

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Approaches to Evaluating Faculty Outreach, Part II:

Demonstration Project—Evaluation of CU Contemporary Dance Works

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In 2011 the University of Colorado Boulder Office of University Outreach (OUO) commissioned our research unit to explore the evaluation needs, opportunities, and interests of faculty who have received Faculty Outreach awards to carry their expertise to public audiences around the state. As part of this study, we conducted three “demonstration projects” to generate practical examples and to bring evaluation-related concerns, challenges, and possibilities to the fore.

One of these demo projects examined CU Contemporary Dance Works (CUCDW), a week-long residency where dancers perform and work with young people in a rural Colorado community. We gathered data during the May 2012 residency in Trinidad, CO, the fourth year CUCDW has visited this area. We used a short questionnaire to gather perspectives on personal and community outcomes from local residents who participated in dance events, and their perceptions of any value added by the multi-year residency model. We also gathered both formative feedback and summative outcomes data by surveying the graduate student dancers. Both questionnaires used short-answer formats to invite text responses that were then coded using standard methods for analyzing qualitative data.

Analysis of the dancer survey (7 responses) identified 69 distinct ideas coded under three main themes. Dancers’ formative feedback identified scheduling and preparation issues that the company could address in the future and highlighted successes and problems that planners can use to improve the residency in the future. As benefits to themselves, dancers emphasized the professional preparation they received in teaching, directing, planning, and advocating for dance. Finally, they reported perceptions of the benefit they brought to the community, emphasizing new experiences and exposures for local residents and new perspectives on dance as an art form.

Responses to the community survey (42 usable responses) suggest the CUCDW has some reach within the region. Among respondents, 70% had attended 2 or more events during the week, and 73% had attended in past years. They were broadly distributed by age and regional geography.

Community respondents identified three main types of benefits to individuals in 65 coded statements: new experiences and exposures; affective gains such as enjoyment, motivation, and self-expression; and transferable benefits such as fitness and teamwork. These individual benefits also accounted for two thirds of respondents’ 96 coded statements about benefits to the community. These statements suggest a “rising tide” view of community benefit. Importantly, a third of community-related statements asserted specific benefits from the residency model: anticipation; audience growth over time; and individual development over time.

Overall, the data provide evidence of value from the CUCDW’s work in Trinidad. Benefits to individuals are magnified when they accrue to many members of the community. Dancers’ perceptions were consistent with community members’ self-report, and the dancers themselves reported a positive and collaborative learning experience and identified several outcomes that they expect to be valuable in their future professional lives. It is noteworthy that community members cited benefits that derive from the focus on a particular, rural community for multiple years. The main limitation of this study is the small sample size; we do not know if the responses are representative of community perspectives in general.