

Cooperative Consortium for Transdisciplinary Social Justice Research Proposal

Research and action supporting social justice, diversity, and equity are longstanding strengths at UofL. A more coordinated approach to social justice research, creative activity, and advocacy is necessary to exponentially increase the University's impact on society. This proposal for a three-year pilot provides critical support for interested faculty and students across 7 colleges and schools (with more possible) to build on existing social justice research initiatives and to create new transdisciplinary social justice research teams, projects, creative activities, and community-engaged scholarship. We propose to transform the University's existing strengths by uniting the many social justice-oriented programs that currently collaborate partially, sporadically, or not at all.

A group of more than 45 faculty have cooperated to propose creating the Cooperative Consortium for Transdisciplinary Social Justice Research, which will be supported by 31 University offices, units, centers, institutes, and departments. We adopt a **transdisciplinary research (TDR) model** that stretches past traditional academic multi-disciplinarity or interprofessionalism to foster collaborations across disciplines, colleges, and beyond academia to develop humanistically-infused processes for understanding and finding new solutions to complex, intransigent social problems. See Appendix 1: Impact of TDR on society and the innovative character of the Consortium. A wide-ranging group of UofL faculty are engaged in social justice research and creative activity. We believe that social justice transdisciplinary research (TDR) will create new knowledge that is socially significant and innovative raising the University's national prominence in research. The Consortium establishes a niche area of excellence in social justice TDR while better coordinating and making visible our existing social justice research/creative activity commitments, and providing a significant competitive advantage for foundation and other external grants. "Social justice" is a concept that is often poorly defined even as it is used with increasing frequency in both ordinary language and the social sciences (Jost and Kay 2010). This vagueness is prevalent in part because there is considerable disagreement among individuals about what conditions comprise social justice. For the purposes of this Consortium, we rely on philosophers and scholars such as Linda Martin Alcoff, Derrick Bell, Daria Roithmayr, and Ian Haney-López, who conceptualize how systems activate and reinforce inequality. The Consortium's conception of social justice is not merely procedural but substantive, interactional, distributive, and grounded in rights movements of the past century. The research supported here, therefore, seeks to achieve some specific conditions: freedom; the advancement of anti-discrimination law and policies; the promotion of empathy as a means of disrupting the impact of exclusion on communities of color, other historically excluded groups, and the economically disadvantaged; substantive access to societal and economic resources, such as housing, and education; and a balance of individual liberty with the common good, which means that systematic inequalities must be eliminated for the general welfare of society.

Project Background: TDR is at the forefront of knowledge creation and represents a departure from the traditional focus on disciplinary requirements in academic settings (Pohl, 2011). As Pohl (2011) notes "universities have departments, [and the] real world has problems." TDR is perceived as uniquely appropriate to address intransigent social problems in many areas such as education, the environment, basic research, the health sciences, and beyond. (Carew & Wickson, 2010). These types of social concerns transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries that limit many research endeavors. The Consortium proposes to harness the power of TDR to create innovative research-policy solutions.

Faculty in a wide range of departments and disciplines pursue social justice research or creative activity from diverse disciplinary perspectives, from Law to Criminal Justice to Medicine, from African American Theatre to Counseling to Geographic Information Sciences. There are at least two academic programs (Peace, Justice, & Conflict Transformation undergraduate certificate program; A&S Social Change Minor) and two institutes (the Muhammad Ali Institute and the A&S Anne Braden Institute) explicitly dedicated to social justice. Other initiatives, centers, and programs across many colleges and schools are dedicated to aspects of social justice-- from Public Health Practice to the Kent School to the CEHD Early Childhood Research Center. The Consortium will draw together these strengths by creating a new structure to unite these research and creative efforts, and to support and fund social justice TDR teams, thereby building a coherent social justice community of students, faculty, staff, and community.

The Consortium will promote knowledge creation through social justice TDR to complement discipline specific research and provide the platform for a "higher plane of inquiry" (Gray, 2008). It also will provide a social justice hub bringing interested faculty and students together to incubate new collaborative, community-engaged TDR on issues

of social and racial justice. The concept for TDR teams is derived from the successful community engaged research team on housing justice spearheaded by the A&S Anne Braden Institute. The Consortium, as the outward face of social justice at the University, will provide a more coherent public voice and a more accessible entry point and resource for students, new faculty and community partners. It will offer the entire University the opportunity to understand better the role of social justice research in advocacy and community education through events designed to bridge the gap between research and action. Other events and programming will support research teams with sessions on such topics as funding, creating effective community partnerships, and case studies.

