Irene and others asked the Salt Lake Rotary Foundation for funding to pay a small number of students to create community service programs that they would each direct. She received the funding and immediately advertised for seven students to work 20 hours per week to create the first ongoing service programs. Eight students responded, and she selected them all. Each of these student program directors met weekly at 6:30 a.m. (the only time left in their busy schedules when they could come together), and each created an ongoing program to address a community need about which they were personally concerned. One student, a recovering alcoholic, created a program through which he recruited students to volunteer with him at Odyssey House, an agency serving recovering alcohol and drug abusers. Another, concerned about strong educational opportunities for children, created a partnership with Lowell Elementary and organized students to tutor there. Yet another student, herself legally blind, believed that the U should have a support group for students with disabilities. She worked with the U’s Center for Students with Disabilities to create such a group.

One important piece of advice to each student director -- “remember, you are in charge of this program” -- proved to be a powerful motivator toward serious leadership and commitment. It established the model for the next 20 years of student leadership development. The center experienced rapid initial growth, from eight ongoing student-directed service programs involving 546 volunteers in 1987-88 to 19 programs and 1,409

volunteers in 1988-89, and 27 programs and 2,762 volunteers in 1989-90. By 1992-93, the Bennion Center was involving 5,000 volunteers per year in 45 programs and knew it had to curb its growth and focus on strengthening training, agency partnerships, and funding diversity. In the center's 20th anniversary year, it sponsors 45 student-directed programs and has kept a fairly steady number of programs in operation. The programs themselves change somewhat each year, depending upon community partner needs and student interests.

The student-directed programs use various types of action to achieve their goals. These include direct and indirect service, public interest advocacy, and community organizing on primarily local as well as state, national, and global levels.

In the student component, and in all other parts of the Bennion Center, the service came first and the infrastructure to support it grew as needed. Initially, with a small number of student leaders, the directors could handle shared decision-making fairly informally. By 2008, a more elaborate organizational structure had developed to enable more experienced student coordinators to support beginning directors. A broadly representative decision-making structure is in place, guided by a **student service council**. Key steps in the evolution to a more formal organization structure included: ceasing to pay students to direct programs except in cases of real economic need, development of more training strategies, an advanced guidance layer of experienced program directors (called **coordinators**) to assist newer directors, a **cabinet** of student leaders to lead on internal decision-making and problem-solving, and annual **selection processes** of new leaders. Each year, almost all applicants for leadership positions are selected and placed in positions of responsibility that match their interests and capacities. Almost no one is told they can't have a position. The underlying premise is that most students that have the commitment to direct a program have or can develop the skills to be successful.

Training and other support strategies evolved over time, with the continuous theme of student leadership at the fore. Training for new and experienced directors, coordinators, and other leaders changed over the years, and included basic orientations, fall trainings, winter retreats, coordinating-group meetings, and in-depth summer leadership programs. At all times, experienced student leaders determined the best ways to offer the learning opportunities they thought necessary. The core belief has been that *leadership is learned by leading*.

Benefits of Students Taking Leadership

The energy and community accomplishments that emerged from this model have been almost consistently strong. Those responsible for each student program understand that the responsibility for success lies with them. They know the internal sources of support, guidance, and advice, but they also know that the program decisions and actions ultimately come from them. Within this framework, undergraduate students forge amazingly strong programs and achieve important community results while developing their own leadership skills by doing.

The center has often used the slogan “we make the road by walking,” understanding fully that each individual and the entire center learn as they deliver service. As in all human endeavors, those doing the “walking” sometimes stumble. This happens, in the Bennion Center setting, when a student leader fails to deliver the needed leadership for some reason. Sometimes students simply fail to realize the amount of time and work necessary to lead a program. Sometimes other activities, academic demands, friends, a new boy or girl friend become a higher priority. When this happens, the center must take action to assure accountability to the community and to guarantee that community partners are not disappointed. More experienced student coordinators face the responsibility of resolving these problems, thus creating another layer of problem-solving leadership.

Students as the Cultural Heart of the Organization

The student component of the Bennion Center has played a very important role in developing and “living” the culture of the center. Center leaders repeatedly committed time and energy to identify the values they saw as key to the center itself and to their understanding of the larger community. The student leaders kept these values in focus by adopting a “Good On Ya” Guy, a stuffed koala bear that rotated regularly to a student leader who had shown, through her actions, a belief in the shared Bennion Center values.

In 1990, faced with some tough decisions about controversial actions relating to the work of the Campus AIDS Project run by the center, student leaders adopted a consensus decision-making process as a way to respect the views of all participants in the center’s work and to determine what Bennion Center actions all student leaders could support. (A description of this consensus process in operation is included in the section on culture.)

About once every two or three years the student leaders addressed the question as to whether or not some students should be paid for their involvement. Each time this idea was presented to student leaders, they opted not to take this approach. They saw that all leaders could not be paid, and they refused to pay some and not others.

In 1997, the Bennion Center initiated the Alternative Spring Break Program, which has been operated every year since, in partnership with the offices of the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, Health Promotion, and Alcohol and Drug Prevention. Students lead each spring break trip, supported by a faculty or staff mentor. Alternative Fall Break trips and Alternative Week-ends have been held the past several years, and the same offices are working toward a shared sponsorship of these programs.

Lessons Learned – Take-Away Ideas

- Students and staff active with these extra-curricular service programs learned early in the center’s development that size and numbers could not be the only measure of success. Although both community needs and student interest would have allowed continued program expansion, quality became a key concern, and those involved in 1992 made the

difficult decision to freeze the number of programs at the current level and eliminate weaker programs in order to bring new programs into being. The number of student-directed programs has remained fairly constant.

- There is a continuous challenge to maintain the balance between allowing students to learn by leading and meeting community commitments fully. The issue surfaces in different ways in different years, and the struggle to find the right answer for each situation is part of the student learning.
- At several times during the Bennion Center's development, staff members came to believe that the system would work more effectively if coordinators were paid a modest stipend. Each time this idea was presented to a decision-making group of student leaders, they rejected it, believing that this step would diminish the value of their service. This view has always prevailed, although the Helping Hands scholarships enable the center director to give small stipends based on need.
- Staff members must be selected who can offer appropriate supports and training for student leaders without "taking over" when challenges arise. This takes a certain temperament and willingness to accept that a program will sometimes have failures and all involved will have to learn through those failures as well as the successes. Problems have been viewed as learning opportunities rather than failures.
- Community partner agencies and individuals who need the help of students and who also value the student learning process are invaluable. Nurturing the strength of Bennion Center-community organization partnerships has to be a strong and continual focus of attention.
- Early in their involvement as program directors, many students find it very difficult to acknowledge that they are experiencing problems in organizing or operating their programs. Too often new directors feel that those around them are all succeeding, and an admission of a problem is too personally threatening. The center's culture of *learning through doing* must be strong enough to overcome that problem, in order for a struggling director to seek the help needed to overcome challenges.
- Although the center offers various types of training for new and experienced student leaders, it became clear early in its development that "real learning" most often came through the doing. Frequently, staff reported hearing from a student that they had just "learned" something by "doing" that staff thought had previously been "taught," or at least discussed, in a formal training session.
- Bennion Center students and staff recognized early that all applicants for leadership positions had skills and capacities of value to the center and to the community. Thus, the annual selection of leaders focused primarily on finding the right leadership *match* for an applicant's interests and skills rather than on selecting only the *best* people. This approach stems from a belief that in a democratic society, all members of the community can, and indeed should, play an active role.

