Survey of Constituents of Creighton’s Outreach and Service

Creighton University
Office of Institutional Relations

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Ruth Tempelmann, PhD
Consultant for Survey of Constituents of Creighton’s Outreach and Service
A Survey of Constituents of Creighton’s Outreach and Service

I. Introduction

Organizations and institutions frequently publish a document citing past successes and future goals. These annual reports, laden with numbers, graphs, charts, and testimonials are important in disseminating information of interest to donors, boards of directors, other institutions, and constituents who have a vested interest in the organization. Creighton University is no exception. This particular project, titled “A Survey of Constituents of Creighton’s Outreach and Service” does not use numbers or graphs to demonstrate the levels of success for Creighton’s service and outreach programs. This study approaches students and community representatives and poses questions related to the broad theme of service via personal interviews.

Since this is not a typical format normally used for annual reports, it was a bold and innovative decision from the Office of Institutional Relations to identify a single statement from C.U.’s mission as the focus for this project; “Service to others, the importance of family life, the inalienable worth of each individual and appreciation of ethnic and cultural diversity are core values of Creighton.” The question, “Is Creighton an institution of integrity in that it truly does what is says it does, especially in the realm of outreach and service to others?” became the main theme for an ensuing sub-set of interview questions which will be conducted with individuals involved in Creighton’s outreach programs. It is the intention that Creighton will use this instrument and the results to evaluate how well it is performing service/outreach, from the perspective of its constituents.
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II. Description of Project

At the request and under the supervision of Patricia R. Callone, Vice President for Institutional Relations, a research study was proposed in which the perception of Creighton University would be asked of students and community representatives. The purpose of this study would be four-fold:

- A new brochure may be developed and used by Creighton’s schools and colleges in their recruitment efforts. A President’s report may also be developed concerning Creighton’s outreach. The information presented on Creighton’s Community Relations web site may also be revised.
- Information will be provided for Creighton’s Case Study for the “Willing to Lead” campaign statement.
- A strategic look will address Creighton’s outreach and plan for the future, especially three to five years.
- Information will be provided for Creighton’s Self-Study, Criterion Five: Engagement and Service.

An advisory committee comprised of faculty and staff members or their designees were asked to assess the value of this project and offer the names of potential contacts in the community for interviews. With the approval of this committee, a proposed set of questions was designed to solicit answers to open-ended interviews. Students and community representatives would be interviewed and given the opportunity to respond. Based on methods of sound qualitative research, this study would provide frank perspectives on how Creighton is perceived in the community, specifically in the areas of service and outreach.
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The components of the project consist of these items.

- Interviews with students, both professional and undergraduate, as well as designated representatives from community non-profit agencies addressing these questions:
  1. Do agencies with whom Creighton has an affiliation perceive Creighton to be of service to community needs?
  2. Is Creighton seen as a partner in building up the community?
  3. Are there new programs that need to be designed for new needs in the community?
  4. Who are the possible partners?
  5. Are there programs that Creighton should eliminate?
  6. What are students learning from being involved in outreach?
  7. What are Creighton's strengths in its outreach activities?
  8. What areas need improvement?

- A thematic analysis is to be provided, based on responses to the questions. In addition, overall themes that emerged during the interviews, general and specific, will be described. This analysis may provide useful information for program enrichment and program improvement throughout the university.

- A report will present information regarding the specific responses to the questions, as well as emerging themes when all interview responses have been reviewed.
III. Methods

The design for this study followed qualitative methodology incorporating interviews with open-ended questions conducted over a period of five weeks. This method was used to learn the perception of Creighton University from individuals actually involved in some area of Creighton’s service and outreach programs. The value of this type of study lies in a) the contribution which can be made to other studies Creighton has conducted, and, b) as a complement to those studies.

The opinions of undergraduate and professional students were collected on a random basis at various sites on the Creighton campus. Popular sites providing ample numbers of students willing to be interviewed included the campus mall, student cafeteria, fitness center, and residence halls. While some students stated they did not have time to participate in the interview, most students were willing to share their views of Creighton’s outreach, based on the interview questions.