The TDR teams will be positioned to create significant and innovative solutions to intransigent structural inequalities, addressing local to global challenges. The social justice research focus will directly support what President Ramsey has recognized as the University's "unique obligation and opportunity to help transform and sustain our community."¹ Constructing a broad network of scholar-activist students, faculty, staff, and community partners can create the capacity for transformative, novel solutions and the translation of research into meaningful social justice action. This resulting constellation of University scholar-activists will be primed for maximum impact and for moving our metropolitan community forward into a positive 21st century.

The power of TDR teams, bringing together faculty, as well as graduate and undergraduate students from the many units and departments contributing to the Consortium, is truly transformative. The wide-ranging support from 31 University offices, units, centers, institutes, and departments indicates the readiness to unite around a social justice TDR agenda. We have adopted a cooperative funding model to maximize the impact of this support and limited budgets. These matching funds derive from small donations, and the aim is to distribute these resources back to research teams to advance the University's social justice research. We have received small pledges from: the School of Public Health & Information Sciences; School of Medicine; Arts & Sciences as a unit and 18 of its departments, centers, institutes, and programs within A&S; the College of Education & Human Development; the Kent School of Social Work; Brandeis School of Law; and School of Nursing. Several University-wide entities also have contributed, including the Office for Community Engagement and the Muhammad Ali Institute for Peace and Justice, as well as HSC Office of Health Affairs Diversity and Inclusion. See Appendix 2: Letters of Commitment & Support.

Our University is justifiably proud of its diversity and it is key to the University's mission. It is essential that we recruit and retain a critical mass of diverse students, our future leaders, each year. Yet we face increasing competition as other universities develop strategies to do the same. This proposal—coupled with existing units as named above—substantiates UofL's abiding commitment to diversity: the very concept of social justice appeals to many families of color and those of modest income whose children can enrich our student body now and in the future. These same dynamics operate in regard to recruiting and retaining talented faculty of color and of underserved populations more broadly.

The Consortium will create structured opportunities for faculty across disciplines and schools to gather and pursue both internal and external support for their research, as well as provide opportunities for undergraduate and graduate student engagement in the funded TDR projects. One result will be vastly broader exposure to a range of disciplines for student groups such as the Harlan Pre-Law or MLK Scholars, for example. Student involvement will provide participants with a bridge from undergraduate to graduate or professional programs. Students who participate in these initiatives will be well prepared to be future change agents in their communities as scholar-activists identifying the causes and consequences of injustice and working collaboratively on resolutions.

Student social justice leaders who participate in the Consortium will learn through successful TDR case studies about the importance of creating new knowledge through collaboration, and how to effectively translate research into action with local community organizations. Funding for students will be available through undergraduate and graduate fellowships. See Appendix 3 describing the range of graduate and undergraduate student benefits. Consortium programs will prepare new faculty and graduate students for successful scholarly or public service careers by advancing understanding of community partnerships, funding opportunities, and the role of research in advocacy and policy development.

¹ 2014 UofL Carnegie Elective Community Engagement Re-classification Application: page 5.

There are other university models of social justice institutes linking scholarship, advocacy, and community across constituencies (students, faculty, staff, community) and academic disciplines, however few focus primarily on research and scholarly activity as proposed here. See Appendix 4. The closest model is the Case Western Reserve University Social Justice Institute, which explicitly recognizes that the University has “not always been on the right side of justice” in terms of gender and racial discrimination and neighborhood tensions.²

Project Scope & Approach:

The principal function of the proposed Consortium is to incubate, support, and promote faculty and student involvement in University-wide social justice TDR investigating all aspects of structural inequality. The Consortium, as a hub for social justice TDR and creative activity, would generate diverse outputs—from peer-reviewed publications to varied other products from community-engaged scholarship and creative activities (e.g., from policy papers to oral history-based theatre). Our aim is to be intentional about grounding Consortium research in the liberal arts and incorporating arts and humanities elements into interdisciplinary, inter-professional scientific research in most or all cases. The Consortium also will be a resource to incoming students and faculty regarding social justice research at the University and the opportunities to translate research into action.

The Consortium initially would pursue several areas of research focus to build on existing strengths in faculty scholarly and creative activities across the University:

- (1) **Community Justice** A) a new transdisciplinary project on Restorative Justice addressing school-to-prison pipeline and related issues; and B) a transdisciplinary project to expand the existing Anne Braden Institute Fair Housing initiative;
- (2) **Environmental Justice** – TDR teams would build on prior work of the Sustainability Scholars Roundtable;
- (3) **Emerging Social Justice Issues** - providing an opportunity to respond to current social justice issues arising locally, nationally, or globally;
- (4) **Social Justice Issues in West Louisville** - ensuring collaboration between the Consortium and the University's Office for Community Engagement and the Signature Partner Initiative.

