

December 16, 2010

Ms. Shanté Morgan-Durisseau
Chair, VCCW Study on the Status of Women and Girls in Ventura County
Ventura County Commission for Women
4360 E. Main Street #460
Ventura, CA 93003

Dear Shanté,

Thanks for meeting with my students and me (November 4) regarding our partnership to conduct a research project to document the status of women in Ventura County for the Ventura County Commission for Women (VCCW). I'm writing to summarize our conclusions about the process by which we will carry out the research, and develop the report to deliver to the VCCW, so that we all have a clear sense of timelines and mutual expectations.

Research content & reporting:

CSUCI will primarily be involved in Phase I of the VCCW Study on the Status of Women and Girls in Ventura County. The research itself will focus on collection and analysis of publicly available data assessing a variety of issues related to the status of women in Ventura County. The report will present basic patterns in those data in a manner that will make them accessible to and utilized by the VCCW, policy-makers in the county, and the general public. The central areas of data, and the central components of the report, will be organized around the manual produced by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) in 2004: "Assessing the Status of Women at the County Level: A Manual for Researchers and Advocates." Specifically, those components will include: demographic information; political participation; employment & earnings; social & economic autonomy; reproductive rights; and health & well-being.

For all components, we will use the most recent available data, providing an up-to-date resource for all interested readers. It is a propitious time to be conducting the research, as much of the 2010 Census data can be used. However, since Census data is rolled out in a long series of releases, it is not yet clear whether we will have access to all appropriate data from 2010.

Research & process:

The research will be conducted by a group of approximately six students in the Sociology Capstone course (SOC 499) during the spring semester, 2011, under my close supervision and guidance. As such, the project will be conducted as a part of CSUCI's broader commitment to community engagement and service learning. Service learning (whether an activity or a research project such as this) is always designed to be mutually beneficial to both the community partner and the students involved. Our partnership will deliver a report that should be of substantial use to the VCCW in coming years. Our students will gain experience in designing and carrying out research, and in working with community partners to develop a report that will be most useful. Phase I of the study is expected to be completed by the end of the spring semester. At that time, CSUCI and VCCW will evaluate how we might work together to implement Phase II, which would involve more original research, collected via either focus groups, surveys and or town hall meetings.

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Benefits to both the VCCW and to students will be maximized to the extent that we are able to work closely throughout the process. A good step in that direction would be to have students attend a meeting of the VCCW early in 2011 to allow them to meet members, and to understand the important work that the commission does in the community and how the research that students are conducting will help the commission to accomplish its work. Working closely will also help to ensure that the final report is most useful to the commission; questions will inevitably arise regarding a variety of issues, and being able to have them answered quickly will help us to keep the research pointed in direction that will ultimately be of most use to the commission.

Finally, as we discussed, an additional advantage of completing the report within the service learning framework is that we help to cultivate a new generation of women (and men) in our community who have the skills and the habits of effective community service to carry on the work of the commission. Meeting initially (and occasionally thereafter) to discuss the project will help to ensure maximally beneficial outcomes all around.

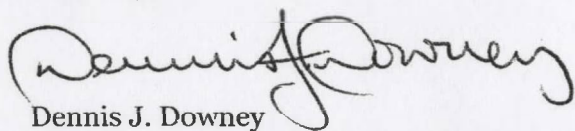
Resources:

Because the project will be undertaken by students under my direction under the auspices of a service learning course, and because the data will be drawn from publicly available sources, the primary resources necessary to complete the project are time, energy, and research skills which we will be providing. There will be no direct financial costs for the research itself. However, it is important to keep in mind that we will not have resources to print up the final reports, so we will only be able to deliver several copies to the VCCW. We will also provide an electronic copy (in a pdf file) that will allow you to print as many copies as you see fit with your own resources.

One final cost issue: in some instances, the Census charges for data (in certain formats, or for early availability). I do not foresee that being an issue in this project, but it is a possibility since I have not located the sources of all of the data that will be necessary for the analyses. If that resource issue does emerge, we will let you know immediately so that we can either find resources to purchase the data (generally several hundred dollars) or simply select to use the next best available data, or to do without the particular components relying on those data.

My students and I look forward to working with the VCCW on an important project that will provide many indirect benefits to the community. Please write back when you can to let me know if the understandings summarized here match the understandings that you took away from our meeting – or to let us know of any issues that you would like to discuss more fully.

Sincerely,



Dennis J. Downey
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