Thirteen undergraduates and six professional students participated in interviews. Undergraduate students represented hometowns from Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, South Dakota, Colorado, Kansas, and Montana. Professional students identified their hometowns from the states of Nebraska, Utah, California, as well as China, India, and an African nation. Undergraduate students listed their declared majors in Philosophy, Biology, Social Work, Nursing, English, Marketing, and Greek/Roman Classics. Professional students were working toward advanced degrees in Pharmacy, Microbiology, and Law.
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Community representatives who participated in the study were selected from a list of contacts provided by the Office of Institutional Relations and the advisory committee. These individuals held positions as Executive Directors, Chief Executive Officers, Pastor, School Administrator, Coordinator, or Director of local agencies with which Creighton has an affiliation.

In-depth and face-to-face interviews were conducted with each of those identified. Nine categories of non-profit organizations were included to represent schools, health centers, churches, homeless shelters, libraries, social service agencies, and Habitat for Humanity. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the exception of one out-of-state telephone interview.

Interview questions were generated from five themes submitted by the advisory committee and re-formatted for use with student and non-profit representatives. The five thematic questions provided by the committee are listed.

1. Is Creighton an “institution of integrity” in that it truly does what it says it does in the realm of its outreach to various communities and in preparing men and women to be of service “for” and “with” others?

2. Do students see the Creighton mission of receiving an education to become a leader in one’s career or profession to be not only for one’s self, but also that their personal gifts and talents are to be used in the service of others?

3. Do agencies or organizations perceive Creighton to be of service to the broader community?
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4. Does Creighton meet your (agency/organization with which Creighton is engaged) needs? If not, why not?

5. To agencies/organizations: With what other colleges or universities do you partner? In the next three to five years, how do you see your relationships in the community changing? Do you see Creighton being a partner with your agency in the next two to three years? In the same way?

These questions were revised and as appropriate, provided the basis for the interviews. (Interview questionnaires are included in the Appendix of this report.) In order to fully address the essence of the first and second questions, which target students, three interview questions were asked of undergraduate and professional students.

- In your opinion, how does Creighton University prepare students for a life of service?
- Describe your personal level of service at this point in your life, i.e. with what service activities are you currently involved?
- How do you perceive Creighton and its mission of preparing men and women to be of service for and with others? and/or What is your own perspective on how well Creighton is preparing you to be of service to others?

The following subset of interview questions was directed toward representatives of the non-profit organizations with which Creighton has some level of affiliation.

- How involved is Creighton University with your agency at the present time?
- How do you rate Creighton University as a provider of services in the community?
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- How well does Creighton University meet the needs of your agency?
- What is your perception of Creighton University and its mission, which is providing a service to the community?
- With what other colleges and universities do you partner?
- How do you see your relationship in the community changing during the next three to five years? How do you see Creighton partnering with your agency in the next two to three years?

IV. Results

Undergraduate Student Perceptions

Themes: Opportunities, What vs. Why, Jesuit Influence, Compliments, Levels of Service, Benefits to Students, Benefits to the Community

Nearly all undergraduate students who participated in interviews spoke positively of Creighton’s preparation for a “life of service.” Several students pointed out that Creighton University was a Jesuit institution and as such, Jesuit tradition and principles were constantly stressed. Many undergraduate students commented on the opportunities available to them for becoming involved in service. The departments of theology, philosophy, justice and peace, as well as the Cortina community were especially mentioned. Starting from “Day One,” the residence halls offer opportunities for service-oriented projects, with posted announcements. Residence halls have affiliations with community agencies such as the Hope Center and students are encouraged to become involved in fund-raising or other service endeavors. Many of the opportunities are
religious-oriented. One student pointed out, “Creighton offers more service opportunities than any other place I’ve been.”

Not all undergraduate students understood the connection between the services in which they were involved or why they were encouraged to participate. One undergraduate suspected “covert” reasons for an emphasis on service, suspecting that Creighton may have a desire to improve their “numbers” in so doing. Another student stated that doing a service project felt good, but they might not be motivated to do so in the “real world.” A student expressed the opinion that “Creighton pushes for service, but does not emphasize the purpose of doing service to make social change.”