Unresolved Questions/ Continuing Challenges

- How can the center be accountable for both student leadership development and high quality responses to community needs? The issue of balancing student leader accountability and community need is an ongoing challenge that needs continual

attention. Whatever the new solutions will be as new actors come on the scene, it will be important that the answers are developed and implemented by involved students, because addressing this ongoing challenge offers rich learning opportunities.

- How can the center assure that new staff who work with student leaders have the temperament and skills to support, not take over, student leadership? It has been evident throughout the life of the Bennion Center that staff must have the capacity to stand beside, not in front of, the student leaders charged with carrying out a given program or project. The center's past and future success will depend upon the continuation of this approach. The energy and vitality that have been an on-going characteristic of the Bennion Center grow primarily from new students experiencing community problems and needs, from their developing a passion to make a difference, and from weaving that passion into the culture of the Bennion Center.
- It is a challenge to pass on the learning from one year's program director to the next, and an even bigger challenge to maintain the history and "lessons learned" within a long-time program through a succession of new directors. Too frequently, the learning from years past is lost in the inevitable change of leadership. Continuity of staff and multi-year involvement of student directors can help mitigate that challenge; other solutions are still needed.
- How can the student leadership component of the Bennion Center continue to innovate, to test, to create, and to learn together as the organizational infrastructure ages and solidifies? In the second year of the Bennion Center's life, its student president suggested that "we should close our doors in five years, stay 'dark' for at least two years, and then start over, so that new people can experience the creativity and challenge of creation." In the absence of such a drastic action, new leaders will have to determine how the vitality that characterizes the center can be maintained. Several key elements to success in this area will include continuing a strong student leadership and decision-making model; building a supportive community of student leaders; welcoming a diversity of student leaders; and maintaining a willingness to address needed organizational change, a bias toward action, and a willingness to risk. Student leaders and staff can help maintain innovation by challenging the phrase "but we did it that way last year" whenever they hear it.

The First Project Youth

By Deborah Hannan-Wunderli, Founder of Project Youth

Everything I've ever needed to know, I learned during the first year of Project Youth. In short, I learned that an inspired idea, joyful enthusiasm, and daily hard work truly make up the formula for something big to happen.

It all started when my college sweetheart (now my husband) and I were hanging out in the basement of his family home talking about what we want to do with our lives, thinking about how people end up where they end up, and the importance of having a positive vision of your own possibilities. As we were talking, we began to appreciate the value in our own lives of certain expectations we had of ourselves that guided who we would become from an early age. One of those expectations was that we'd go to college. The idea was instilled in both of us as far back as we could remember, and the question was never if we would go but where we would go. We then thought of the many kids who do not attend college and considered what a tragedy it would be if many capable young adults ended up not in a position to attain a higher education simply because they didn't have that vision planted in their minds as kids. So we wondered if it would be possible to instill the idea in kids before they made choices that would make it more difficult to choose that path. Could we get kids from disadvantaged grade schools to spend a day on the University of Utah campus and begin to see themselves as potential college students?

Fast forward a few months later and you would have seen 2000 sixth graders come to the U of U, escorted around campus by 400 student volunteers. During the course of the day, they stopped along the way to see faculty presentations from the different colleges, and ended up at the Huntsman Center for a big rally. I'm compelled here to say what I truly feel: IT WAS AWESOME! The energy among the kids and volunteers was truly awe-inspiring. It was one of the best and most humbling days of my life. To this day, it remains one of my most defining moments -- something I've reflected on often -- something that breaks me free from the tyranny of the probable to elevate my thoughts to the belief in the possible.

Of course, what's often left out of the story was what happened between the lofty rhetoric of the original idea and its big finish. That's the space where all insecurities, uncertainty, discouragement, setbacks, and day-to-day leg work take place. That's when the vision starts to fade in the face of physical and mental fatigue. The harsh reality I learned most clearly from Project Youth is that a good idea is not enough. It takes work to give an idea life. And there was no shortage of work. From the first conversation with Chase Peterson, the president of the University at the time, to the conversations with all the schools we wanted to invite, with every student group to get volunteers, with every faculty and staff member to get presenters and facilities, with sponsors to get funding, it took energy -- energy to overcome fear of rejection, energy to sell the idea with the conviction it deserved, and energy to keep the faith that it would actually work. It still seems a little remarkable to me today that it actually did work and that people responded the way they

did. It was incredible how many people contributed their time and effort to make it happen.

At the end of the day, the story of Project Youth is the same as the story of the Bennion Center, which is the same as the story of every worthwhile endeavor. It is ultimately a story of inspiration, faith, and persistence. It's a tried and true formula to be sure, but I didn't fully appreciate it until the Bennion Center helped me experience it first hand by giving me the opportunity to take an idea and run with it. It was a simple idea, but one we thought could make a difference. As I reflect back now, I wonder what has happened to that first group of 2000 kids that came to campus. Did it actually make a difference? I know for sure it at least made a difference in one person's life – mine.

*Addendum by Barbara Thornton,
Former Bennion Center Student Program Director*

I was lucky enough to attend Project Youth as a sixth grade student in 1995. The experience of being mentored by college students as I toured the amazing University of Utah campus was an indelible one. Despite coming from a family of educated parents and older siblings, I had little exposure to the scope of activities, programs and multi-faceted educational opportunities available in a university setting. Later, as a college student, I became involved with the very program that inspired and enlightened me as a child. I have been involved with Project Youth for five years (including the privilege of serving as co-director) and I am thrilled that I can continue to share this mind-opening experience with sixth-graders every year.

Theme Three: Learning from Service Experience: In and Out of the Curriculum

Center leaders have often described the Bennion Center's development with the phrase "we make the road by walking," understanding fully that each individual and the entire center learn as they deliver service. From the beginning, the Bennion Center seemed to attract students who were especially caring, inquisitive, and ready to ask hard questions as well as engage in community action. "Why isn't the family of this elderly woman helping her?" "I'm enjoying this tutoring, but why don't we have more teachers to assure all these children get help?" "I want to help in this homeless shelter, but it doesn't seem like the right place for families...isn't there a better way to enable people to get back on their feet?" "How can I prepare myself for a lifetime of community service?" "Isn't there a way to prevent this problem from happening in the first place?"

