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In 1999, we gathered for the first Engagement Scholarship Consortium Conference, with the goal of moving learning out of the traditional classroom setting and into the communities that our institutions call home.

For our 16th annual conference, we circle back to where it all began and focus on further cultivating engaged scholarship as a vital component of the student, faculty, staff, and community experience.

September 27–30, 2015 • Penn State

Preconference: September 27 and 28
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Greetings, JCES Readership. It is with great ambivalence that I write this, my final editor’s message for JCES. Being editor of JCES brought much to my life. I have had the opportunity to work with an amazing group of individuals. From the students who have worked in the office to the full-time staff affiliated with the Center for Community-Based Partnerships, my job as editor was made easier because of them. During my tenure as editor, a very difficult job was made possible through the hard work of three editorial assistants, Dr. Kyun-soo Kim, now on faculty at Grambling State University, Dr. Jessica Averitt Taylor, now on faculty at Northern Kentucky University, and Vicky Carter, a doctoral social work student, our current assistant to the editor. Each of them kept us organized, on task and moving forward. They did and continue to do far more to contribute to the success of JCES than most people realize. We are fortunate to have had Kyun-soo and Jessica at critical times in the journal’s development and we are very fortunate as we approach another critical time in the journal’s growth to still have Vicky. To each of them I say thank you and you are appreciated. A special accolade goes to Dr. Edward Mullins, production editor of JCES, whose talent and artistry continue to add to the unique aesthetics of JCES. But more than that, his strategic use of visuals gives the journal a vibrant, new, and different look and appeal. His commitment to readability adds to the journal’s accessibility to all. He oversees the production of each issue of JCES and I appreciate his work.

JCES has allowed me to meet some of the strongest engagement scholars across the globe, many whom have and do serve as Editorial Board members, reviewers, and authors. Without you, the journal would not have achieved its current status in the engagement scholarship world. Also, to the board of the Engaged Scholarship Consortium I extend a sincere thank you for your support and sponsorship of JCES. Your sanction of the journal brings with it a level of credibility that is one indicator of success. It is always nice to know that the fruits of one’s labor are recognized. And last, but definitely not least, a sincere appreciation to Dr. Samory Pruitt, vice president of the Division of Community Affairs at the University of Alabama, whose vision it was to start an engagement scholarship journal, which ultimately became JCES. For some reason (about which to this day I remain confused) he asked me to be this new journal’s founding editor. Hesitant at first, I questioned his selection of me, especially considering there were others with stronger scholarship records than mine. Basically, what I heard was in our years’ working on the same campus he took notice of my commitments to students and working with communities. He knew I was committed to providing a stronger voice and presence of those often overlooked or easily dismissed. Dr. Pruitt somehow knew before I did that I would take on this challenge. Thank you for trusting me with the course of the journal, the content of the journal, and most importantly, for supporting elevating the roles of community partners and students in a scholarly peer reviewed, academic journal.

So, my farewell is bitter sweet. It is sort of like a child getting married or going off on their own. You are happy, but…. After all, what started out at as a three-year commitment, turned into an eight-year one. It is time for me to return to working with other people and with students and doing the work I was doing before I became editor.

In the first issue of JCES we promised you a new and different kind of journal with an emphasis on what we refer to as “authentic” community engagement. We talked about the transformative nature of engagement scholarship and how JCES would be a vehicle for that. I am confident that we have delivered on those commitments. I am also confident that JCES will continue to grow, develop, and be transformative under the leadership of the new editor, Dr. Nick Sanyal of the University of Idaho. I am very pleased that Nick agreed to be the next editor. He is intelligent, committed to students and community partners, balanced and innovative with a strong engagement scholarship record. He “gets it” and I have 100% confidence in his ability to lead and shape JCES as we move into the future. We also welcome Dr. Marybeth Lima.
from Louisiana State University as the new associate editor. Another scholar in engagement scholarship, Mary Beth brings a wealth of knowledge and perspective to the journal.

