

5 June 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing in support of Professor Ariel Beaujot's request to the City of the La Crosse for two years of funding for her *Hear, Here* project in your capital budget. The project is not only one that provides residents and visitors with a valuable opportunity to learn about how the community values history, diversity, and social justice, but is also an important teaching tool for UWL students, who benefit from how *Hear, Here* gives them opportunities for service learning, internships, equity and in Community/Tourism/Heritage Development. I have known Dr. Beaujot for eight years and have collaborated with her in various projects, most recently on a documentary on LGBT history for Wisconsin Public Television that grew out of four *Hear, Here* sites. This project is an important catalyst for change with broad repercussions. Beaujot's work has engaged our students and the broader La Crosse community in important community conversations about race, class, and oppression—matters of great timeliness given recent events in Minneapolis.

It is important that you understand the high caliber of Beaujot's public history projects. They have earned international, national, and regional recognition, and many businesses and community groups reach out to her for expertise in the design and implementation of public history programs that incorporate community-engaged learning. Her work allows her students to reflect on and interrogate the politics of representation and exhibit design at museums while undergoing ethical and personal development. Students incorporate these into their learning portfolios and these serve an important role in consciousness-raising and their engagement in social-justice advocacy.

Beaujot's work on the *Hear Here* project, has been recognized by the American Association for State and Local History, and has service-learning and employment opportunities for dozens of students, and stimulated important community conversations. *Hear, Here* is an innovative public history project that is an excellent example of her ability to design and oversee community engaged learning. It provided our Policy and Public History students with training in the digital humanities, public history, economic development, and heritage tourism. It engaged a number of partners, businesses, and public officials to develop an interactive, location-based mobile phone documentary project about the experience of immigrants, women, people of color, and LGBTs.

*Hear, Here* responds to emerging trends that call for more inclusive narratives of the past to overcome the erasure of minority voices and experiences and reveals how they experience micro-aggressions, repression, and efforts to suppress their stories. The project turns downtown La Crosse into an arts and cultural destination and fosters an inclusive sense of community. Students are excited to participate in a project that garners much media attention, with live broadcasts from the opening receptions that attracted hundreds of visitors, town notables and residents, as well as business people.

From the outset, *Hear, Here* has prompted important discussions and created an awareness of a past (and a present) that many members of the community ignored (or denied): marginal and vulnerable groups regularly experienced hostility around town. When someone vandalized one of the project's signs, and a business owner objected to its replacement (and lobbied to erase race from the project, claiming that his business was labeled racist), *Hear, Here* became the talk of the town. It became the subject of a number of editorials; various city and

county boards discussed it. However, it had positive community response and forced a much-needed community conversation on race that included workshops sponsored by the city of La Crosse Human Rights Commission. *Hear, Here* has served as a catalyst for meaningful conversations around race. Beaujot does the public humanities work that prepares society to embrace demographic change and to recognize the diverse historical roots and the legacy of discrimination and race-based hostility. Beaujot and her students taught La Crosse how community heritage projects can expand customer base, increase interest, and pedestrian traffic downtown. *Hear, Here* has been a transformative experience for our students and has served to identify public history as a career choice for some of them. Students are excited to be contributing to community change and to participate in a tangible project. Student feedback reinforces the transformative experience her classes provide. Hotels, tourist attractions, and other downtown businesses distribute promotional materials for *Hear, Here* and Beaujot is a frequent guest of regional cultural festivals. There is much interest, broad support, and good will for the program. Beaujot, her students, her community partners, and *Hear, Here* contributes to making the past meaningful, serves as an engine for inclusive economic development, and as a catalyst of positive social change.

I strongly recommend Dr. Ariel F. Beaujot's request for two years' funding for *Hear, Here*. It's an important and worthwhile project with significant impact and a relatively low operating cost. Given the state's financial situation, it is difficult for the University to continue to cover operating costs and I think that it is appropriate for the City of La Crosse—whose citizenry and visitors derive great benefit from the project—provide some support.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail ([vmacias-gonzalez@uwlax.edu](mailto:vmacias-gonzalez@uwlax.edu)) or via phone: 651-242-7292.

Sincerely,



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