Clearly, the first focus of the Bennion Center was on action, while the quest for deeper understanding has been the persistent partner to the action. Growing out of student interest and action, two modes or "tracks" for learning began to emerge: one curricular and one co-curricular.

Co-Curricular Learning through Action and Reflection

In 1989, students attending an annual COOL Conference and another group of students who went on a rural Utah spring break service trip simultaneously discovered the power of **reflection**. The COOL conference attendees were introduced to the idea of reflection as a strategy to deepen the learning from active service by attending a conference session on that topic. Students who participated in a rural service trip to Myton, Utah, stopped on the way back to Salt Lake City to have a picnic lunch and spent nearly two hours talking about the amazing experiences they'd had; what those experiences meant to them; and what they'd learned about rural Utah, about Myton and its history, about the differences between small town and urban life, and about themselves. Both groups came back eager to explore the use of reflection to enhance their own learning.

In 1989-90, Dan DeGooyer became the first student leader to hold the reflection director position. His challenge was to help other student leaders develop ways to include reflection within their service programs. Out of the subsequent thinking and planning came frequent "reflection sessions" and an annual reflection magazine that included the thoughts, poems, and essays of Bennion Center participants. Student leader training was expanded to include sessions on the rationale and strategies for including reflection in their programs. Student leaders learned about the **action-reflection cycle** as a mode of understanding and learning. Indeed, for a time reflection was emphasized so strongly within the student component that it became known as "the R word." The fundamental co-curricular strategy for learning was born and, over time, became well established.

Building Links Between Service and Coursework

Almost simultaneously with the use of reflection, other student leaders were beginning to think about ways to link their service involvement with their academic coursework in a variety of ways to enhance their own learning. Patrick McCabe, while serving at the Salt Lake Homeless Shelter and Resource Center, decided to do his Honors Program thesis on the legal right to shelter. In the process of strengthening his own learning, Pat received recognition from the Honors Program for the outstanding thesis that year, largely due to his ability to include his learning through active involvement as well as his library research on the topic. Dave Vandemerwe, the student director of one of the center's programs serving elderly people, decided to add a gerontology minor to his undergraduate education. Other students designed their own majors, linking service and their coursework through the Bachelor of University Studies Program.

Very importantly, Andy Cooley, an active Bennion Center volunteer, ran for student body president pledging that if he were elected he would find a way to link service and the curriculum. All this happened before Bennion Center leaders even heard the term "service-learning." Andy Cooley won the ASUU election and promptly appointed a three-person committee to carry out his service-learning campaign pledge. The committee included Andrea Pinnock, then student president of the Bennion Center; Valerie Arrango, ASUU representative; and Janice Ugaki, junior class president. In one very intensive year's work, the three young women developed a proposal for what has become the Service-Learning Scholars Program. They presented the idea to all the necessary individuals and groups on campus, modified the proposal based on the input of these people, and in two important final steps gained the approval of the U's Academic Senate and the Board of Trustees. The foundation of the University of Utah's nationally recognized Service-Learning Scholars Program was in place.

These events of 1989-1991 marked an important step forward in the life of the Bennion Center, mirroring similar discoveries within the national higher education community service field. John Dewey, David Kolb, and other educators had long understood the power of learning through the action-reflection learning cycle. Bennion Center participants discovered the paths to richer learning for themselves through their own service and active inquiry.

Lessons Learned – Take-Away Ideas

- The impetus for both curricular and co-curricular learning grew from the interest and determination of active Bennion Center student leaders who wanted to take responsibility for their own learning. The student interest was supported by staff, the Bennion Center Board of Advisers, and individual faculty members and administrators, but students led the charge. The clear lesson is that students, supported by key allies, can create change within the university when they are committed, consistent, wise, and determined.

- Curricular and co-curricular service and learning opportunities can exist side by side within an organizational structure like the Bennion Center. Both provide important but different learning opportunities. Co-curricular learning is especially valued for the leadership lessons it offers. Curricular learning is important because it may be meshed within any academic field and community work related to that field, and it engages faculty in the learning process.
- A focus on **learning through doing** empowers those who are involved because it clarifies the reality that in dynamic work like community service even leaders don't have all the answers before they begin.
- While students initiated co-curricular reflection and curricular service-learning, it has and will take strong faculty and U administration participation to move the service-learning and civic engagement agenda forward. Key administrators have played an important role in enabling the development of curricular service-learning.
- Housing both curricular and co-curricular programs within the Bennion Center requires continual work to assure coordination and cooperation, especially out in the community. It also requires that those involved in one set of programs respect the value of the other. This requires special focus, because academia in general tends to place more value on learning that bears course credit.
- During the development of service-learning, Bennion Center leaders learned valuable lessons from the past. Older national service-learning initiatives had mistakenly given academic credit for service itself, rather than credit for the learning that grew from service involvement. That practice led, in a number of national instances, to the discrediting of service-learning. Armed with that lesson from the past, the U of U has continually avoided that pitfall.

Unresolved Questions/ Continuing Challenges

- How can the Bennion Center and student leaders deepen and enrich reflective learning in a busy, action-oriented environment? The potential for asking deeper and more challenging questions is periodically visible within Bennion Center activities; the room for growth in this area is significant.
- How can the Bennion Center continue to attract student leaders from diverse political, religious, cultural, and philosophical backgrounds, so that group reflection sessions include the challenges that grow from diverse views? Student leaders frequently comment that they are working with more diverse students through the center than in other spheres on campus. Maintaining and enhancing that diversity will require continual attention and further work.
- Other continuing challenges and unresolved questions related to curricular service-learning are included in the sections on the faculty role and on embedding civic engagement within the University.

Personal Reflection

By Patrick McCabe, Former Student Leader

From The Bennion Center's First Five Years of Caring

During winter quarter, Grethe Peterson, a member of the Bennion Center Advisory Board, reported her reaction to KUED's documentary on the plight of the homeless in Salt Lake City. The student members of the board were intrigued by the discussion that ensued and thought the Bennion Center could get involved by creating a "Campaign for the Homeless" on campus. I agreed to be the campaign director. As I read the name now, I think I would select a less *noblesse oblige*-sounding name. Rather than doing something *for* someone else, we primarily provided help for people to help themselves. The name also implies that the homeless are powerless and need things done for them. As I learned more, my perception of the homeless changed considerably.

I hit the ground running the following autumn because I was able to attend a Salt Lake City conference on homelessness. I met many more people devoting their time to the problem. I also learned about an attempt in New York City to craft a legal right to shelter from broad phrases in the New York State Constitution. I was stunned by this "radical" idea. However, it seemed like an elegant solution to the problem: just make being homeless illegal and require society to provide some minimum level of subsistence for anyone who needs it. As with all seemingly simple solutions to complex problems, the difficulty was in the execution. How minimum a level of subsistence? How can this legal right be enforced? Ultimately, I turned my interest in these questions into my senior honors thesis. This linkage of my community service work with my academic work foreshadowed the development of the Service-Learning Scholars Program created in 1992 and the establishment of Bennion professorships to create courses linking hands-on service in the community with a course of study. My work on this paper also confirmed my interest in studying law.