Enjoy this special issue with highlights from the 2014 Engaged Scholarship Consortium Conference, hosted by the University of Alberta, in Edmonton, Alberta Canada. We are pleased to be able to present this issue at the 2015 Engaged Scholarship Consortium Conference hosted by the Eastern Region (James Madison University, The Pennsylvania State University and Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University) at Penn State in State College, Pennsylvania. Take a minute to look at this issue. I am sure you will find something of interest to you. As always, we welcome your feedback and encourage you to let us know your thoughts. The editors may have changed, but the email address is still the same, jces@ua.edu.
Outreach and Engagement Staff and Communities of Practice: A Journey from Practice to Theory for an Emerging Professional Identity and Community

Susan B. Harden and Katherine Loving

Abstract

The emergence and recognition of outreach and engagement staff and non-tenure track faculty in higher education literature as key figures in the success of university outreach and community engagement are welcome developments for these practitioners. This article describes the perceptions of outreach and engagement staff at large, public research universities with decentralized engagement initiatives. The authors describe efforts to organize outreach and community engagement staff to create supportive networks, improve practice, provide professional development opportunities, and advocate for practitioner interests and needs. Community-of-practice theory offers a model for connecting, organizing, and sustaining outreach and engagement staff practitioners and their emerging professional identity.

Introduction

In the past three decades, American higher education has expanded commitments to serving the public good (Chambers, 2005; Jacoby, 2009; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). Much of the conversation has centered on the institutionalization of community-engagement (Battistoni & Longo, 2011). Driving the conversation are higher education networks, 21 new initiatives between 1978 and 2008, organized with a mission to promote community and civic engagement in higher education (Hartley, 2011). As Jacoby (2015) notes, most higher education mission statements include citizenship, democracy, or social responsibility as student learning outcomes. As a result of this call for a deeper commitment to the public good, there has been an increase in the number of the academic staff and non-tenure-track faculty members recently hired to facilitate community-university partnerships (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012). However, research institutions have been lagging their private college and public community liberal arts college and university counterparts in commitments to community engagement (Stanton, 2007). The complexity and decentralized nature of research universities contribute to uneven resource allocations of engagement resources and therefore “despite strategic steps taken by institutional leaders to advance engagement at research institutions, the level of implementation on these campuses is likely to vary considerably across units” (Weerts & Sandman, 2010, p. 703).

Consequently, community engagement practitioners at research institutions work in isolation in unique roles compared to their co-workers, often in new and innovative positions. As a result, outreach and engagement staffs have questions about their new and developing professional identity and seek deeper understanding of their work. Recent studies indicate that the work of engagement requires unique functions, skills, and values (Weerts & Sandman, 2010). Do these roles constitute a cohesive professional identity for outreach and engagement staff that can be used in clarifying professional development opportunities and assessment of institutional impact? If so, can this group of workers connect in ways that overcome positional isolation and improve their practice, both on their campuses and within national engagement networks? In this essay, the authors describe the emergence of a unique professional identity for outreach and engagement staff and a common set of functions, skills, and values in these roles at the University of Wisconsin–Madison enhanced by developing a community of practice. This model for connecting and organizing outreach and engagement staff has expanded to other universities, a national network, and an annual conference, the Engagement Scholarship Consortium.

Emerging Professional Identity

While recent research is rich regarding the impact of civic or community engagement initiatives on students (Jacoby, 2009) and faculty (Boyte & Fretz, 2011; Presley, 2011; O’Meara, 2011), the implications of the expansion of the engagement mission on staff are less known (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012). Consequently, it is instructive for staff to look at service-learning faculty for defining elements of an emerging professional identity.
identity. Stanton, Giles, and Cruz (1999) note that pioneers in service-learning pedagogy came to higher education from multiple paths (clergy, community organizations, government programs, and academia); worked independently in their institutions and often against standard norms in higher education; felt disconnected from similar colleagues at other colleges or universities; and have worked 50 years to conceptualize their approach and institutionalize service-learning as a pedagogy and field. Early service-learning practitioners shared similar characteristics including a sense of agency, independence, ethical motivations, political convictions, a desire to serve, a concern for how service was being applied in higher education, a belief in cross cultural learning, and reflective pedagogy. Feelings of isolation among service-learning practitioners created a need for institutionalized networks to share information and provide support. The Society for Field Experience Education was founded in 1971 and developed an informal community of practitioners to gather and talk, with the focus being on dialogue, “more sharing, less competition” (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999, p. 155). Emerging professional identities can develop when professionals feel isolated, yet share common characteristics, professional values, and need for a broader community.

