

Expansion of Center for Children, Law, and Ethics into University-wide Center

Describe your idea in 600 words or less

This QEP proposal is to expand the current Center for Children, Law, and Ethics, based in the law school, into a truly University-wide Center. As Center Director I have found interest, requests for assistance, and student involvement from across the University. The subjects which the Center addresses, which include child abuse, human trafficking, adoption, foster care, orphans and vulnerable children, child custody, education, reproductive and pediatric bioethics, and children's rights, are inherently of cross-disciplinary and cross-professional concern. The creation of the new Social Work program particularly comes at a good time for this proposal.

The expanded Center would have relevance to Law, Social Work, other schools in Health Sciences (nursing, pharmacy, and public health), Family Studies, Education, Psychology, Business (Social Entrepreneurship), Divinity (including the Global Center), the existing Fellows and new Micah Fellows Program, Spiritual Life, Center for Congregational Resources, etc.

While time limitations have prevented me from recruiting a full proposed leadership Team for an expanded Center, at this time I am authorized to say that Professors Rachel Copeland (Social Work), Kristie Chandler (Family Studies), Amanda Howard (Psychology), and Drayton Nabors, Director of the Mann Center, support this proposal and are willing to serve as Team members if this proposal is selected. (Drayton Nabors is involved in a competing QEP proposal but authorized me to say that he would be glad to be involved if the proposal to expand the Center for Children, Law, and Ethics is selected.)

The current Center consists of myself as a part-time Center Director (I am a full-time professor), four student Team Leaders, and about forty other students. There is also an excellent Advisory Board

with experts local, national and international. My work on children's issues has brought Samford and the Center national and international attention, as I have been quoted in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, CNN, and the Tennessean, and as I have presented on children's issues throughout the United States and internationally in Brazil, Canada, the Netherlands, India and South Korea, with my articles having about 49,000 downloads from a worldwide readership. I serve as an independent expert for the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH), and International Social Services (ISS), two of the leading international organizations in the fields of intercountry adoption and children's rights. I gave plenary presentations on illicit adoption practices to the 2010 and 2015 Hague Special Commissions on the Practical Operation of the Hague Adoption Convention at the Peace Palace of the Hague, Netherlands. (These Special Commissions are diplomatic, intergovernmental events facilitated by HCCH, with about seventy nations represented at the 2015 Special Commission.) In 2014, I received the Outstanding Scholar in Adoption Award from the St. John's University Adoption Initiative, a leading inter-disciplinary forum on adoption issues. My work on children's issues provides a positive foundation for expanding the Center, as it creates local, national, and international connections with leading organizations and experts in the field.

There are many Samford faculty doing exceptional work on these important topics whose work and service could be coordinated, synergized, and facilitated through the existence of a University-wide Center. There is great potential for Samford to use the Center as a vehicle for further local, national, and international service and positive impact. An expanded Center could focus and facilitate student learning opportunities on these complex issues across the campus. Finally, given the high profile and sympathy of these topics, such a Center, particularly as refocused for the entire University, has good fund-raising potential.

An obvious question this proposal faces is the rationale of expanding an existing Center. There are four primary rationales in expanding the current Center. First, while the current Center is

administered and funded solely from the law school, and focused primarily on law students, most faculty and student interest in these areas comes from outside of the law school. Most of the students preparing to work professionally with children or children's issues are also outside of the law school.

Second, the current Center has only minimal staffing and funding, providing severe limits as to its capacities. My own role as a part-time Center Director is necessarily limited, since I am a full time law professor consistently carrying an overload teaching load, making me one of the busiest professors in the law school in terms of overall numbers of students taught. Apart from my necessarily very part-time role, there are no other faculty or staff positions associated with the Center. Center funding this year consists of a relatively modest overload stipend for myself as Center Director, about \$8,000 in student leadership scholarships, and the possibility of spending perhaps around \$2,000 on a conference or event. In addition, one of the ways in which I contribute to the Center involves keeping up a high level of activity working directly on children's issues, through publications, presentations, and extensive (generally unpaid) consultations with organizations, individuals, and experts. While I attempt to coordinate with other programs and faculty and staff in the law school and University, such as the law school's externship and public interest programs, the cadre program, and faculty in the school of Social Work and in Family Studies, obviously a Center so limited in staffing and funding necessarily has a limited reach.

Third, most who work with children or children's issues need to possess inter-disciplinary competence beyond that of any single profession or discipline, given the predominance of inter-disciplinary approaches in work with children. Hence, a Center that is truly cross-disciplinary and cross-professional is more effective than one focused primarily only on one discipline or profession. For example, the standard legal approach to child abuse allegations involves a multi-disciplinary team, under which a trained social worker or psychologist interviews the victim while a prosecuting attorney and others watch from another room. Cross-disciplinary teams then meet and evaluate the interviews and

the appropriate interventions. Health care professionals are also commonly involved in assessing child abuse allegations. Similarly, adoption and foster care in practice involves coordination between social workers, psychologists, and attorneys and judges. Interventions on behalf of poor families and children in developing nations involves cross-disciplinary expertise as well, including economics, the health care professions, social work, sociology, psychology, and law. Efforts to respond to child trafficking also involves collaboration between lawyers, social workers, mental health professionals, and health care professionals. Journalism and communications plays a critical role in advocacy on a wide range of children's issues, given the importance of mobilizing public interest, knowledge, and support on behalf of vulnerable children. It is thus very difficult to capture within a single disciplinary program, all of the relevant dimensions.