An Epiphany in the Cold

*By Bill Crim, Former Bennion Center Student President
From The Bennion Center's First Five Years of Caring*

While helping to serve lunch at the St. Vincent de Paul Center, a man came through the line with two small children, a boy and a girl. I offered to carry the trays of the children and did so. As I walked to the table with the little girl I heard her cry and saw her pain as she rubbed her hands together, "Owee, owee, owee." Her fingers and cheeks were bright red from the cold, her eyes were pained and red from the tears. Apparently her hands had been frozen numb outside and as they began to thaw, the biting pain caused her to cry out. I was dumbfounded. I didn't know what to do. Her father caught up and sat down, and I backed away, wondering how it could be. I returned to my duties and despite the horror of this experience, I soon filed it away in my memory, so as to avoid the pain of contemplation and the nagging sense of responsibility.

Later that night, I returned from the airport and passed a woman stalled on the freeway. This day had been bitter cold and was getting colder. A National Weather Service warning had been issued for dangerous, freezing winds, and I later learned that record low temperatures had been reached. The woman asked us to jump-start her car, which we attempted. I stood out in the cold for probably five minutes before she decided that it wouldn't work. I thought that I was literally frozen...I had never been that cold. As I sat shivering in the car, the image of the little girl I had seen earlier in the day returned with great force, and with that image, an intensity of feelings which I have rarely experienced. I have seen tremendously disturbing sights while working with the homeless but I have never felt as angry, frustrated and sad as I did then.

Where is she? What, if anything, is protecting her from this freezing wind? How many other people have no protection from the elements? This is supposed to be the land where all are "endowed with the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and today I saw a little girl crying from the pain of frozen hands because she has no home, no adequate clothing, and has to wait outside in sub-zero temperatures for some lunch. We cannot rest until every child and person has an independent and warm place to sleep, eat, play and learn.

Service is Always Possible
By Robert Nielsen,
Former Bennion Center Student Leader and Staff Member
From The Bennion Center's First Five Years of Caring

It was Winter Quarter 1990, and I was trying to balance two classes with full-time employment. This was not an easy task, since my job required me to drop my life and jump into a snow plow every time the clouds threatened. But that quarter had a profound influence on how I now view the college experience.

I met several students who volunteered and directed projects in the Bennion Center. I also met Irene Fisher, who was teaching a legislative process class that I was taking. Irene's class turned out to be one of those points in your life to which you look back and see a significant change of course. Through her class and the friendship of Hillary, Dave, Sara, Duane, and other Bennion Center volunteers, I had been introduced to a way of making a difference. These friends had shown me that it was possible to serve people AND go to school.

As I stated in my application to become a project director at the end of that quarter, "my experience in volunteer projects has been minimal. This is perhaps the very heart of why I have applied for this position. I have travelled through college with an 'I'll help others after I'm stable' outlook, but am realizing that my efforts could be effectively used to better the lives of others right now." After applying for a position as Public Interest Advocacy Project Director, I quit work and returned to school as a full-time student and Bennion Center project director. I was beginning to understand that if we all wait until we are "stable," people within our community will experience needless inequities, abuses, and loneliness.

Three years have passed and I am still at the Bennion Center learning to serve others, learning about ways to bring about change in our community, and learning that significant events begin with small acts of kindness. The Bennion Center experience has been incredible. The Center has provided me and other volunteers the physical, financial, and emotional resources necessary to coordinate service projects which not only make an immediate difference for the recipient, but make a lasting impression on the volunteers. The value of these resources cannot be overstated, for they have allowed me to explore different means of serving others. Ultimately, the existence of the Bennion Center has helped me move from a job of servicing mowers, plows, and turf to a career of serving people.

Although I will soon be leaving the Bennion Center, its influence will always be with me. I have learned that people can make a difference in the lives of others, and that we cannot wait for someone else to initiate change. The Bennion Center has certainly made a difference in my life and career. Hopefully, I will now be able to do the same for others.

A Personal Perspective on Service and Learning
by Yevgeniya Kopeleva, Service-Learning Scholar

Stepping into the University of Utah as a first-generation college student wasn't easy. When the U seemed like an enormous place where no one knew your name, the Bennion Center was my haven where every conversation led to a friendship. It became my home and inspiration to succeed for the next four years.

I walked into the Bennion Center as "Artem's little sister." I didn't know I was going to co-direct Project Youth as a freshman or become the Education and Ability Coordinator my sophomore year. I didn't think I would be interested in environmental issues until I took the Service-Learning Global Environmental Issues class. I think back upon my Service-Learning Art in the Community class and always remind myself how, although the fifth graders may not remember anything I taught them about photography, they will always remember me wearing University of Utah gear and know that they too can reach for their dreams and go to college. I spent my birthdays participating in Alternative Spring Breaks in Seattle, San Francisco, and Portland, serving those in need and gaining a better understanding of the world around me. I lived in the Service House with some of the most incredible people on this campus. I was no longer "the little sister." I became known as the small individual with a big heart and the desire to transform the world; I was Yevy.

It is these experiences through the Bennion Center that sparked my interest in the Service-Learning Scholars Program and helped me discover my passion. It is the last four years of involvement that have guided me to fulfill my ISP and lead the Community Engagement Co-requisite initiative with fellow scholars Patrick Reimherr and Jon Hayes. Looking back at our college career, the one thing that stood out to the three of us was our service-learning classes. The best memories came from the experiences we had outside the classroom. In our student government roles, we felt that the opportunity to take what you are learning in the classroom and apply it to the real world is what higher education should offer and provide for students. Just like one student led the creation of the Service-Learning Scholars Program, we had the passion and the drive to enhance the undergraduate curriculum with the help of Dr. John Francis, Linda Dunn, and Katie Winters.

Due to budget cuts, we decided to take a step back and begin with showing the significance of the foundation of the proposal in hopes of setting the precedent for our university to continue thinking of ways of helping students become civically engaged and ready to face the world when they graduate. We are proud to say that along with our leadership capstone class and the support from the Bennion Center, the lower-division writing requirement, Writing 2010, will offer service-learning sections this fall. Our hope is to introduce students early on to valuable academic and co-curricular experiences that they can continue to take advantage of and participate in the numerous opportunities available at the U and beyond.

The tears, the laughter, the joy, and our constant desire to make this university a better place is the reason we never gave up. I know that our countless hours of meetings,

conversations, discussions, research, presentations, and lack of sleep on behalf of the community engagement initiative have and will continue to have an impact on the future of the University of Utah and our communities. As difficult as it may have been at times, I wouldn't trade this experience for the world, as it has made me a stronger individual. I am truly grateful to the Bennion Center for being my very first home at the U, my inspiration to make a difference on campus and the world, and the impetus for my personal transformation to a small individual with a big heart.

