

**Proposed QEP Title:**

Community Engagement: A Response to Samford's Call to Serve

"You make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."  
Winston Churchill

**Describe Your QEP idea (300 words or less):**

This proposal developed as a result of Samford's 2013-2014 Community Engagement Report – the first baseline measurement of international, national and local community work at the university level. To build upon our institutional ethos of service, the Mann Center created a director of community engagement position to promote a university-wide culture of Christian service.

Creating a world-class center for community engagement will harness the talents and abilities of Samford students, faculty, and staff to meet community needs. More specifically, the goals are to:

- **Enhance student development through academic community engagement.** Increase funding for faculty/staff in the form of course development grants, engaged research support, possible new positions and faculty awards for outstanding community based scholarship.
- **Expand reporting and gauge impact.** The expanded 2015-16 community engagement report will have components implemented by an objective, third party evaluator to ensure unbiased results. This comprehensive report will include quantitative and qualitative measurements of:
  - Engaged learning and volunteerism activities not only by students, but also of faculty, staff and the institution;
  - The impact of existing credit and non-credit bearing engaged learning activities and programs; and
  - Internal and External perceptions of the university and potential areas of community need that lend themselves to Samford's strengths.
- **Create a strategic international partnership in the developing world** planned by faculty, staff and students from across the University, to help our students develop their skills in a global context while empowering others. The determination of scope and strategic location would be led and coordinated through the Office of Global Engagement and would build upon the University's strong existing global partners in the developing world. Initial exploration would include the Dominican Republic.
- **Enhance Samford's institutional identity** by effectively sharing the University's community engagement story.

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

30 years of data indicate that the strongest colleges and universities build organizational cultures that value engaged teaching, service and research. These institutions report community engagement as crucial to the education of their students (Campus Compact Annual Survey, 2015). Creating institutional

policy that fosters community engagement and the broad curricular integration of community based learning and research are key strategies used to create such a culture.

Credit-bearing engaged learning comprised 87.8% of Samford's community work during the 2014-15 year through field education, internships and service-learning coursework. By definition, engaged learning is a collaborative venture. Faculty, staff, students and community partners work together to develop and execute projects that effect positive societal change and promote student learning, confidence and a deeper understanding of the human condition (Eyler, Stenson and Gray, 2000).

Working across campus to further integrate engaged learning and research in the curriculum creates an intentional academic framework that both prepares students for real world experiences and fosters critical thinking. As a result, Samford is able to afford more meaningful and varied opportunities that animate the institution's unique identity as a Christ-centered place that educates students' minds and opens their hearts.

**How does your idea inspire broad participation? (200 words or less):**

Currently, each of Samford's ten colleges offer either academic service-learning courses or co-curricular service opportunities for students, while eight offer both co-curricular and engaged learning opportunities. Additionally, the AFROTC, Athletics, and Student Affairs departments engaged 2,283 Samford students in co-curricular service during the 2014-2015 academic year. Community engagement is embedded in Samford's ethos as a university, with nearly all students involved in service last year.

Students annually coordinate Samford Gives Back, a day of service attracting 600 Samford student volunteers in 2015. Academically, the University Fellows and Mann Center are partnering together to launch the Micah Fellows program in fall 2016 to provide a Christ-centered, community engagement honors program experience for incoming Samford students. The Office of Spiritual Life provides intentional co-curricular service opportunities led by faculty and students through their service cadres, a part of the convocation program.

Community engagement touches all facets of academic and campus life at Samford University, but we have yet to harness the transformative power of these engaged learning opportunities. This proposal has broad University-wide support, with committee members from the College of Health Sciences, Global Engagement Office, Mann Center for Ethics and Leadership, Orlean Bullard Beeson School of Education and University Advancement.

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

This proposal addresses both a demonstrable strength and profound weakness at Samford. Samford's community engagement is an institutional strength in terms of volume.

While Samford students engage in over 715,000 hours of community service, we need to institutionalize and coordinate efforts to foster the "social and civic responsibility and service to others" as described in the mission.

It is a weakness in that the university has yet to harness the transformational power of these experiences through assessment, planning, prioritization and measurement of impact. While Samford is engaged in significant academic and co-curricular community service, the University has not been strategic in aligning our resources with the community's needs to maximize our impact for both our

community partners and students. This proposal will help integrate community based learning and research more fully into all of our academic programs to make students not only smarter, but better people.

This proposal also builds on Samford's strength in developing students holistically by integrating academic learning, faith and service. Samford's commitment to both the core curriculum and convocation program are existing structures that can be used to help better integrate academic community engagement into the Samford student, faculty and employee experiences.

**How will you measure the outcomes of your ideas? (300 words or less):**

At Vanderbilt University, service-learning researchers Janet Eyler and Dwight Giles use a collection of socio-psychological scales such as personal efficacy, tolerance, and locus of control to measure values that service-learning purports to instill in students. By surveying students and correlating data to external factors, they seek to isolate the impact of service-learning on citizenship, social justice, civic responsibility and similar dispositions.

Measurement, assessment and accountability are a major part of the Community Engagement QEP. In collaboration with Samford's participants, we will develop both qualitative and quantitative measurement methods to gauge the quality and success of our programs. We will measure the efficacy of this program by evaluating students, employees and community partners.

We suggest implementing a senior exit survey for all undergraduate students that includes questions related to the number of service learning hours completed annually by students, as well as the transformation students perceive occurred through those experiences. Samford should also adopt some sort of test to evaluate how involvement in community service impacts student's moral development. For instance, students could annually take the Defining Issues Test or some other assessment and compare results as they complete service in the community.

Several different metrics could be implemented to gauge the effect of this program on employees. For faculty, we will measure the number of service learning courses and amount of research related to service learning produced by faculty. We will also track departmental funding for service learning initiatives since we hope each college will internally promote service learning as we establish the impact of experiential service learning on student learning.

When forming community partnerships, Samford will ensure that the partners will identify needs that can be met by Samford students' service. We will then develop specific, measureable, attainable, realistic and timely goals, from which we will gauge the effectiveness of our partnerships. Additionally, we will solicit written feedback from our community partners once a semester regarding the quality of our service, as well as progress made toward these predetermined goals.

Also, securing Carnegie Classification in 2020 will serve as an external validation of the quality of our community engagement programs as well as the rigor of our implementation and evaluation processes.

**How does your idea complement our strategic plan? (200 words or less):**

The community engagement QEP quite simply would become the heart of the second focus point of Samford's strategic plan – Enhance Our Community. Specifically we will focus our energies on goals a.

“Offer the love of Christ to all people” and b. “Unite the campus through student programming” through co-curricular community engagement opportunities.

The proposal also complements the first focus point of the strategic plan – Emphasize Student Success by “provid[ing] experiential education to all undergraduate students” (a. i.) by embedding academic community engagement in the curriculum of each of Samford’s ten colleges and supporting faculty in the creation and development of community based learning and research best practices.

The focus of this QEP is to serve “the communities we live in and extend our sense of community to all whom we touch” as set forth in the strategic plan. Our proposal is also fundamental to the third focus point – Extend Our Reach – through the goals c. “Expand the borders of the campus through regional, national and international engagement” and d. “Tell the Samford story far and wide.”