Fourth, the issues addressed by the Center, such as child abuse, orphan care, adoption, human trafficking, and bioethical issues, are particularly significant for churches and Christian organizations. Christian concern for children, as well as vulnerable, abused, or oppressed persons, families, and communities, stems from the mission of the Christian church as a vehicle and representation of the love of God in Christ.

1. How does your idea make a meaningful impact on learning? (200 words or less)

Children's issues are complex and cross professional and disciplinary boundaries. Addressing these topics merely within individual programs and disciplinary perspectives is incomplete, and thus learning is best facilitated in contexts that coordinate and make available the relevant cross-disciplinary perspectives, regardless of which discipline the student is officially studying. Internships and clinical components are also particularly relevant to children's issues. Samford already teaches about children's issues, but such could be done much more effectively if facilitated by a Center that crossed disciplinary boundaries.

Learning is also more easily facilitated on topics about which students are passionate. Many Samford students come here with a passion, and a history of volunteer experience, often international in scope, regarding children's issues. Once students truly care about something, it is much easier to engage them regarding universal learning goals, such as how to analyze complex problems from multiple perspectives and disciplines, and how to problem-solve in an effective way.

Even for students who will not work professionally on children's issues, these topics often can be an ongoing source of Christian involvement throughout their lives. Thus, harnessing the passion of many Samford students for children's issues can be a very useful vehicle not only for service, but also for learning about how to view complex problems from multiple perspectives and disciplines, and how to problem-solve in an effective manner.

2. How does your idea inspire broad participation? (200 words or less)

Children's issues are already addressed in many Samford programs, such as law, social work, nursing, education, divinity, psychology, and business (social entrepreneurship). There are a significant number of Samford faculty, students and staff interested and engaged in issues such as adoption, orphans and vulnerable children, child abuse, foster care, human trafficking, etc. The Samford community is already very interested and engaged in these issues; the real question is how best to bring more focus, cross-disciplinary synergy, and effectiveness to our efforts. A University-wide Center would be an excellent vehicle to coordinate and enhance Samford's engagement in these issues.

In addition, children's issues are a likely area of ongoing Christian service even for those students whose primary vocation will not directly involve children's issues. From that perspective, there will be opportunities for broad participation even from students whose primary academic program is not directly related to children's issues.

3. How does your idea build on an institutional strength or address a weakness? (300 words or less)

Samford has existing strengths in children's issues through the existing Center for Children, Law, and Ethics focused in the law school, the new Social Work program, the psychology department, the School of Education, Family Studies, Divinity (especially the Global Center), the social entrepreneurship program in Business, nursing, etc. The Mann Center, and the new Micah Fellows program, are additional institutional strengths which bring emphasizes on Christian service and positive engagement with human needs that are highly relevant to children's issues.

Samford's service-orientated Christian mission and environment are also important institutional strengths. There are important connections between the missions of the Center, Samford University, and the church. Samford's Christian identity and mission also bring to the University students, faculty, and staff with a passion, interest, energy, experience, and expertise in these issues.

The weakness which the proposal addresses is the lack of an effective means for providing cross-disciplinary and cross-program synergy and coordination in these areas which are inherently cross-disciplinary.

4. How will you measure the outcomes of your idea? (300 words or less)

The metrics of outcomes would include the expansion of student involvement in children's issues, expansion of relevant and cross-disciplinary curriculum, courses and training, the creation of educational opportunities and training for organizations and persons outside of Samford who are involved in children's issues, Samford engagement externally in children's issues, and student recruitment when the Center is a significant factor in prospective students choosing Samford.

As I have less experience in measurement of such metrics, I would tend to seek the assistance of those at Samford with such expertise. For example, the Mann Center recently hired Allison Heidbrink Nanni as Director of Community Engagement. Her roles and expertise would be highly relevant for

establishing baselines and ongoing measurements of some of the relevant metrics. I would also plan on consulting with the Officer and Offices of Institutional Effectiveness at Samford.

5. How does your idea complement our strategic plan? (200 words or less)

The expanded Center would emphasize student success through expanded curricular, clinical, internship, and volunteer experiences which benefit from a cross-disciplinary perspective. The expanded Center would enhance our community which is already engaged and concerned about children, by offering training and educational opportunities to off-campus organizations working with children. The expanded Center would expand our reach by more fully connecting Samford to local, national, and international efforts to address issues such as child abuse, human trafficking, orphans and vulnerable children, and bioethical dilemmas involving children. The expanded Center would ensure financial strength through making Samford a more attractive option for the many prospective students interested in these areas, and by attracting assistance from donors sympathetic to Samford's mission who are also focused on children's issues.