**Listening Session – Arts and Humanities**

**Facilitator: Dennis Lunt, assistant professor, Department of Humanities, and director of Leadership Studies   
Crying Wolf Room, Bemidji State University**

**Feb. 15, 2017**

**TOPIC:** Desire to have academic arts programs restored and/or added at BSU

* We would like to see strings brought back to instrumental music – “One of the things that draws people to our field is strings. It’s very attractive and important.” We also want to see the theater program brought back because it unites the symphony and choir. (Pat Mason, conductor, Bemidji Chorale)
* “Theater opportunities abound” in the Bemidji region, but without a theater program at BSU, local theater companies are not getting the student participation they once did. The theater in Bangsberg is an excellent facility, even if it may need updating. BSU’s biannual opera performances are incorporating drama and music on the stage, “but the lack of a theatrical component is so telling. There’s a giant hole in the heart of our artistic community, and we would encourage you to do something about it.” (Kristine Cannon, board member, Bemidji Community Theater)
* One consequence of the loss of the theater program is that in the past is we’re not getting those trained students coming forth to participate in community theater. Also, because of our collaboration, BSU in the past hosted and housed all of the actors in the summer for the Paul Bunyan Playhouse, but doesn’t do that now. “Last year the bill on that was $10,000, which is a big expense for a nonprofit.” (Season Ellison, board member, Paul Bunyan Playhouse, Bemidji)
* We don’t have as great a relationship as we once did with the theater department to get grant applications from students and faculty. “That has fallen off since these cuts have been made.” There also seem to be fewer arts and cultural events on the BSU campus than in the past. “I don’t make it here (to BSU) to have that kind of richness lended to my community, so I find it elsewhere in the community, and I think that’s sad because the arts is a great way for a university to make a bridge with the community.” (Holly Alcott, grants manager, Region 2 Arts Council, Bemidji)
* Pretty sure BSU is the region that the Bemidji area has such a good arts scene – thanks to rich resource of faculty, staff and students. When Visual Arts was removed as a separate department, there were fewer students attending the First Friday Art Walks and getting out into the community that way as a result. “We have lost a huge audience and a huge resource. … People are astounded by the amount of art we have in the community. I hope it doesn’t go away, because having a strong partner with the university was critical for us.” (Lori Forshee-Donnay, executive director, Watermark Arts Center)
* I was a freshman in 1967 with an art concentration. There were a wide range of courses to choose from in the visual arts. “Bemidji was just booming with opportunities for kids to be involved, to write, to paint, to draw, to act. … We aren’t drawing the people that are very serious about art. … There are practical applications offered by TAD but in terms of accomplished artists and career artists, we’re not drawing the same kind of students to BSU. (Lorie Yourd, board president, Watermark Art Center)
* I see the benefit of the literary arts coming from the English program, and we also see that with the music department. “We get grants for some really amazing connections between the community and BSU.” The TAD program is “very ill-defined in my mind. Not that it’s not strong unto itself, but doesn’t translate very clearly for me as a community member or as someone who is supporting people in the arts. … It’s not the individual faculty; it’s more the TAD department and how it sees itself and really what it is, I guess, compared to what it used to be.” (Laura Seter, executive director, Region 2 Arts Council, Bemidji)
* I have a question about why TAD is part of the College of Business. “It may make good administrative sense, but to the community it says something about the value of art and design because business is so heavily stressed.” (Kristine Cannon, Bemidji Community Theater)
* TAD is a very strong program, but we’re just not seeing the fine arts students coming out like before – “we’re not having that student aspect, that student component that we were also integrating into our programs.” (Lori Forshee-Donnay, Watermark Art Center)
* You can’t measure the value of arts programs based solely on how many students choose them for a major because participation in the arts contributes to well-rounded students. “Even if music and theater are not going to be their majors, the ability to speak in front of a crowd, the confidence in speaking to other people, the outlet for the emotions – the arts are just very important in everybody’s lives, whether they major in them or not.” (Vicki Stenerson, vice president, Bemidji Community Theater)

**TOPIC:** Contribution of BSU to arts in the Bemidji area

* People involved in and supporting the visual arts have a wonderful relationship with BSU. There is a reciprocity, with some things occurring on campus and some occurring at the Watermark Arts Center. Appreciate BSU’s funding of a gallery in the Watermark Art Center that will feature the Margaret Harlow ceramics collection and Lillie Kleven print collection. “That kind of support in the community is very much appreciated. We have worked very closely with BSU in preparing for this, … and it’s going to help Watermark survive and thrive.” (Lorie Yourd, board president, Watermark Art Center)
* I see the benefit of the literary arts coming from the English program, and we also see that with the music department. “We get grants for some really amazing connections between the community and BSU.” The TAD program is “very ill-defined in my mind. Not that it’s not strong unto itself, but doesn’t translate very clearly for me as a community member or as someone who is supporting people in the arts.” (Laura Seter, executive director, Region 2 Arts Council, Bemidji)
* A native of College Park, Md., who always felt a strong connection to the Maryland Terps, she has not felt the same connection to BSU living in Bemidji because of the relative lack of connections in the arts. She also mentioned the decline in awareness and participation in the international student event (Festival of Nations), which once was more of an active presentation of food and culture and more recently features students performing in English. “I really want to feel connected here and proud of being in the community with Bemidji State University, but there’s never been a real strong connection there.” “Participation in the arts humanizes us and makes us more complete. They are just as basic as math and foreign language skills. Music and the arts are so integral to who we are as human beings.” (Mary Auger, treasurer, Bemidji Symphony Orchestra)
* By not having a more robust arts program, BSU is missing an opportunity to recruit students from the tribal communities “who don’t necessarily want to travel far and might think about coming here if they want to pursue a four-year degree.” (Karen Goulet, program director, Native American Gallery, Watermark Art Center, and art teacher at Leach Lake Tribal College)
* Also are some missed opportunities in attracting high school students from the region to BSU. “There are some amazing programs in the arts.” (Lori Forshee-Donnay, Watermark Art Center)