Some undergraduate students understood the importance of service, stating that “throughout history this has been stressed.” One student, a science major, stated that a life of compassion was emphasized. Another student commented on the importance of “giving back to others” and “being well rounded.” Still another recognized the importance of “being involved,” in addition to getting good grades. Most undergraduate students who were interviewed described some level of involvement in service or outreach projects at the present time, although others were “considering” getting involved or were still “trying” to be involved as much as possible. A student who is currently not participating in a service project stated that she was last year through her residence hall. Some students seemed to be involved indirectly via Greek organizations and simply by donating canned goods. One student admitted, “I should be doing more.”
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Undergraduate students who expressed a high level of involvement in outreach and service activities identified the Hope Center, elementary schools, Habitat for Humanity, tutoring, helping as a Eucharistic minister, nursing home and hospital volunteering, and coordinating and going on spring break mission trips. To a lesser extent, undergraduate students volunteered with the Red Cross, an annual peace vigil, and athletic coaching.

When undergraduate students were asked about their perception of Creighton’s level of preparation for a life of service, the responses all contained high praise. Many comments were outward focused. “I want to give back to others.” “We have an obligation to ourselves and to the community.” “There is an emphasis on living for a greater cause.” “It is all about giving to other people.” An interesting comment by one undergraduate student pointed out that “It is not just in the classroom, but outside the classroom. We are encouraged not to always go along with the media.” Another undergraduate student reflected that “Doing service work goes beyond college and giving back is a life-long process.”

One student suggested that doing some service or volunteering should be made a core requirement for graduation. Still another commented that the professors were helpful, the spring breaks were worthwhile, and “we all are encouraged to be involved, starting with freshman seminars.” Several undergraduate students expressed opinions addressing the religious aspect of service, stating that they would like opportunities outside the religious realm. Another student felt that the Greek community offered more opportunities for service than non-Greek.

Professional Student Perceptions
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Themes: Opportunities, Opportunities offered by Creighton, Personal Involvement, Future Plans, International Students

Professional students participating in the interviews responded, in general, positively to the question regarding their preparation for a life of service. Within the Creighton community, the students responded that they were encouraged to go on trips and be involved. In the residence halls, as was the case with the undergraduate students, professional students participated in food/hunger drives or homeless shelter involvement. One professional student reported that membership dues are automatically paid the first year for organizations within the school of Pharmacy and Health Professions. Other opportunities exist through St. John’s Church, located on the Creighton campus. An attorney from the “real world” (local community, not faculty) speaks to the law classes.

Indirectly, Creighton prepares students for a life of service by having students serve on boards, providing tutors and laptops, offering pro bono work in the community and in an on-campus legal clinic. Deans and professors talk to students and are visible in various service activities.

One professional student admitted that “Law School is too intense for service right now.” Another student was of the opinion that Creighton itself did not provide much, but allowed organizations to be involved.

When interviewed about their personal level of involvement in service activities at the present time, many professional students acknowledged little or no involvement. Some had been
involved in past events such as the Hunger Drive, Vista, fundraising walks, or the Food Drive, but were either “working at a paid job now” or “focusing on studies.” Family commitment was high on the list of some professional students as well as church activities. One professional student stated that he was a tutor in Upward Bound. A law student was in the Naval Reserve, which limited time for service and outreach. A foreign student felt there “was nothing for international students, but may take an internship next year.”

Professional students had diverse and numerous comments regarding Creighton’s mission of preparing men and women for a life of service to others. Professional students appeared more futuristic in their thinking than undergraduates and commented that they “may get involved in more service projects back home,” “continuing with church activities after finishing my degree,” or going to the Dominican Republic at some point in the future. Some professional students offered suggestions to Creighton such as encouraging more student participation in blood drives or health seminars. Other suggestions included a “closer connection between law school students and the community” and more assistance for international students in finding work in the community. Some students were guardedly complimentary in their perceptions, stating that Creighton “to a certain extent” is helping students prepare for a life of service or Creighton is “doing an O.K. job.” One non-Catholic student appreciated the “Ignatius Values” that were outlined the first year. That student also stated that the “professors were good people and supported a life of service-oriented work” which was in alignment with his personal beliefs.
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Non-profit Organizations