Community Justice Initiative: This initiative has two proposed TDR projects. (A) The first project, **Restorative Justice**, will use TDR to address issues including the school-to-prison pipeline, mass incarceration, youth violence prevention, and organizational justice issues. This project will build a team to unite the interdisciplinary work currently underway in several colleges, schools, and programs at the University – e.g., Criminal Justice, Brandeis School of Law, Kent School, CEHD, and Public Health. See Appendix 5 for details on this project's expansion.

(B) The second project, expanding the **Fair Housing** research, would have several outputs including an annual State of Metropolitan Housing Report, monthly housing work group discussions, an annual forum for Fair Housing Initiatives, work with University arts and digital humanities programs to expand faculty and student-led creative products on fair housing, and hosting a public forum to discuss recent research projects and community work towards fair housing. This substantially enhances and expands the successful community-engaged social justice scholarship project organized and led by the Anne Braden Institute (ABI) and the Center for Environmental Policy and Management (CEPM) in the past few years. See Appendix 6 for details on this project's expansion plans.

Environmental Justice Initiative: Environmental Justice (EJ) addresses the historical and contemporary uneven distribution of environmental harms and benefits across communities. EJ is a major element of the UofL Sustainability initiative with work underway across several colleges and disciplines, an established base of student interest and links to the work of several faculty who are conducting various studies in West Louisville, especially the Rubbertown area, related to pollution; air, soil, and water quality, and access to healthy food as well as concerns of asbestos and vacant or abandoned properties. It is an area of research that highlights structural inequalities that are of concern in our rapidly changing city. It is anticipated that TDR research projects would require multiple methodological approaches, thus creating a wide net for faculty and student participation.

² A case study on Case Western Reserve University Social Justice Institute can be found here: <https://case.edu/socialjustice/documents/SocialJusticeAndSocialWork.pdf>

Emerging Social Justice Issues: This topical area is intentionally less defined to leave room for coordinating effective transdisciplinary research and policy responses to developments that fall outside the areas defined here. These issues might include civil liberties, voting concerns, affirmative action, immigrant rights, and health disparities. The promise of social justice TDR in health sciences at the University is discussed in Appendix 7. Other TDR projects could emerge from the newly established Brandeis Laboratory for Democracy and Active Citizenship, in collaboration with research partners from the Center for Mental Health Disparities, the Brandeis Human Rights Advocacy Project (law school/immigrant rights), and Center for Racial Inequality, could collaborate on a transdisciplinary research team.

Social Justice Issues In West Louisville: Unlike the other areas of focus, this concentration is geographic, building on and expanding a longstanding University commitment—the Signature Partner Initiative, which was established in 2007. Nowhere else in Louisville Metro are social injustices so glaring or so concentrated. Interdisciplinary social justice research projects such as those described above relative to Rubbertown and the methane lab are already in motion. A TDR focus could significantly expand the reach of existing projects and create new synergies enabled by this Consortium for the inclusion of a wider range of disciplines and in particular for new faculty to get involved.

Consortium Structure: The approach to accomplishing Consortium goals involves a cooperative funding model, pooling resources from a long list of contributors, and distributing the funding back to support faculty research and enhanced undergraduate and graduate research opportunities. The organizational structure similarly adopts a collaborative approach. See Appendix 8: Organizational Description and Chart. Designated faculty from all contributing units, departments, centers and institutes would form a Consortium Partner group. Consortium Partner members would be eligible to compete for the faculty fellowships. A lead partner working group (LPWG) would be comprised of entities that already exist and have some staffing capacity. Initially, this would include: the Muhammad Ali Institute [MAI]; the A&S Anne Braden Institute [ABI]; the Brandeis Laboratory for Democracy and Citizenship; the SPHIS Office of Public Health Practice; and the HSC Office of Health Affairs, Diversity, and Inclusion. The LPWG, charged with day-to-day management functions, would share decision making with a Faculty Council composed of faculty fellows, faculty whose time is pledged to the Consortium, and at-large faculty from the Consortium Partner group. The structure would include: a Community Advisory Council; a University Advisory Council; and an Affiliated Faculty group for faculty whose departments or units have not contributed to the cooperative research fund.