Outreach and Engagement Staff Roles

Outreach and Engagement staffs play critical roles in advancing community engagement on their campuses. Specifically, when studied, engagement initiatives at research universities were primarily executed by outreach and engagement staff with backgrounds as practitioners and strong connections to the community partners served (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008). Outreach and engagement staff are profiled as “boundary-spanners,” as they are responsible for the interacting with partners outside of the institution and “community-based problem solvers,” implying that the skills characterizing the work of outreach and engagement staff are largely technical and hands on, managing the daily tasks involved with advancing the partnership (Weerts & Sandman, 2008, 2010). As a result of these relationships, community partners base their evaluation of institutional engagement on the quality of their relationships with whom they identify as the boundary-spanners, most often the outreach and engagement staff at research institutions (Weerts & Sandmann, 2008).

Outreach and engagement staffs also play important roles internally within their campus engagement efforts. Managerial professionals involved with engagement activities, as defined by outreach and engagement staff at the mid-level of the university hierarchy, were the coordinators of social networks of other managerial professionals on campus that helped sustain outreach efforts and maintain strong community-university ties (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012). As outreach and engagement staff can effectively build partnership relationships and utilize their social networks, the theory of communities of practice can serve as a valuable mechanism for organizing, especially on campuses that lack a centralized infrastructure to share information and provide professional development opportunities.

The Community of Practice Model

Communities of practice are “groups of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). Communities of practice help to create a sense of belonging, encourage a spirit of inquiry, and instill confidence.

The concept of communities of practice, originally developed by Lave and Wenger (1991), has been applied in broad contexts including higher education, as well as social, educational, and management sciences (Barton & Tusting, 2005; Blanton & Stylianou, 2009). As Wenger et al. (2002) note: “Communities of practice are a natural part of organizational life. They will develop on their own and many will flourish, whether or not the organization recognizes them” (p. 12).

Stages of Development

Communities of practice generally comprise three elements: a domain of knowledge, a social experience, and a shared practice that makes work within the domain more effective and efficient. Like other models of organizational development, Wenger et al. (2002) describe communities of practice as changing as they develop through stages, beginning from inception, moving through potential and on to coalescing. The first stage of a community of practice, inception, is characterized by a loose, informal social network of people who begin to discover common issues and interests and explore the idea of creating a more formal association. The greatest challenge for a community of practice is establishing a scope for the domain
around the passions and interests of founding and potential members. The group must explore a vision that imagines greater value from the collective association, after which the association begins to discuss the potential areas for knowledge acquisition and learning. As communities of practice coalesce, members grow trust in their association and formulate a value proposition for the ongoing community. They describe the later developmental stages of communities of practice as influencing the broader organization within which communities of practice are situated. As the community of practice evolves, the focus shifts from start-up to sustaining. After the stages of inception, potential, and coalescing, the community of practice develops through the stages of maturity, stewardship, and transformation. It is in these later stages that an established community of practice begins to influence the broader organization through the collective power of informed practice. As the community of practice begins to build and validate core competencies and knowledge, members begin to transfer that knowledge within their work units and the benefits of the community of practice to the broader organization become apparent. It is at this point that the voice of the community of practice begins to be heard outside of the community of practice.

Organizing Outreach and Engagement Staff: A Case to Consider

At the large public research universities where the authors practice (UNC Charlotte, UW–Madison) outreach and community engagement staff work in relative isolation from other engagement colleagues, without campus-wide coordination of the outreach enterprise, and in decentralized institutions where operations are primarily unit and discipline based. Administrative mechanisms do not exist for horizontal, cross-campus connections, resource sharing, or even communication that would benefit practitioners performing similar roles and functions on behalf of their home units.