Being a part of the Service-Learning Scholars Program challenged me in numerous ways, taught me the importance of determination, reinforced my passion of enhancing the world around me, allowed me to reflect and discover who I am and where I am going, and helped me become a change agent today, tomorrow, and always.

The Service-Learning Scholars Program
has taught me that SERVICE is not what you do,
but it's WHO YOU ARE.

To me, **SERVICE IS**
lending a hand to someone else,
stepping out of your comfort zone,
discovering who you are,
realizing your passion,
loving what you do,
involving yourself in deep conversations,
learning something new from each experience,
asking questions,
being challenged,
exploring the world around you,
finding ways to solve an issue,
informing others,
being present,
listening,
reflecting,
doing something because it makes you feel good,
creating memories,
building relationships,
getting others involved,
and sharing your stories with those around you.

SERVICE IS LOVE!

It's not only the people you meet,
but it's also the conversations and life lessons
you will forever remember.

To me, SERVICE IS NOT WHAT I DO, BUT IT IS WHO I AM.

Mission Statements: 1987, 1992, 2000

The Bennion Center Mission Statements over Time

The initial mission statement was created by the Center's advisory board in 1987. Its breadth and detail were especially helpful in those formative years. The second was written by the board in a 2000 summer retreat because participants felt a shorter one would be more useful. The statement of purpose was created by student leaders in 1992 and presented first to the Salt Lake Rotary Foundation, who helped fund the center for the first five years. This commitment was also printed on a large wooden wall-hanging and dedicated to all the center's founders including Dick and Sue Jacobsen, the center's initial donors. When Dick was told that this pledge was being given to the Rotary Foundation and was asked if his name could be included, he said, "Just make me a dot in the right hand corner." That dot is visible on the plaque, which still hangs in the center.

The 1987 Mission Statement

"The Lowell Bennion Community Service Center seeks to involve University students, faculty, staff, and alumni in service to the communities in which they live locally, nationally, and globally. Inspired by the enduring example of Lowell Bennion, whose life-long devotion to the well-being of others guided both his personal and professional affairs, the Center engages all participants in identifying community needs, exploring possible solutions, and particularly, offering enlightened humane service. The Center promotes understanding of the nature of human communities, the benefits of cooperative effort, and the rewards found in the relief of suffering or the banishment of ignorance and fear. In a society of material plenty, those who participate in the Center's activities and projects will find meaning through community service and pleasure in the improvement of life around them."

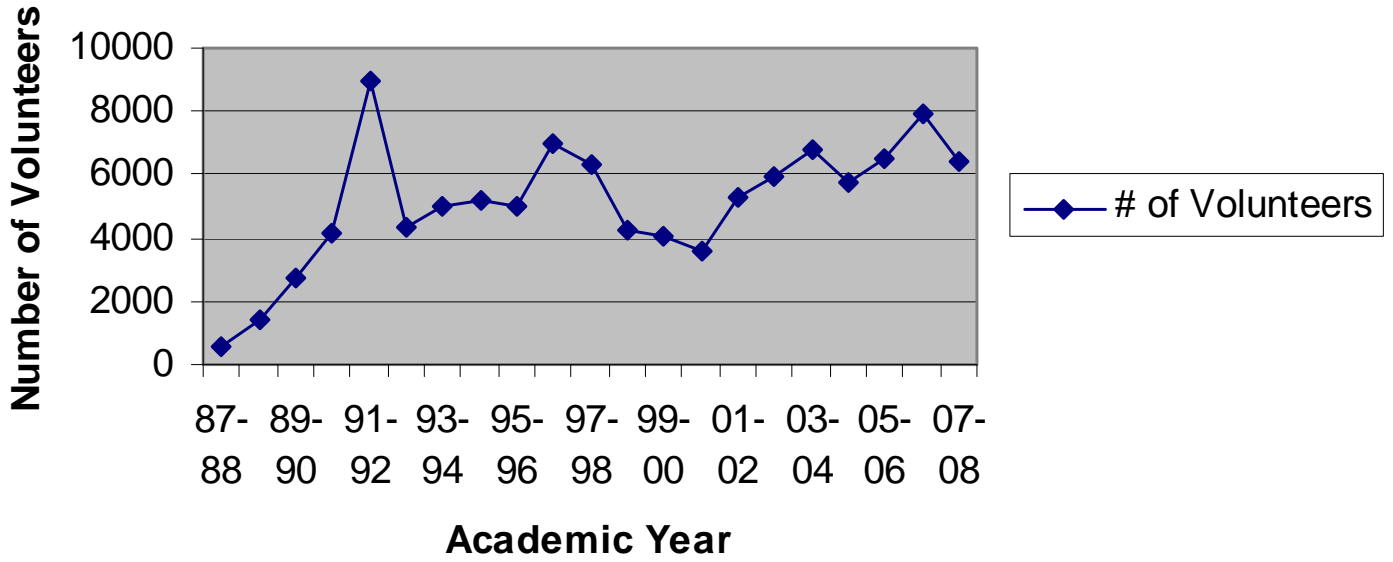
The 2000 Mission Statement

"The Lowell Bennion Community Service Center fosters lifelong service and civic participation by engaging the University with the greater community in action, change, and learning."

