

Advocacy Corps matches KU experts with community organizations

Partnerships look for new ways to serve

When Ed Morris received a message about the KU Advocacy Corps, he wondered how many faculty members in his department were involved in some form of advocacy. When he asked that question at a faculty meeting, he didn't expect to hear the number was 100 percent.

"I was surprised to find out all my colleagues are involved in advocacy in one way or another," said Morris, professor and chair of applied behavioral science, "But I'm sure there are a lot of departments on campus that probably have a very high percentage, but just never thought to ask."

Linda Luckey, executive assistant to the provost and of the organizers of the Advocacy Corps, said the department is a good example of the partnerships the corps is looking for. The department is the designated KU advocate for Douglas County Safe Kids, a health-care based organization that works to combat issues related to youths such as sudden infant death syndrome.

The relationship is different from traditional volunteering, however.

"The idea is to have faculty, staff and students linked up with people in the community, to be a front door for the university," Luckey said. "It's very different than doing direct service, though. The question is not 'how do you work for a group,' but 'how do you advocate for a group?'"

Morris said he foresees his department's relationship with Douglas County Safe Kids as a resource of sorts. When organization staff members have questions, he hopes faculty will be able to lend their expertise, or utilize their contacts to put them in contact with experts in the field.

The corps was formed earlier this year to coincide with the inauguration of Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little. So far, it has focused on matching community organizations with departments, faculty, staff and students on campus. The Center for Service Learning and the Center for Community Outreach are overseeing the corps. They are partnering with Douglas County United Way and

the Roger Hill Volunteer Center in the effort. By the inauguration last April, there were already 50 advocacy pairings made.

The corps will hold a meeting in October to discuss strategy, pairings and to answer questions. Anyone interested in getting involved should send their contact information to kuadvocate@ku.edu.

“We often do a day of service, and that is outstanding,” Luckey said. “But to be able to have an ongoing relationship that’s meaningful to both the community and KU is important.”