Without campus-wide infrastructure and coordination, informally connecting with other outreach and engagement is challenging. While some of these staff members do hold titles that indicate their outreach and community engagement responsibilities, many do not, and as such are not easily identified. Examples of these staff include a precollege program specialist, the community service director at a medical school, civic engagement coordinator, manager of science outreach for k-12 students and teachers, a community-based program coordinator focused on increasing social capital, assistant director for community-based learning, an outreach specialist for a grant-funded project for high-school students with special needs, and a staff person at a dairy institute who facilitates partnerships with dairy producers worldwide. These are academic staff with primary responsibilities for building and sustaining community-university partnerships and the intention of these partnerships is not revenue generation but addressing community needs and serving the public good. Outreach and engagement staff may also have other instructional or clinical elements to their duties, but these duties are secondary to sustaining mutually beneficial partnerships that respond to community issues.

There is something ironic about the circumstance of outreach and engagement staff feeling isolated within their institutions from colleagues doing similar work and lacking in outlets for professional development. It is important to note that while the authors work with many tenure-track faculty doing engagement, often in close partnership within the community-university projects, the authors felt a difference, professionally, from tenure-track faculty. The accountability, recognition, and power structures are different between staff positions and tenure-track faculty including the professional pathway of promotion and tenure and the power embodied in faculty-governance, the privilege of academic freedom, and autonomy of the workday within tenure-track faculty positions (Kiyama, Lee, & Rhoades, 2012). While the partnership work of community-engagement may involve tenure-track faculty utilizing similar skills and values of engagement, our professional systems of advancement and power are very different. And consequently, the authors believe that these different incentives, opportunities, and privileges afforded each group impact our professional identity and the authors desired bonding across those similarities.

It is also important to note that the authors felt a difference with staff on campus whose accountabilities are not community-university partnerships. While the process for promotion may be similar, the accountabilities and recognitions are very different. The impact and benefits of community-university partnerships are relatively unseen on a daily basis by staff who work on campus.
and support on-campus operations and who observe, first-hand, the professional contributions of their on-campus focused colleagues. The lack of decentralization and infrastructure may also contribute to the lack of awareness about the daily tasks, off-campus accountabilities, and benefits of community-engagement work by on-campus staff who perform more traditional university work.

As a first step, the authors made efforts to informally connect with outreach and engagement staff colleagues at their own institutions. In informal conversations, it became apparent that outreach and engagement staff shared common perceptions and feelings around their roles, such as leading without positional power; working in an institutional structure designed for excellence in research, not responsiveness to communities; bearing the risks associated with innovative programming and non-traditional university work; and justifying the time investment required to cultivate relationships with community partners. Moreover, they were concerned that their commonly held skills, like process facilitation, collaboration and systems thinking, were too generalist in nature and therefore not valued in large research institutions of intense specialization. Even qualities that made them well-suited for both outreach and engagement work and navigating internal institutional structures like an entrepreneurial spirit, the patience to build strategic relationships, and the ability to interpret the needs and interests of diverse stakeholders were not recognized by outreach and engagement colleagues as professional assets until they began to connect with each other around their distinct challenges and skills.

The discovery of shared professional concerns of outreach and engagement staff moved from informal conversations and perceptions to the formal research when, at the October 2007 National Outreach Scholarship Conference (NOSC) in Madison, Wisconsin, David Weerts and Lorilee Sandmann (2007) presented their research on boundary-spanning roles in higher education and outlined the predominant role that outreach and engagement staff play as the boundary-spanners at research universities. Weerts and Sandman engaged the audience in generating a long list of skills and roles like “catalyst, surrogate, translator, agitator of the system,” terms not commonly found in university job classifications and yet so descriptive of the authors’ day-to-day work in building and sustaining university-community partnerships. The authors applied the theory of boundary spanning, originally used by Weerts and Sandmann to characterize the facilitation of community-university partnerships, to define the identity of an emerging professional community: university outreach and community engagement staff who facilitate projects, programs, services, research, and relationships with community partners, with a set of shared knowledge, skills and values and a professional identity distinct from that of tenure-track faculty members.

