



Southern Vermont College

Office of the College President
982 Mansion Drive
Bennington VT 05201-6002
802-442-5427

April 18, 2007

Greetings:

Americans are being affected by seismic shifts in the way community news is created, funded and presented. The impact stretches from the networks and our national newspapers down to local radio and blogs.

Increasingly, citizens are asking: "Is there a new role for institutions not previously thought of as presenters and conveners of the news?" Is there a role for educational institutions to engage with these issues in a systematized way? Many constituencies can help answer that question, and we think you represent one or more of them.

AN INVITATION

You are cordially invited to join me, Communications Director David Scribner, Academic Dean Rebecca Diliddo, SVC faculty, and members of the greater Bennington community on Saturday, May 5, 2007 from 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., for a dynamic, one-day collaboration. We'll consider and reflect on the mission, setup and educational purpose of a proposed "Center of Community Media." We'll break into three working groups to address the details. Our goal is to convene the resources and constituencies for whom accurate, local information is essential, and match them with the inspiration of experts like:

- Wally Bowen, founder of the Mountain Area Information Network in Asheville, N.C.
- Bill Densmore, of the Media Giraffe Project at UMass Amherst
- J. Barton ("Tony") Elliott, founder, SoverNet, WOOL.FM
- Tim Nulty, director, Burlington (Vt.) Telecom (broadband community wireless) (invited)

Please review the attached draft agenda and please let us know by April 25 if you can join us for continental breakfast, lunch and a goal-oriented discussion on May 5. No specific preparation is necessary; you've received this invitation because of your experience, insight and affiliations.

BACKGROUND

There are experiments in community-media collaboration underway across the country. One of the oldest and most comprehensive is the Mountain Area Information Network in North Carolina. The Media Giraffe Project at UMass studies such innovation. SoverNet's founder is now working to bind local and low-power radio stations in a web-based programming collaborative. And Burlington, Vt., is developing a municipally owned infrastructure that promises 1,000 or more "channels" for exchanging TV-quality video.

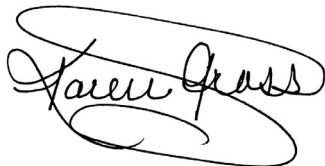
Leaders of these initiatives will be present to help put our deliberations in context – but not to lead them. A Center of Community Media might not require a permanent physical location. It could represent a collaboration, which serves rural communities of southwestern Vermont and adjacent eastern New York and western Massachusetts. It might be a replicable model for other communities. Our May 5 meeting, thought of as a "founding convention" will explore the conceptual and pragmatic framework for such a center and drive for a specific set of next steps. It may become the basis of an annual event assessing the progress of the media center, evaluating its performance, adapting to new technologies, and adopting new strategies.

Below are some available components Southern Vermont College brings to this exercise. From our perspective, one objective might be how we combine these elements and other regional collaborators into a prototype center of community media, one that will become an exemplary communications center.

- We're a small, liberal arts college (450 students) with a career-enhancing, community-oriented curriculum. We are neighbors in a town with two other colleges, Bennington College and a branch of the Community College of Vermont.
- SVC owns the only community radio station in Bennington County (WBTV 1370 AM), and the only location station programmed locally. There is no local TV station – the nearest is in Albany, N.Y., 40 miles to the west.
- The college also has a partnership with the local public-access cable station (CAT-TV) and a working agreement with a local newspaper.
- We offer our students a Communications major which incorporates radio and TV broadcast skills. The college seeks to revise and update the major to address the emerging web-based journalism/ media environment, and to provide training and tools for the development of local voices and perspectives in our increasingly less-diverse media environment.

Please let us know by April 25th if you plan to attend by emailing David Scribner at dscribner@svc.edu or by phoning David at (802) 442-5427. And as a relative newcomer to the region, I look forward to meeting and to sharing this exciting day with you.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Karen Gross". The signature is written in black ink and is enclosed within a large, loopy, oval-shaped flourish.

Dr. Karen Gross
President

**Founding Convention:
The Center of Community Media,
A partnership between Southern Vermont College and the Bennington Community**

Saturday, May 5, 2007
8:15 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Southern Vermont College

WORKING AGENDA

- | | |
|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8:15 a.m. | Continental breakfast and informal conversation, Burgdorff Gallery |
| 8:45 a.m. | Vision and reality – SVC President Karen Gross |
| 9:00 a.m. | Format/goals for the day – David Scribner |
| 9:15 a.m. | Circle round introductions and expectations |
| 10:00 a.m. | Mountain Area Information Network -- Wally Bowen
A case study in rural multimedia |
| 10:30 a.m. | Coffee break / |
| 10:45 a.m. | Assign three task groups & scribes for breakouts <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mission statement• Operational setup• Educational outcomes |
| 11:00 a.m. | Task forces adjourn to alternate spaces for discussion |
| 12:15 p.m. | Task forces return to Burgdorff Gallery for lunch and trading |
| 1:00 p.m. | Reconvene in round to hear task-force reports |
| 1:30 p.m. | “Magic scepter” think-session about ideal setup
(If you had a magic scepter for . . .) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Vision• Goals• Structure• Curriculum• Community role• Platforms• Financing |
| 2:30 p.m. | Second set of breakouts on key requirements |
| 3:30 p.m. | Reality check: From scepter to reality --
recommendations to SVC |
| 4:00 p.m. | Closing circle and recommendations: How can we implement key
recommendations; and/or where should we begin. |
| 6:30 p.m. | Optional dinner for invited participants |

PROPOSED BREAKOUT TASK GROUPS

1. MISSION STATEMENT

Starter considerations:

The Center of Community Media (CCM) is intended to be the centerpiece of the college's communications program and a major educational and communications resource for the community. What is the current condition of the media – and our relationship to it -- that make a community media resource a critical addition to the community and to the college? Is there a future for radio and if so, what form should/could it take? In conceptual terms, what kind of replicable model could this center become for other rural communities? And as access to communications media evolves as technology evolves, how does the center of community media adapt to a new media environment, the environment of the 21st century and beyond? What can and should be accomplished within a Community Media Center – today and ten years from now? Is the concept even a viable one – fiscally, academically, in terms of community needs and enhancement?

2. OPERATIONAL SETUP

Starter considerations:

The set-up: How could the components of the CCM fit together? What form could it take? What could the relationship be between the college and the radio station; between the radio station and CAT-TV; between radio, video broadcast; between all these and the Web; between area educational institutions (colleges and high schools), and finally, how could these sites contribute to the academic curriculum and, conversely, how could the communications program enrich the CCM. Pragmatically, how can these elements combine into an economically viable configuration of opportunities?

3. EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Starter considerations:

Educational outcomes: What areas should the communications program of the future address with its curriculum; what kind of expertise should students of media examine, and what kind of skills should students be expected to acquire to be able to use and work with the media of the 21st century? And by students, we should include college, high school and lifelong learners in the public. Can there be different aims/content for different partners in a shared enterprise? On the other side of the interface between the college and the community, what sort of skills/content/access can the CCM provide area citizens? What contributions to democratic discourse and exchange of ideas and information and work can the CCM offer? What access can the CCM provide, and what training can be created for ordinary citizens so that everyone has the opportunity to engage in the public media arena