14 February 2019

**The University of Utah MUSE Project: Narrative Report on Activities in the 2018-19 Academic Year and Budget Requests for 2019-20**

**I. Introduction**

The MUSE Project is dedicated to enriching the culture of undergraduate education at the University of Utah. In carrying out this mission, we contribute to the fulfillment of the University’s major goals, especially “Promoting student success to transform lives.” We work to enhance the experience of undergraduate students by connecting them with dynamic educational opportunities and inspiring people. MUSE helps undergraduates establish productive learning relationships with professors and other campus professionals, community leaders, and distinguished national guests. We welcome our students into an energetic social and intellectual community, which offers them a small-college experience at our major research university. Through all of this we work to provide educational experiences that enable students to recognize and develop their own intrinsic gifts, discover their sources of inner strength, and flourish in their intellectual and professional work.

Our work at MUSE also aligns with the focus on student education and success in the “Utah Pledge,” especially with respect to the U’s commitment to providing students with mentorship and deeply engaged learning. At MUSE we’re excited about President Watkins’ emphasis on creating an Exceptional Educational Experience (E3) for every University of Utah student. Our MUSE office was founded as a Presidential Initiative in the 2010-11 academic year, and the vision for it among University leaders at the time accords perfectly with the newly developed paradigm of E3. We’re eager at MUSE to build on past successes and to serve the educational goals that President Watkins has set forth. A major part of her plan is educating students for local, national, and global citizenship. In “Clearing the Path,” a strategic “student success” agenda published last year, President Watkins wrote that perhaps the most important benefit we offer students at the U is “the personal connections and human interactions that form responsible, creative, and productive citizens.” This emphasis on education grounded in personal relationships evokes the deepest culture of MUSE. This is what we do and what we offer to students, both in our regular weekly programming and in our annual Theme Year events.

We’re paying special attention to the E3 research being done on student needs and perspectives by a UGS team led by Prof. Amy Bergerson. The initial results include strong student interest in “anchoring connections” on campus that give them a sense of belonging, the essential role of faculty in determining the quality of their educational experience, and a clear understanding of how academic and co-curricular experiences prepare them for their future lives. Our MUSE programming responds very directly to these student needs, and we’ll use these categories to give an account of our work at MUSE during the 2018-19 academic year.

**II. A Report on MUSE Activities in AY 2018-19**

1. Community Building: Providing Students with “Anchoring Connections” at the U

One of our most important programs in this respect is **“MUSE Casual Fridays.”** Each Friday during term we host students for a free continental breakfast and an opportunity for conversation and networking. Professors and other university professionals often attend, and the gatherings take place in the common areas of the Sill Center. Student attendance at these events continues to increase, and they tell us that they enjoy the relaxed atmosphere and the chance to meet other students from across campus. Many have spoken to us about how MUSE Casual Fridays are a break from the regular stresses and anxieties of student life. The door is open to all students for these events, and the remarkable growth of this program over the past two years indicates that it’s meeting a variety of student needs. MUSE Casual Fridays provide students with a strong sense of belonging, a convivial campus space, and a diverse and welcoming community.

**“MUSE Nights Out”** is another one of our programs that enables students to bond with the University. On these occasions MUSE invites students and faculty (and often other leaders) to attend a University event and then have a conversation about it over dinner. We recently hosted a MUSE Night Out with our friends at the University Museum of Fine Arts. The students learned about the current exhibit at UMFA, “The Race to Promontory,” and received a guided tour by the curator, Leslie Anderson. Students always enjoy these opportunities for community building and intellectual exchange, and they’re very grateful to the University for providing them with a good meal.

2. Meaningful Relationships with Faculty: MUSE Professors

Our **MUSE Professors** collegium is currently in its third year, and its members are fully engaged in providing extensive service to U of U undergraduates. Selected on the basis of their commitment to undergraduate education, these professors meet with students on a wide variety of occasions throughout the academic year. The collegium numbers about thirty, and the members represent all of the colleges at the U that teach undergraduate students. In fact professors from additional colleges are reaching out and expressing an interest in joining the group, based on their desire to contribute to undergraduate education. This year we’ve welcomed Dr. John Ryan, for instance, from the School of Medicine, and Dr. Amy Barrios from the College of Pharmacy. Both have participated actively in MUSE events and offered counsel and encouragement to our pre-Med and pre-Pharmacy students.

For the past two years, MUSE Professors have represented the faculty at the University’s “Sophomore Rise” Celebration dinner, and they attend the major fall and spring dinners for MUSE students. On all of these occasions they engage in extended conversations with undergraduates over the course of the evening, and the student feedback we receive from this contact with faculty is enormously positive. MUSE Professors also give MUSE Lunchtime Lectures, attend Casual Fridays, and meet individually with students.

Our **MUSE Internships** constitute another program in which students interact meaningfully with faculty and other university professionals. In this program we partner with offices around campus to create paid internships for students in fields that match their interests. This was our first initiative for MUSE students, and it continues to provide our scholars with remarkable opportunities for individual learning and mentorship.

3. Integrating Diverse Kinds of Learning and Preparing for the Future: The MUSE Theme Year

MUSE works to help students find their purpose and their unique way forward in life. In doing this we address the need students have expressed in E3 research for a sense of continuity between their lives in college and their postgraduate experience. One of the programs that functions in this way is our **MUSE Lunchtime Lectures**, which take place once a month at the Sill Center. The professors who speak at these events often discuss their own educational and career trajectories, and in this way students gain accessible examples of how established professionals progressed through college and into their life’s work. This often leads to lively discussions in the question-and-answer period, as well as in individual and group conversations after the lecture. The MUSE Lectures are educational events that enable students to feel more deeply about their sense of purpose and to think more creatively and hopefully about their own professional advancement.

These MUSE Lunchtime Lectures are part of our **MUSE Theme Year**, a year-long program in which we invite students to explore a specific topic. This year our theme is “Purpose,” and we’ve encouraged students to think about this though a variety of different events. Thanks to a partnership with our UGS colleague Cory Stokes, “Purpose” was chosen as the theme of a design competition called “Creative Jam” among U of U students. This event was sponsored by Adobe, and MUSE offered a presentation about purpose to the student competitors. This discussion strongly influenced the design projects that the students created.

Each year at MUSE we choose a centerpiece text for our Theme Year and invite the author to deliver a keynote address to our students and the broader community. Over the past five years we’ve been able to introduce U of U students to some eminent guests, including Justice Sonia Sotomayor and Congressman John Lewis. This year we welcomed Vice President Joe Biden, who spoke to a standing-room-only crowd at Kingsbury Hall in mid-December. Thanks to a generous annual grant from the O.C. Tanner Company, MUSE has been able to distribute hundreds of copies of VP Biden’s book *Promise Me, Dad* to students at the U. In this text the Vice President writes about the last year in the life of his son Beau, who died of cancer in 2015. The title of the event at Kingsbury was “Vice President Joe Biden on Hope, Hardship, and Purpose,” and 1,700 of the 2,000 attendees were U of U students. The Vice President reflected on his experience in college, the development of his own sense of purpose, and the values that have enabled him to persevere in the face of loss. His presentation responded directly to the need U of U students have expressed for a better understanding of the relationship between their college and postgraduate experiences. Vice President Biden was overwhelmingly popular with our students, many of whom got to meet him personally at a gathering after the main event.

We hope this overall account gives an indication of the richness and variety of our MUSE Programming in academic year 2018-19. We’re dedicated to continuing this work, through which MUSE is helping to make the educational experience of University of Utah students exceptional.