Organizing the Organizers and Creating A Community of Community-Builders

This sense of a new professional identity called boundary-spanners and evidence of the critical role that staff and non-tenure-track faculty members play in the university outreach and engagement enterprise created a foundation for community building which eventually involved the authors. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the author initiated an invitation for formal connections with other outreach and engagement staff members, hoping that by gathering together, they would offer support to each other and improve their service to community partners and to the university. A call for participants attracted 35 interested staff members from across campus. Recognizing that the development of a campus-wide structure for boundary spanners would require additional support and expertise, a co-author agreed to share some of the leadership tasks.

The unique challenge of trying to organize outreach and engagement whose professional identities are emerging led to the effort to coalesce around goals rather than boundary-spanning roles. When the 35 who initially expressed interest in the network were surveyed, a broad range of outreach and engagement roles were represented, but 100% agreement was reached on the proposed goals of the group, which were to:

- facilitate communication and collaboration,
- share information and resources,
- improve the quality of outreach and engagement staff’s work,
- support professional development,
- improve the ability of the campus to meet community needs,
- advocate for campus decisions and policies that support partnerships and outreach work.
As the organization developed around these goals, a trusted advisor from the Office of Human Resource Development was enlisted to support the development of the network, which he identified as a peer-to-peer self-organizing system, better known as a “community of practice.”

As stated earlier, communities of practice can develop organically as was the case at The University of Wisconsin-Madison. According to the theory, the development of the community of practice network indicates that the group is following a predictable theoretical trajectory for the community of practice model and is coalescing around something real, important and worthwhile. All of the group’s initial goals were typical of community-of-practice functions, though that was not known by the authors at the earliest stages of formation. Consequently, those goals informally bound the group together as a community of practice before members had a clear understanding of their common roles, knowledge, and skills. The goals also served to organize members around their professional struggles rather than their strengths, and gave the group its first indication that existing challenges should be addressed instead of simply creating new resources.

While at the time the group leaders had not explored community-of-practice theory sufficiently to understand the developmental tasks in which they were engaged, early attempts to establish similar experiences, corresponding domains of knowledge, and shared practice led to the identification of a common set of professional challenges and opportunities:

- professional identity and isolation,
- the power of innovation and the burden of bureaucracy,
- the challenge of measuring and describing progress and success,
- the risks and benefits of collaboration,
- functional leadership versus positional power.

Over the next two years, the community of practice examined these challenges, reframed some as opportunities, and began to identify common functions, tasks, and roles, as shown in Table 1, by analyzing the themes that emerged from conversations at monthly meetings, informal focus groups, and other network activities. Similar to the list generated at the NOSC workshop on boundary-spanning roles (Weerts & Sandmann, 2007), these shared practices would prove to be a powerful organizing tool, and the most persuasive way to communicate shared purpose and professional identity to potential members (Table 1).

Articulating these functions, roles and skills has helped determine professional development needs, suggested content for new staff orientation and onboarding, offered guidance in recruitment and hiring, and perhaps most importantly, has given legitimacy to the nimble, generalist, and relational strengths of outreach and engagement practitioners. This early work brought the community of practice to the point at which the community of practices’ domain could clearly be identified as “the art and science of community-university partnerships, outreach and engagement” (Loving, 2011).

**From Network to System of Influence**

As the community of practice coalesced, two main goals were identified: to create a horizontal structure across campus units in order to support engagement professionals in achieving the community-of-practice functions mentioned above, and to ensure vertical alignment in the implementation of the outreach and engagement mission of the university. The latter includes increasing campus capacity to respond to community priorities; supporting structures and policies that sustain quality community engagement; addressing the challenges inherent in leading without positional power; and engaging boundary spanners at all levels in leadership, planning and decision making (Figure 1).