Themes: Technology, Health Care Issues, Giving to the Community, Jesuit Influence, High Praise, Hispanics, Inner City, Suggestions for Improvement, Non-Catholic, Contradictions & Caveats, History & Longevity

A total of eleven non-profit organizations were interviewed addressing Creighton’s mission of service and outreach in the community. The first question “What is your perception of Creighton University and its mission, which is, providing a service to the community?” evoked numerous positive responses. In general, comments such as “Excellent to work with,” “Approachable,” “C.U. delivers when they say,” “A terrific university,” and “C.U. is better at service than other institutions of higher learning.” The representative from one local agency commented, “C.U. puts forth significant effort to be involved with service in the community.” An executive director of a local agency offered high praise, “I have nothing negative to say about C.U. and I’ll bet most of the feedback is positive!” Another added, “We have a high regard for the institution and the individuals at C.U. It is professional and in very high regard.”

Some compliments came with caveats. “C.U.’s mission is excellent, great philosophy, but does not always execute the mission.” Suggestions elicited included “C.U.’s internal focus is good, but not so good externally” and “We have a great respect and relationship with C.U., but it could and should be better.” A comment addressing the involvement of faculty and staff suggested “The C.U. staff and administration could take advantage of more opportunities to do service on “company time” which would more fully demonstrate their commitment to service in the community.”

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Comments addressing underserved populations included “C.U. student involvement with Hispanic kids is beneficial.” Another caveat, however, is imbedded in the following observation, “A relationship with inner-city kids and north Omaha kids still needs to grow. It is important for C.U. students to have experience with lower income populations. C.U. students can be good role models for lower income kids. They (the kids) would benefit from an even deeper relationship with the college students.”

Those representatives from the local non-Catholic community who were interviewed had high praise for Creighton and its outreach programs. “The C.U. mission of service is very evident. Not only through the students who help us, but the city of Omaha also benefits.” “C.U. graduates have a strong work ethic to be of service to (our organization), the expectation is to give back to the community.”

A prevailing perception connecting Creighton with health care was evident in this comment, once again with a caveat. “The relationship between C.U. and the health center has improved over recent years and should be even better in the future.”

A generally positive perception exists towards Creighton’s technology department. “The C.U. Department of Information Technology has been very helpful at reaching out and using their expertise for the benefit of the community.”
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The Jesuit influence is evident in the comment “C.U. provides a quality education grounded in the Jesuit mission and is successful at providing quality education.” A particularly poignant observation, “What Jesus teaches doesn’t make sense until it is applied. In application, an education will make sense.” Yet another caveat, however, came with the following opinion, “Externally, the perception is that C.U. gives generously to community non-profits, though the internal perception is that ‘compulsion’ is the reason for individual donations.”

When individuals were asked the second question of the interview “How do you rate Creighton as a provider of services in the community?” most responses contained high praise. “Creighton is a credible institution, well spoken of,” “Good summer programs,” “Tries to get minority involvement with the community,” “C.U. has been great to work with,” and especially relevant, “I rate Creighton very high. They are a service-oriented institution and really care about the community.”

Some non-profit agency representatives were not particularly complimentary toward Creighton. One individual observed, “If it is a rating scale of one to ten, I rate Creighton a ‘five.’” Another stated, “We have less involvement than we used to. There is some negative perception, but only with one department.” Again, along with praise came caveats. “The Creighton picnic used to provide a nice opportunity for community members to spend an afternoon on the campus. I’m sorry that is no longer a free opportunity.”

Further responses addressing a rating of C.U. as a provider of service included the perception regarding the Hispanic community. “I rate C.U. ‘fair.’ Other than the service of education, involvement with the disenfranchised community is limited.” A seemingly contradictory
response stated, “C.U. is committed to serve. The students have developed a bond with the Hispanic family.” Also, “Involvement with the African American community is low.”