**TOPIC:** Quality and contributions of BSU students

* When they audition for Bemidji Chorale, they are very well prepared. “The kids that have come out of BSU are fabulous.” (Pat Mason, Bemidji Chorale)
* Art/design student Hope Wall completed a branding and signage project for the Watermark Art Center. “She did a beautiful job, and it was a great learning experience for her. She had a client, she responded to our feedback and did a presentation to the committee and did an excellent job.” (Lori Forshee-Donnay, Watermark Art Center)
* There is a core group of artists and designers, including Alice Blessing, now in their 30s and 40s who came here because of BSU and have stayed. “They are really interesting, really invested in the community and really interested in making change.” (Laura Seter, Region 2 Arts Council)
* Many graduates have gone on to success. One former student when I was teaching mass communications at BSU 22 years ago was Jon McTaggart, now CEO with MPR/APM. “In that arena, our students from BSU have achieved a great deal of success and were very well prepared to contribute in the community at large, even if not in this particular community. (Kristine Cannon, Bemidji Community Theater)
* One-third to half of all BSO board members are graduates or faculty and staff with BSU. The faculty are involved with the community in other areas. “That’s probably my strongest connection to BSU is being on the board with current or retired faculty members.” (Mary Auger, Bemidji Symphony Orchestra)
* An inherent challenge in arts education at BSU is the lack of good-paying jobs in the region. “Whether it’s music, visual art or the performing arts, the number of paying jobs available to us are very few.” Students need to go to the Twin Cities or elsewhere to grow their careers. (Kristine Cannon, Bemidji Community Theater)
* But the arts are growing in the region, and there are opportunity for administrative positions related to the arts in Bemidji and the surrounding area. (Laura Seter, Region 2 Arts Council)

**TOPIC:** How BSU can contribute more to the community

* It would be helpful to have better information about how and where we can post information about events and programs on campus, and also to learn if there is some way to streamline it so it’s more consistent. (Lorie Yourd, Watermark Art Center)
* There are definitely opportunities to increase awareness on campus about arts events in the community and to increase awareness in the community about arts events on campus. (Lori Forshee-Donnay, Watermark Art Center)
* It would be good to have a way to share events on a university calendar. (Natalie Grosfield, regional office coordinator, MPR, Bemidji)
* “A lot of students don’t know what’s happening in the community because they don’t have a way of knowing what’s happening out there.” (Mary Knox-Johnson, artist Gallery North, Bemidji)
* More could be done to inform people involved in the arts of the resources and opportunities available at BSU, such as one-time use of a hologram on stage. (Mary Knox-Johnson, artist)
* It would be helpful if groups had better information on who to contact about their events. It’s a missed opportunity in educating our students. “Being an engaged member of the community is a big part of a student’s education.” (Linda Seter, Region 2 Arts Council)
* Overall, faculty and arts organizations need to develop stronger relationships. “Being able to find those connections and develop those relationships is important, and it has to be both ways.” (Lori Forshee-Donnay, Watermark Art Center)
* It can be difficult to purchase tickets to BSU arts events because they can be only ordered online. (Pat Mason, Bemidji Chorale)
* Continue to hold and support the summer theater camp for children held at Bangsberg. (Kristine Cannon, Bemidji Community Theater)
* With agreement from former BSU President Hanson, Bemidji Community Theater has held rehearsals at Bangsberg for several weeks a year. But they have declined to act on another part of that agreement, which would allow BCT to hold performances at Bangsberg, because organizers do not believe they would be able to attract an audience there. They also anticipate it would be difficult to find suitable dates because of conflicts with use of the building by the BSU music department. (Ernie Rall, board president, Bemidji Community Theater)
* Watermark Art Center hopes to enlist BSU faculty in a future lecture series that will accompany exhibitions at the center. (Lorie Yourd, Watermark Art Center)

**TOPIC:** How people and organizations in the arts can contribute to BSU

* As adults, we can model interest and involvement with the arts beyond our area of focus. We’d like to see students from across the university become more interested and involved in all aspects of the arts, and that’s true for many of us as well. (Lorie Yourd, Watermark Art Center)
* “Maybe the onus is on us to reach out and share more information and help ourselves.” (Natalie Grosfield, MPR, Bemidji)
* BSU could take better advantage of artists in the Bemidji region by bringing them in to meet with students in fine arts courses. (Mary Knox-Johnson, Bemidji)
* Bemidji Community Theater productions frequently pertain to real events in history. Performers might be able to benefit students by sharing their dramatic characterizations with students in relevant courses. (Kristine Cannon, Bemidji Community Theater)
* Graduates within the community and beyond in a variety of arts and humanities fields can be invited back to campus to how their majors and preparation at BSU helped them be successful in their careers. (Vicki Stenerson, Bemidji Community Theater)