Weerts and Sandmann (2010) make the point that community-university boundary spanners operate from all levels of the institutional hierarchy. While the community of practice staff network is built on the needs and interests of “community-based problem solvers” or outreach and community engagement staff practitioners, effective engagement requires that the multiple types of boundary spanners within campus align their priorities and internal communication (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Consequently, administrators should know what practitioners are doing and vice versa, and their efforts should pursue the same broad mission and goals and reflect shared values around community-university partnerships. The desire of community of practice leaders to improve institutional alignment was true to boundary-spanning theory.
Emerging Identity and Community at a National Level

Having successfully connected and organized at the local institutional level, community of practice leaders pursued the broader goal of connecting, organizing, and affecting change on a national level. The National Outreach Scholarship Conference served as the venue, as a bow of acknowledgment to the Weerts and Sandman 2007 session on boundary spanning roles that had first inspired campus-based organizing. At the 2009 National Outreach Scholarship Conference at the University of Georgia, the co-author initiated a meeting of outreach and engagement staff and non-tenure-track faculty members who wished to connect with one another and establish themselves as a conference constituency. Fifteen attendees from eight institutions gathered to explore the establishment of formal networking, presenting, and professional development opportunities for outreach and engagement professionals using the National Outreach Scholarship Conference as an annual gathering place. Like the communities of practice staff network, the attendees developed a set of goals relating both to the “horizontal” needs of the staff—improving practice—and the resulting “vertical” institutional imperatives as modeled in Figure 1. Five clear goals emerged:

1) Establish an identity and voice in the national outreach community.
2) Offer targeted professional development opportunities.
3) Provide a national venue for sharing the work of outreach and engagement staff.
4) Celebrate the distinct roles and accomplishments of outreach and engagement staff.
5) Create a national community of practice for engagement professionals.

Table 1. Outreach and Engagement Staff Boundary Spanners: Functions, Tasks, and Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Sample Tasks</th>
<th>Sample Roles</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relate</td>
<td>Bring people together</td>
<td>Network/Connector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Understand interests</td>
<td>Matchmaker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gather information</td>
<td>Concierge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovate</td>
<td>Reframe issues</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
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<td>Develop new approaches</td>
<td>Innovator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Test new ideas</td>
<td>Visionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultivate</td>
<td>Build capacity</td>
<td>Community organizer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Prepare environment</td>
<td>Promoter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Develop leadership</td>
<td>Catalyst</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Build infrastructure</td>
<td>Nurturer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborate</td>
<td>Structure partnerships</td>
<td>Translator/Interpreter</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Create inclusive environments</td>
<td>Broker</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Maintain relationships</td>
<td>Gatekeeper</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Negotiate power</td>
<td>Mediator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitate</td>
<td>Lead and design processes</td>
<td>Problem solver</td>
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<td>Advance initiatives</td>
<td>Surrogate</td>
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<td>Evaluate</td>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Meaning maker</td>
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<td>Document</td>
<td>Storyteller</td>
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<td>Describe</td>
<td>Program evaluator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicate</td>
<td>Understand</td>
<td>Publicist</td>
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<td>Share Exchange</td>
<td>Reporter</td>
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<td>Media specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Educate</td>
<td>Learn</td>
<td>Student</td>
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<td>Apply</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Disseminate</td>
<td>Trainer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advocate</td>
<td>Change systems</td>
<td>Agitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Develop resources</td>
<td>Persuader</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Protect partnerships</td>
<td>Protector</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ensure equity</td>
<td>Fundraiser</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrate</td>
<td>Demonstrate accountability</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Manage resources</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
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<td>Manager</td>
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Compiled in April 2009 from CPO Staff Network meeting notes, revised October 2009 by participants in CPO professional development workshop, revised October 2010 by participants in the national Outreach and Engagement Staff Workshop.