This structure creates the opportunity for numerous concrete outputs. The Consortium will:

- (1) Fund and support new research and expand existing research by creating faculty fellowships to develop transdisciplinary research teams. A total of 27 fellowships (direct grants and fellowships made possible with a PTL replacement) provided annually. See Appendix 9.
- (2) Ensure that faculty fellowship outputs include a publication submission and/or presentation in Years 2 & 3 in a local, regional, national or international forum;
- (3) Enhance student research opportunities with student fellowships for undergraduate and graduate students. A minimum of 7 undergraduate fellowships (scholarship awards) and a total of 9 graduate fellowships will be available. See Appendix 3.
- (4) Create structured opportunities for faculty to come together across disciplines and schools, and in conjunction with community partners, on a common issue;
- (5) Function as a clearinghouse for all University-wide social justice research and creative activity, providing new, expanded opportunities to garner external research funding and work with community partners more effectively;
- (6) Create a dynamic, updated, and coordinated website featuring social justice research outcomes and processes, and highlighting particular faculty/student research achievements for improved communication, both internally and with the public;
- (7) By end of Year 2 and Year 3, produce an annual publication of UofL transdisciplinary social justice research, leading to an open-access digital journal; and
- (8) By end of Year 2 and Year 3, an annual symposium event on one or more of the topical themes, including opportunities for faculty to present research-in-progress, student poster showcase, and arts and humanities components.
- (9) Specific housing research outputs noted above and similar research outputs from the RJ and EJ projects.

Projected Impact on Society & University Mission: The Consortium embraces TDR as the process to develop new knowledge and combat the most challenging social justice problems of our time. Social justice TDR provides the opportunity to build on existing research strengths at the University and create transformative, socially significant outcomes connecting research to policy and action. The pooled resources model dramatically expands the support for this work through small contributions and the research agenda. The organizational structure ensures accountability for research funding. Together, this creates the maximum opportunity for the creation of a niche area of excellence and national prominence for social justice TDR at the University of Louisville.

The Consortium directly supports four of the five pillars of the University's 2020 Plan: educational excellence; research, scholarship, and creative activity; community engagement; and diversity, opportunity, and social justice. The Consortium furthers the 2020 Plan goal of educational excellence, which is described by University to "ensure our students become responsible, informed, and engaged citizens, involved in the cultural and social as well as the economic aspects of their communities."³ The Consortium will provide students with the opportunity to work on transdisciplinary teams to investigate all aspects of inequality as well as participate in other scholarly functions including the annual symposium. See Appendix 10 for a more detailed description of the Consortium's relationship to the 2020 Plan and 21st Century University Strategic Mission.

The Consortium fulfills the core values of the University's 2020 Plan. It will pursue TDR which will require the "courage to question convention." The faculty organizing team championing this proposal is built on the "passion to break new ground" by adopting a TDR model as well as a unique collaborative-cooperative funding and administrative model. The social justice focus is designed to develop "insight to champion community."

Students who seek social justice academic programs, related student-support services, and authentic diversity and inclusion will be attracted to the work of the Consortium. These students will join a University-wide social justice community engaged in meaningful community research, outreach, education, and advocacy. Excellence in graduate education is promoted by the opportunity to participate in the collaborative work of building transdisciplinary teams and the opportunity to work with both professional and graduate students from disciplines across the University. Graduate students also will be better placed to apply for dissertation funding.

Project Management Timeline/ Expected Benefits

The planned Consortium management as described above has generated a detailed quarterly timeline for implementation, as detailed in Appendix 11. Its milestones include:

- Year 1: Convene all faculty governing/advisory bodies & selection committees, designate & assign faculty fellowships/assistantships, complete campus-wide inventory of current SJR; gather relevant faculty and implement initial community justice transdisciplinary projects, launch CCTSJR website; plan initial symposium; establish CCTSJR Community Partnership Council, and
- Year 2: Ongoing convenings continue/expand; hold first annual TSJR symposium; publish first annual compendium of research products; conduct organizational audit to assess progress; begin hosting foundation visits & expand sustainability plan; and ensure TDR teams meet goals for a publication and/or presentation.
- Year 3: Expand above ongoing activities and breadth of UL participants/partnerships; host 2nd symposium (regional); compile evidence on metrics in Louisville Metro, public schools, and other public institutions relevant to CCTSJR research of past 3 years; and focus on external funding and increasing research products

Sustainability Plan

Community-engaged and transdisciplinary research are increasingly axes of major support by foundations and philanthropists. A list of possible funders for this type of research is included as Appendix 12. The potential of this venture has been demonstrated on a modest scale by a few major five-figure gifts received by the ABI for its community-engaged social justice scholarship by leading local families in the past few years. The recent CDC grant to OPHP also suggests the potential of grounding scientific and applied research in the arts and humanities. By the end of the 3-year period, it is anticipated that CCTSJR will have demonstrated its greater coordinating and output potential in support of our metropolitan research mission and will have improved Louisville Metro metrics in terms of violence, fair housing, restorative practices, and environmental health. These outcomes will better equip UofL for external funding for inter- and transdisciplinary research moving forward towards social justice ends.

³ University's 2020 Plan, p.8.