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Community Connections

Hear, Here: Visions of Downtown La Crosse

Increasing community engagement is one of the pillars of UWL's strategic plan, outlined as a "key component to our teaching, scholarly, & service mission." In ORSP, we get to be at the front lines as faculty and staff come together to develop, plan, and write grants that will help them connect to and serve the broader community. In this month's newsletter, we would like to applaud Dr. Ariel Beaujot (History) for her dedication to developing collaborations across the campus and in the community. Beaujot and her students have done a variety of projects within the community, including *Hear, Here: Visions of Downtown La Crosse* and *[art]ifact: where history meets art*. In this article, we will focus on her *Hear, Here* project.

[Hear, Here](#) is an oral history project that focuses on 1) sharing stories of local, underrepresented community groups, such as the Ho Chunk, black, and homeless communities, and 2) "externaliz[ing] the inner thoughts and stories so that people from the community would know how the community was experienced by others." By sharing the stories of the past and present, Beaujot hopes that "we might think about where our community has been, where it is now, and where we might want it to go in the future." There are street-level signs throughout the downtown area (the link above shows where you can find them). The signs provide a toll-free number that will connect a person to a "story that happened in the location where they stand." Furthermore, if a person stays on the line after the story is completed, he or she can leave their own story and it may be used at that site and online at the *Hear, Here* website (pending review of the story

with the alignment of the project). The project began in 2015 with 28 stories, and will run until 2020; the project currently has a total of 50 community stories, and Beaujot's research group hopes to reach 60 as the new goal. This project has been funded by internal funding (two Faculty Research Grants) and local organizations, including the La Crosse Community Foundation, Xcel Energy Foundation, and the Wisconsin Humanities Council.

The *Hear, Here* project has provided Beaujot with an excellent opportunity to collaborate across campus and the community, contributing to the developing and ongoing conversations about the history of La Crosse and the people who live here. The project initially began in collaboration with UWL [Continuing Education & Extension](#), where community members were invited to collaborate with Beaujot's history class to research stories, learn how to conduct ethical interviews, and create content/visuals for the website, phone system, pamphlets, posters, and grants. She also reached out to Murphy Library's [Special Collections](#), the [Oral History Program](#), and the English and Art departments to develop content for the website and phone system (the Oral History Program provided the initial 15 stories for the project). Beaujot's collaboration expanded to include additional community members, such as Downtown Mainstreet, Inc. and the Heritage Preservation Commission, with more collaborations developing at this time.

This project has had a positive impact on the work and research experiences of many of Beaujot's students. From helping with grant application development to researching, interviewing, and collecting data for the final stories to be shared at each *Hear, Here* site in the downtown area, each student has contributed significantly to each level of project development, which has given them hands-on experience that will prepare them for jobs after graduation. For Beaujot, this project has been an opportunity for the university and the community to work together, saying that it "helps us see each other as being one and the same—we as professors live in the community, [and] the community is part of the important work we do here at [UWL]."

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