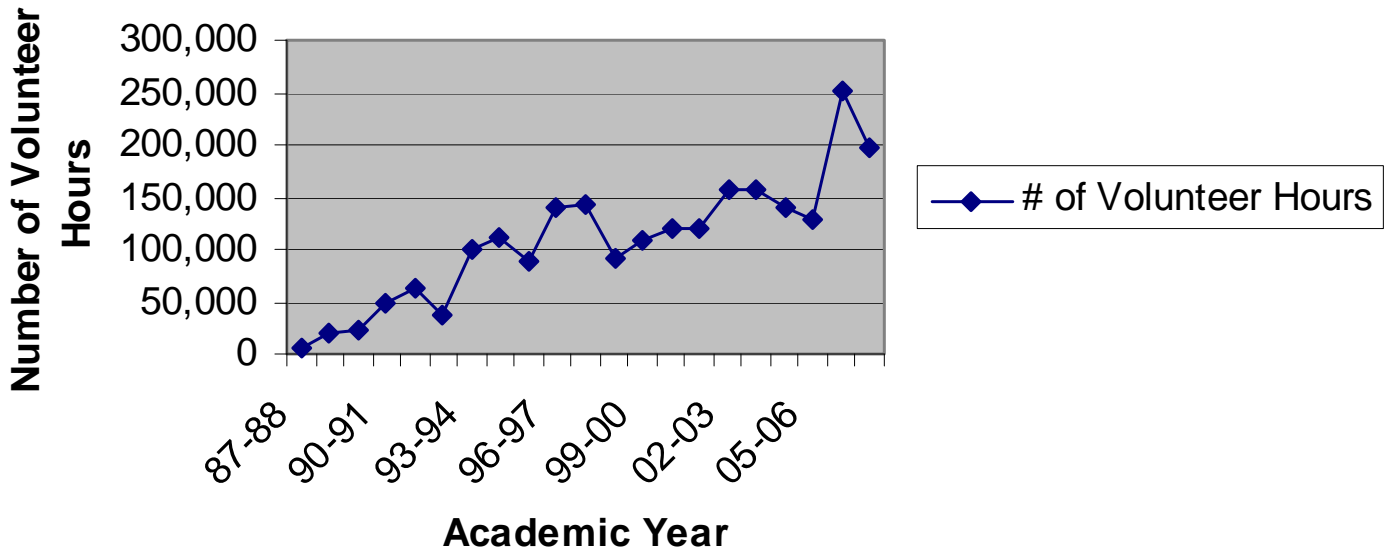
1992 Service Pledge to Our Community

"Because we recognize a gap between our society's values and our current reality and because we believe that when one person is hurting, we all suffer; then we, as participants in the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center, pledge ourselves to engage in effective action and thoughtful reflection in order to find solutions to our communities' problems, narrow this gap, and build a better future."

