



## MELLON INCLUSIVE TEACHING GRANT PROPOSAL

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The Center for Hartford Engagement and Research (CHER) seeks a Mellon Inclusive Teaching Grant to identify and implement best practices for community engagement with diverse student populations. CHER's mission prioritizes the formation of mutually beneficial partnerships with Hartford community members. These partnerships deepen student learning, in part through perspective-taking – or considering viewpoints different from one's own. This approach implicitly assumes that community engagement involves white, privileged students interacting with community members different from themselves. In reality, Trinity's student population is increasingly racially and socioeconomically diverse, and students from underrepresented groups are centrally involved with CHER programs. For some students, engaging with community partners means interacting across lines of difference, while for other students it means connecting over shared experiences. We therefore aim to foster equity and improve student learning outcomes by implementing pedagogical practices that acknowledge and celebrate how students' diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds shape differing experiences of community engagement.

For CHER, the need to address this issue became clear this summer after reviewing @BlackatTrin. The shared posts indicate that students of color regularly feel exhausted and exploited, including at times in the community engagement context. Students' learning is impeded when they feel used for the linguistic and cultural diversity they bring, without recognition of their contributions. Because students of color, first-generation students, and students with financial need enroll in community learning courses in higher proportions than white, or socioeconomically privileged students ([CHER Report 2019](#)), fostering a more equitable environment for these students is essential. In addition, prejudice toward Hartford and its residents represented a significant theme in the @BlackatTrin posts. Institutional and individual mistrust of Trinity's predominantly Black and Brown neighbors spills over into stigmatizing students of color on campus. Not surprisingly, these tensions can emerge among diverse student groups in the community engagement context, as students express different levels of comfort navigating and interacting with Hartford.

After reviewing the @BlackatTrin experiences and reflecting on our programs, CHER developed and released an [anti-racism statement](#) that committed to:

- Strengthening meaningful connections with Hartford to reduce prejudice toward Hartford residents, and the accompanying stigmatization of Trinity's students of color.
- Institutionalizing mechanisms for student leadership in CHER to better listen to the experiences of BIPOC and other marginalized students.

With these goals in mind, CHER intends to employ a Mellon Inclusive Teaching Grant to work in partnership with students to (1) identify best practices for community engagement with diverse student populations, (2) evaluate how these practices fit with Trinity's context, and (3) initiate implementation. Our collaborative group, composed of faculty and staff (Beatrice Alicea, Erica Crowley, Cynthia Mena, and Abby Williamson), will work with our new student advisory board members (Wendy Salto and Renita Washington), as well as other students, to develop an inclusive process that recognizes the importance of generalized learning from the literature and other institutions, as well as elevating the specificity of Trinity students' experiences. Thus far, our collaborative group has considered the following elements to achieve our aims:

- Partnering with students to research diverse community engagement experiences through literature reviews, institutional scans, interviews, and focus groups.
- Hosting faculty/staff workshops where students can take the lead sharing the collaborative group's findings.
- Engaging with Trinity's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Office to better support shared goals around bridging diversity and fostering inclusion.
- Promoting anti-racist dialogue and action as elements of community partnerships.

The Mellon Grant would provide CHER with a structure and resources to pursue the crucial goal of fostering equity by improving diverse students' community engagement learning outcomes.