When representatives from local non-profit agencies were asked how well Creighton met the needs of their particular agency, the third question of the set, the responses included both high praise as well as suggestions for improvement. “We have a great relationship with C.U.” one representative stated. Another added, “C.U. is very cooperative and helpful,” “C.U. has served our purposes well,” and “C.U. has really stepped up by helping students and families. I think they are very strong at meeting our needs.” Non-Catholic agencies were positive in their comments, “Great things are happening in our school because of Creighton. Creighton provided the new soccer stadium for a speaker and also the Mutual of Omaha ballroom for another speaker.” The Habitat for Humanity representative stated, “Our production is up, going from five homes to six, one house each year.” A public library representative commented, “C.U. has gone out of their way to work with us in the community, a good blending of a public entity and a non-profit organization.” Another agency director felt that Creighton has “guarded” involvement with his organization, nothing very close.

The current level of involvement between Creighton and non-profit organizations was addressed in the fourth interview question. Representatives from some of these agencies declared a long and successful history with Creighton. “We have had student involvement for several years.” “We have had a cooperative effort for twenty years with a certificate program.” “Our ‘Creighton house’ project has been going for two years with the work being done in October on fall break.” “We have a lot of involvement with C.U., probably more than any other agency in town. We
have a long history of working with Creighton.” Another non-Catholic agency representative expressed positive involvement. “C.U. has partnered with the library.” Health care providers shared their levels of involvement with Creighton. “CUMC does our lab work and x-rays.” “A CUMC student in internal medicine shadows our doctors.” “We are currently working with the School of Medicine.” “We have an affiliation with the C.U. Health Sciences Library which helps with training staff and identifying grants.”

Suggestions that were directed towards Creighton in the interviews were “We would like to see a regular evaluation of C.U.’s program,” “We would like to see C.U.’s faculty join in on public policy issues,” “There is not as much involvement as could be,” and “Creighton could provide better leadership for the Urban League, both north and south Omaha.”

Creighton University is not the only institution of higher learning with which non-profit organizations have an affiliation. The fifth interview questions specifically inquired “With what other colleges and universities do you partner?” In addition to Creighton, a total of fourteen other institutions of higher learning were involved in some way with the organizations interviewed. While most organizations had involvement with several colleges and universities, two non-profit agencies stated they had no affiliation other than Creighton.

Health care providers partnered with Iowa Western Community College, Methodist College, UNMC, CUMC, and Clarkson College. The social work department at UNO is involved with one of the agencies. (The representative from this agency added that UNO deals with diversity issues better than C.U.) The Building Trades Department at Iowa Western Community College
is involved with Habitat for Humanity and builds a house every other year. Both Bellevue University and Metro Community College provide interns at an agency. (The representative from this agency offered the opinion that Bellevue University has had more aggressive recruitment in the Latino community than C.U.) Involvement to a lesser degree included Dana College, Loyola University, the College of St. Mary, and Notre Dame University.

The sixth and final question of the interview set looked at the future of Creighton and any changes that may occur in outreach with community relationships during the next three to five years. The non-Catholic affiliates expressed a desire to remain in partnership with Creighton as they proposed a “true partnership, having C.U. involved as early as possible.” “Our mission is to build safe and decent homes (Habitat for Humanity) in the community and we hope to have C.U. continue to be a partner. We also hope to add a garage as part of the Creighton house next year.” “ESL (English as a Second Language) classes will be implemented this summer, hopefully with C.U. assistance.” “We want Hearthstone Homes to come in and get involved with the parents of our school children.” “We are considering working with the Omaha Housing Authority.”

Health care providers also had forward-thinking hopes for the next three to five years. “We are currently working with Alegent trying to get a health clinic set up in our agency.” “We would like to have an administrative internship from C.U. at our agency.” “We would like more dialogue between C.U. and our agency in making decisions on health care in the community, and possible reciprocity of board membership.” “We would like the new CEO of CUMC to visit our agency.”
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A representative from an agency offered the following possible goal, “We are considering opening a computer lab to parents for training.” A lofty technological goal was suggested by one organization, “We are in discussion about making downtown Omaha between the river and the Creighton campus wireless.” Yet another stated “Our agency will become broader, metro-wide, with more involvement at the state and local level. We do not anticipate further involvement with Creighton.” An agency that anticipates furthering their partnership with Creighton suggested the possibility of a day shelter which would offer another opportunity for C.U. law students to become involved while they were in school.