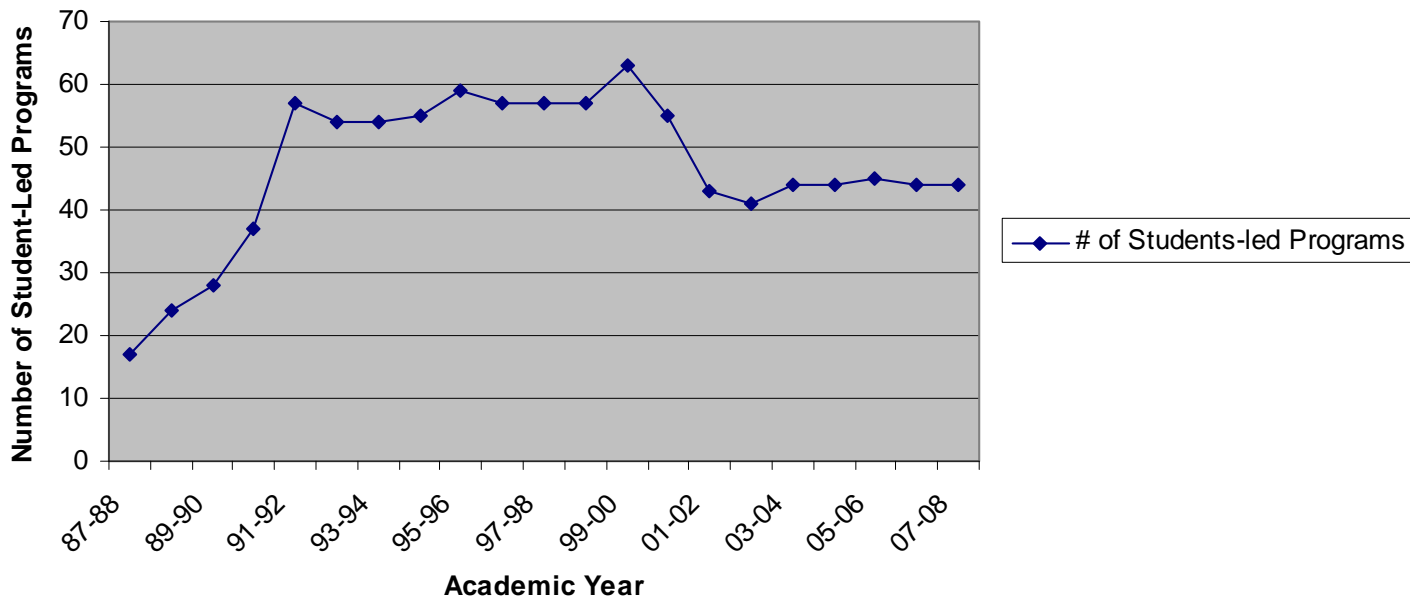
Volunteers Over Time



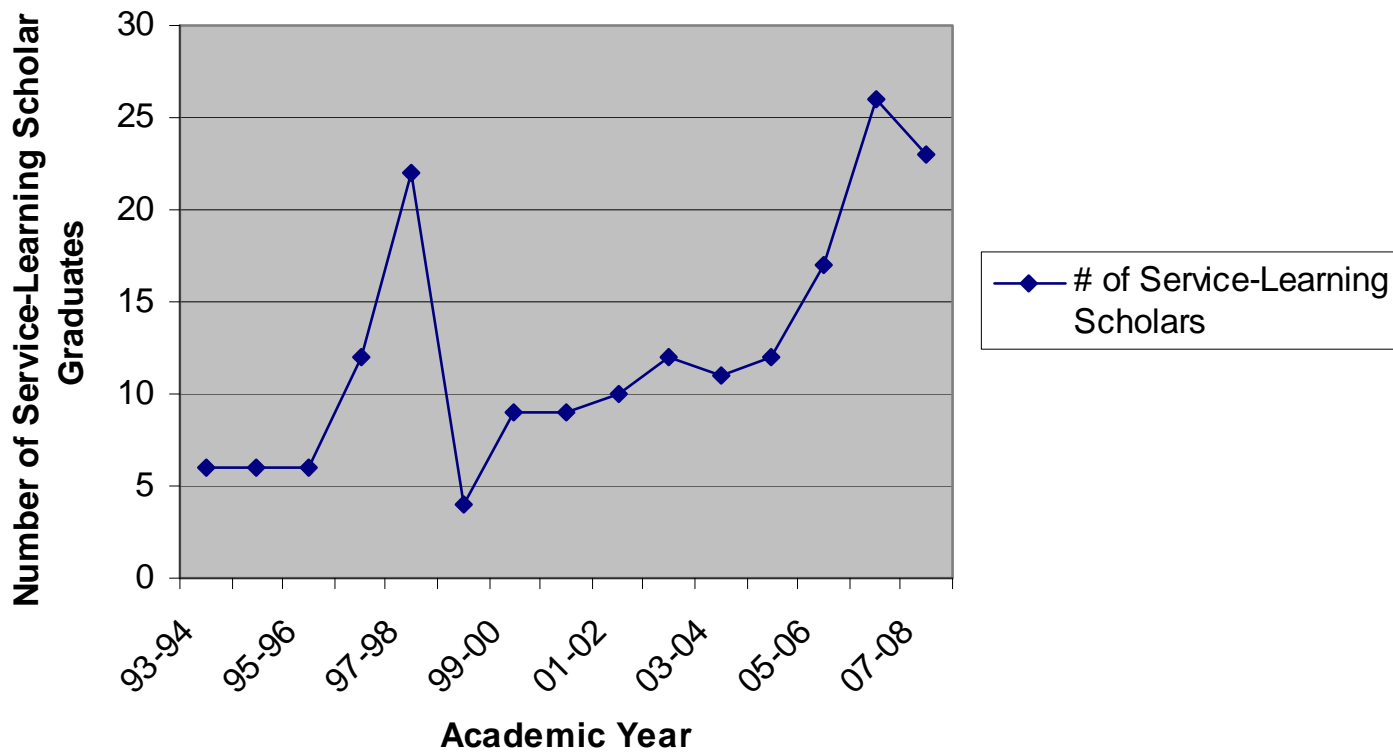
Volunteer Hours Over Time



Students-Led Programs Over Time



Service-Learning Scholar Graduates Over Time



Quotes from Lowell L. Bennion

“I am very proud to be associated with this Center at the University. People think that I had something to do with its founding; that it is my program. I am honored to have my name associated with it, but I didn't establish it, I was just one of several that worked on the organization of the Bennion Center. They thought that rather than just have an abstract name, they ought to tie something to it, so they chose my name for some crazy reason.

But, I am proud of what is being done by the Center, by you students and by Irene Fisher and her colleagues in the office. I think that it is remarkable. I think you're the liveliest group on campus.

I think that you worked out procedures very well. I attended the annual meeting of the board last week, and we got pages of procedures that you follow. Very creative. So I wonder what I could say today that would be very different, that you haven't already put into practice.

Let me try a few basic simple notions on you. I discovered one thing: that life is meaningful to the extent that it is purposeful. We get the meaning out of life by the goals that we pursue, by the purposes we pursue.

I had a little sister at the University when I was at the Institute and she complained a great deal about a lot of things. Life was boring to her. University life. She met a young man from Utah State who fell in love with her, and she with him. You should have seen the change in the meaning in her life. After that, she lived towards marriage and had a boyfriend, a peach of a guy that she later married. Life is meaningful to the extent that it is purposeful.

If some of you haven't chosen a major yet, if you get excited about a major, you will find that student life becomes more meaningful to you. I think that we understand people's behavior, when we understand their purpose in life, or in their activity. So I think, that, number one. . .I understand you're directors of programs, is that right? Most of you anyway. You need to define your purpose, and remind yourself of it regularly. It will be meaningful to the extent that it is purposeful.

My second little notion is that your purpose ought to be defined in terms of the people. The most important thing in life are human beings and what is going on in their lives, and so you should define your purpose in your project in terms of how your program is going to affect people - what people? And how is it going to influence or affect them or what's it going to do for them? Think in terms of people, the people you are trying to reach through your program, either directly or indirectly. I don't know any way that is as good to measure your program, the value of it or the purpose of it except in terms of people. Do you think in terms of people, in terms of who is going to be affected in what ways by your project? I maintain that it is meaningful to the extent that it affects people, meets some of their needs. Some very specific people.

We need to define the needs that people have in any area we are interested in. We need to spell out in our minds and together, need to spell out what the needs of people are. Our purpose ought to be to satisfy human needs of one kind or another. I guess you've done all this, have you?

Found your purpose? Know whom you're serving? And in what way you are serving them?

I think people have tangible needs and intangible. Tangible needs are very concrete, should be concrete, very visible. For example, elderly people, elderly widows. Do you know that there are hundreds of people in the Salt Lake valley, elderly people who live alone who have neither spouse nor children, who face old age and death alone. And they have concrete needs. Some of them have weeds in their yards, their walls need washing, their house needs cleaning. Some of them need to have somebody come in and prepare lunch for them or do their laundry.

I called on an eighty-three year-old lady the other month, and she said she had a neighbor who came in every day, who made her bed, fixed her lunch, helped her shower. A fifty year-old lady who . . . spent an hour or two a day meeting the very desperate needs of this little lady so she could live in her own home and have freedom and privacy and live inexpensively because of the help that this neighbor provided.

I am especially interested in the elderly and handicapped because I am there. I can't use my arms, I can't drive, can't put on a shirt or coat without help. I am not asking for any sympathy, I am just telling you I know what these practical needs are. My wife is going to outlive me. She is good enough to help me get dressed and undressed a couple of times a day. I don't know what I'd do without her. Yet there are hundreds of little old ladies in the Salt Lake valley that have neither husband nor children to do things for them. They face life alone.

In planning your work, I would suggest that you think in terms of very concrete terms: what are the needs of the people you are trying to serve? Do they have some tangible, practical needs? I think that it would be very satisfying -- I know it is -- to meet these concrete needs that people have.

Now, people have intangible needs. I have reduced them to four. I think that every human being has three or four very basic psychological needs or human needs. The first is to be accepted by other human beings warmly. To give and receive and love, if you will. To give and receive affection and security. Feeling that they are wanted and respected and loved. That's the most pressing basic universal psychological need that human beings have. I'm sure you're aware of that.

I took a box of food on the way home to a lady once, to a widow. We had a nice visit. When I left, I wished her well, and she said, "Mr. Bennion call again, will you, if only to say 'hello'." She said it with tears in her eyes. She missed somebody, anybody even speaking to her.

Do you know, it's remarkable to me that Jesus made love the most central basic virtue of his teaching. And it's the most basic psychological need. My interest in religion, in the Gospel, is because it meets human needs better than anything else. If we understood love as Jesus understood, as the Hebrew prophets understood it. Do you follow me? The most basic human need is to love and be loved, and the heart of religion at it's best, at least the Christian religion and Jewish faith, is to express love. Now if you are not religious by nature or by affiliation, you can do it just as a human being. You can know that people need to be accepted and loved. What I am suggesting is that when you go out to do a project, for instance, if you are cleaning up

a yard for an elderly widow, make sure that you not only clean up the yard, but that you give her a feeling of love and acceptance. You talk with her and show her affection. Show interest in her. Take turns, keep one of the group visiting with her all the time -- not the same one!! Don't let anyone escape the pleasure of work. Visit with her, show an interest. Realize that she needs to feel your love as much as she needs the weeds to be dug up out of her yard.

Anyway, that's the most basic psychological need. We developed a program when we were at the community services council. We called it "Befriending an Elderly" -- Befriending. We recruited families and couples and a few individuals who would adopt one of these lovely widows and become a real friend. This is not once a month, but once a week. Telephone them occasionally, remember them on their birthday, and at Christmas time. Become a very genuine friend, working at the relationship gradually, so that these people knew that at least they had one family or one friend who really shared an interest in them.

The second basic psychological need, I think, is to be productive, to be creative. We need love and acceptance, but we need to be productive to feel that we deserve and merit this acceptance. You need to try and find ways for people to be productive that you serve. And creative.

I remember visiting an aunt of mind when she was about ninety-six years old. She had rheumatoid arthritis in her knees. She was in a wheelchair. She had reared eleven children, been active in the church and in the community, had a wonderful life. She complained to me because she couldn't do anything now with her bad knees and being confined to a wheelchair. I said to her, "You don't know how much your presence means to your children and other people like me. We just love you, being in your presence. We enjoy your company. We like to listen to you." And she went on and talked about her courtship days. I knew her husband. He was my uncle. She had a great time recounting her courtship days that were productive, creative and very rewarding. I gave her a chance to talk, to recollect, to feel, to remember that she had won this fine man as a husband and had a family of eleven children, all of them able, bright, interesting people.

So don't just clean up yards. Give them a chance to talk and recollect and express their accomplishments out of the past. If you are working with younger people, see if you can give them ways to help them be creative and productive.

I think that the third basic psychological need is self esteem and sense of one's worth. You've heard about that so much, I'm sure. Dean Gibbons just mentioned it: you need to love yourself before you are free to love other people. Somebody said that if you love your neighbor as yourself and you hate yourself, woe unto your neighbor. My experience is that people who don't love themselves, accept themselves, have poor relations with other people. They're not free to give of themselves. So, we all need to have a feeling of our own worth. We need to cultivate that in the people we serve, whether it be elderly or young people.

When I ran a boy's ranch for twenty-five years, I had two thousand boys come to me for a few weeks. We had them work good and hard in the morning. In the afternoon, they learned to ride horses and play sports and fish. In the evening, we made them think. We had debates and discussions, and tried to get them to express themselves. We had twelve year old boys stand on

their feet and talk in favor of this or that. Our whole purpose was to make these boys feel proud of themselves. If you have a good feeling toward yourself, you've got it half made. If you don't, you're in trouble, I believe.

So those are the three basic psychological needs: acceptance, productivity, and self esteem or sense of worth. This sense of worth comes largely from the first two, from being productive and from feeling wanted and loved and accepted and needed.

I think a fourth need is to find meaning and purpose in life as a whole. That comes largely from these other needs. What I am suggesting to you is that when you are going to clean up a yard for a widow, that you be conscious of her basic psychological needs, show her a lot of love and attention, acceptance. Get her talking her creativity and productivity. Let her know that you have a high regard for her. Meet her human needs along with her tangible, concrete yard or house needs or whatever might be...

It doesn't take extra time as much as it does reflection and thoughtfulness to meet these human needs as well as achieving your concrete goals of your program. I think that every program ought to have some very concrete needs that you're trying to meet. Trying to help kids succeed in school or teaching the illiterate to be literate, the hungry to be fed. You need these concrete goals to justify the existence of your program. But along with the concrete tangible, have in mind these intangible needs that people have, and try to meet them along with the concrete.

I've had the privilege of being chauffeured once a week by one of the students from the Bennion Center. It's been a very rewarding experience. This summer, I had a young man come up -- I forget his name -- I had him cut lawn for a widow that I know. While he cut the lawn, I hugged her, and we met her needs, psychological and tangible. It was a fine experience for everybody.

By the way, you not only need to meet these intangible [needs] of the people you serve, but you need to be aware of the volunteers who work with you. They have these needs, too. How can you give your volunteer co-workers a feeling of acceptance? How can you make them more creative and feel productive? How can you raise their self-esteem?"

Bennion, Lowell L. "Lowell Bennion's Speech to Bennion Center Project Directors." Project Director Meeting. Lowell Bennion Community Service Center, Salt Lake City. 26 Sept. 1991.

“Frequently, noticing the problems of others makes us uncomfortable . . . we need to be patient with our discomfort so we can truly help the suffering person.”

Bennion, Lowell L. Do Justly and Love Mercy: Moral Issues for Mormons. Centerville, Utah: Canon P, 1988.

“All of us have the power to forge creative relationships. All we need is sincerity and interest in the welfare of others.”

“We need to save the heart and mind for creative things, for fine human relationships, for playing or listening to good music, for conversation, for reading, for visiting the sick and afflicted . . . This will give us a sense of control and purpose in living.”

“Our only access to the future, and the best way to determine in some measure its character, is by what we do today.”

“From the cradle to the grave, all people need someone to communicate with, someone to listen to them, hold their hands, show an interest in them . . . There is no substitute for love in life, either in giving or receiving.”

“If we thought of life as a gift, we might not demand nearly as much from it. And if we lived more graciously, giving of ourselves more freely to the well-being of others, many of our personal concerns would disappear, & life would become easier for all.”

“Doing things for their own sake is a richer experience than acting to please others . . . We should concentrate on the rightness of our actions, on the value and meaning of what we are doing, and not look to the approval or praise of others for our reward.”

Bennion, Lowell L. How Can I Help? Final Selections by the Legendary Writer, Teacher, and Humanitarian. Murray, UT: Aspen Books, 1996.

"A value which can and should permeate all other values is creativity. A creative person is one who rejoices in his own individuality, his uniqueness, and expresses it."

"Creativity does not lie in the product itself as much as it does in the process. What is thrilling and fulfilling is creative self-expression, whether anyone else recognizes or values our work or not. This is not to negate the importance of recognition. Human response to another's creativity confirms the feeling and also stimulates creative moments in one who appreciates it..."

"The act of creation is the highest expression of creativity...this is possible for most of us simple, unsophisticated persons if we face life with courage, with affirmation, dare to do our own thinking, and trust the work of our own hands."

"How shall we give vent to this tremendous urge to live? Shall we fill our days with trivialities, routine, daydreaming? Or can we learn to express our natures more significantly by engaging more often in creative living?"

"Each of us has a great need to be creative. Creativeness satisfies our hunger and thirst for meaning. It brings joy. It is a quality that can enter into and enhance anything we do with our hands, hearts, and minds. It is a worthwhile goal to consider and pursue."

"Creativeness is a matter of attitude more than circumstance"

"Creativeness has one basis, then, in education and hard work. The rest of it is perhaps a matter of faith, attitude, and imagination. Even these, however, can be cultivated. The imagination can be quickened by reflection, observation, reading, and conversation."

"Make something, do something with your hands, with your imagination, with your mind, with your soul, with your fellow men. Do something in their interest."

"The quality of our human ties determines the quality of our lives more than any single value."

"I find all persons I meet interesting, even those who seem obnoxious. I rejoice in the great diversity among human beings - young and old, of every shade and color, of diverse patterns of thinking. I am pleased to associate with youth and the elderly, with professionals and nonprofessionals, with men and women, with "sinners" and "saints". There is nothing that fascinates me quite as much as a human being - myself and others. There is no higher value on earth, it seems to me, than fine human relationships."

"Life goes on and will continue. Let it be in search of meaning. Let it be for the things that matter most."

Bennion, Lowell L. The Things That Matter Most. Boston: Deseret Book Company, 1998.