Suggestions for C.U. to consider as future goals include “better services for the poor and disenfranchised.” One individual stated that Creighton could do better at organizing groups to help people help themselves. Another stated that C.U. needs to bring people together and stop “demonizing.” Yet another commented, “As long as C.U. takes public funds (such as the new parking garage) they should do a better job of giving back.” “The relationship between Creighton and the Latino community could be furthered by offering more scholarships to Latinos.”
V. Summary and Recommendations

In order to succinctly summarize the results of this project, brief responses will be provided to each of the questions posed in Section II. Description of Project.

1. Yes, agencies with whom Creighton has an affiliation do perceive Creighton to be, in many cases, of service to community needs. While most organizations interviewed have a generally positive perception of Creighton and its outreach programs, careful scrutiny of the suggestions made in this section may prove beneficial to Creighton.

2. Nearly all the organizations interviewed expressed a partnership with Creighton in building up the community. This partnership was stated with a sense of pride. Agencies expressing limited or no partnership still acknowledged the value of other “partners” and stated that there was a value to the community in the affiliation.

3. The question addressing future plans during the next three to five years is worth further exploration. Representatives from each organization responded enthusiastically regarding their hopes and dreams for the future. Especially noteworthy are the ideas pertaining to collaborative technology, mutual objectives in the provision of health care, and the value in partnering with what has become a high-profile organization, Habitat for Humanity.

4. An apparent “natural” partnership exists between Creighton and religious-based non-profit agencies, however, non-Catholic organizations, too, expressed a sense of pride in the relationships with Creighton and the contributions that have been made. Further study examining which community organizations, both religious and non-Catholic, may provide even more benefits to Creighton and the community.
5. This particular question regarding programs that Creighton might choose to eliminate was the one least directly addressed. Discreetly inquiring further into the perceptions held by at least two of the non-profit agencies may be needed.

6. Undergraduate students were, for the most part, enthusiastic in their vocal approval of outreach programs and offered impressive lip-service, especially to the spring break mission trips. Yet, the relatively small cross-section of undergraduate students participating in the interviews as well as their general "youthfulness" is a cause for hope and optimism for the future. In contrast, professional students appeared more realistic in their opinions of Creighton's outreach. In both cases, however, it is commendable that most all the students interviewed were aware of and knowledgeable about the many service opportunities offered by Creighton.

7. Creighton is a high-profile institution of higher learning and, in general, is held in high academic regard in the local metropolitan community. Being able to identify specific areas of expertise within the university and offering this expertise to the community has proven to be a strong positive attribute contributing to the overall perception by the general public. A number of the individuals interviewed connected Creighton to CUMC and responded to the questions based on their opinions of CUMC. Philosophically, is CUMC an outreach "activity" of Creighton University??

8. Obviously, not all comments and responses to the interview questions were positive, however, the majority were. Even those suggestions with negative connotations bear investigating to determine whether or not there is validity to the claims.
VI. Appendix

1. Interview Questions (Students)

2. Interview Questions (Organizations)
Interview Questions (Students)

April 2006

Date & Time:

Interview Site:

Name (optional):

Hometown (optional):

Undergraduate or Professional Student:

Major/Degree Pursuing:

(1.) In your opinion, how does Creighton University prepare students for a life of service?

(2.) Describe your personal level of service at this point in your life, i.e. with what service activities are you currently involved?
(3.) How do you perceive Creighton and its mission of preparing men and women to be of service for and with others?

and/or

(3.) What is your own perspective on how well Creighton is preparing you to be of service to others?

Any other comments?
Organization:

Representative/Title:

Date:

(Cross reference #) Question

(5.) How involved is Creighton University with your agency at the present time?

(3.) How do you rate Creighton University as a provider of services in the community?

(4.) How well does Creighton University meet the needs of your agency?
(1.) What is your perception of Creighton University and its mission, which is, providing a service to the community?

(5.) With what other colleges and universities do you partner?

(5.) How do you see your relationship in the community changing during the next two to three years? How do you see Creighton partnering with your agency in the next two to three years?