Figure 1. Community Partnerships and Outreach Staff Network Purpose and Structure

Achieve Vertical Alignment
- Structures & policies
- Leadership
- Planning & decision making
- Communication
- Responsiveness to communities

Facilitate Horizontal Connections
- Collaboration & innovation
- Resource & information sharing
- Learning & professional development
- Technical assistance & problem solving

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In pursuit of these goals, the attendees strongly supported the idea of a National Outreach Scholarship Conference affiliated, annual program developed specifically for engagement professionals, perhaps best offered as a preconference meeting. In 2010 at the National Outreach Scholarship Conference at North Carolina State University, a pilot preconference workshop for outreach and engagement staff was developed by Loving and UW–Madison faculty colleague Randy Stoecker. By 2011 at Michigan State University, the Outreach and Engagement Staff Workshop was formally affiliated with the National Outreach Scholarship Conference, supported and funded by the conference executive board and attended by thirty university staff members from the United States and Canada, forming the core membership of an inter-campus community of practice for outreach and engagement staff practitioners. This early success resulted in ongoing support from the National Outreach Scholarship Conference, now known as the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC), for the annual Outreach and Engagement Staff Workshop preconference meeting, as well as the distribution list and a web site, thus institutionalizing this bi-national community of practice. The annual preconference workshop for outreach and engagement staff attracts 50-75 participants and continues to grow in terms of institutional support from ESC.

Benefits of Scaling Up and Implications for the Field

Communities of practice are primarily learning and knowledge management organizations; the community remains most vibrant and effective when members are improving their practice together. While local communities of practice can meet campus-specific needs, a national community has the potential to aggregate the needs and interests of practitioners at multiple campuses to develop broadly-relevant and widely-accessible professional development opportunities and curricula specifically for outreach and engagement staff. Professional development at this scale is integral to the establishment of a new professional identity as boundary-spanners and of new directions for research.

As the parallel fields of engaged scholarship and engagement scholarship develop, a national community of practice for staff may have the power to take on a system-of-influence role in a conversation that has, to date, not had unified staff representation. Advocating for standards of practice, conveying the importance of integrating the voices of community partners, and ensuring that staff are recognized as legitimate experts and researchers in community-campus partnerships, are among the contributions that can be made at the national level to improve the quality and inclusiveness of community-engaged theory and practice.

Questions for Future Research

Weerts and Sandmann’s research (2008) confirmed the value of community-university boundary spanners to community partners and to the outreach and engagement enterprise of universities, inspiring the initial organizing of the local and national networks. Those networks now offer a research platform for addressing unanswered questions including: What professional development opportunities are most effective in preparing and advancing the skill set of engagement professionals? How do institutions facilitate and inhibit work with community partners? These formally organized communities of practice for outreach and engagement practitioners provide a way for the group to be accessible for further inquiry and investigation, a critical step in building our emerging professional identity.

This application of the community-of-practice model also deserves examination. While the networks described developed along a typical community-of-practice trajectory, there are still challenges to explore: How can we measure and document the value of outreach and engagement staff to colleagues, institutions, and communities? How are engagement communities of practice best situated and sustained within institutions of higher education? Communities of practice are often self-organizing systems, and finding the right balance between organic growth and administrative support can be difficult. Just enough support allows the community to be self-directed and highly responsive to the needs of members, while too much support suppresses momentum and suggests competing agendas (Wenger et al., 2002). Research may indicate another model or organizational format for best supporting and advancing the work of boundary-spanning staff on a long-term basis.

Conclusions and Next Steps

As the national community continues to
coalesce, a primary task will be navigating the developmental challenges of this second stage in the community of practice model—the tension between taking the time to build trusting relationships among members and demonstrating immediate value to keep interest and participation high (Wenger et al., 2002). The value of networking around the identified domain—the art and science of community-university partnerships, outreach and engagement—must be established. Affiliating with the Engagement Scholarship Consortium offers the opportunity to extend targeted professional development content and a forum for sharing scholarly work to a group that has only recently been formally recognized as an important constituency of the conference. Establishing communication mechanisms as well as relationships with other national outreach and community engagement organizations will also be critical to the network’s ability to grow in relationship and relevance over time. Can a national community be nurtured successfully, or will it exist primarily to support its institution-based counterparts?

As UW–Madison’s local community of practice matures in the third stage of development, it faces a different set of challenges. The core challenge will be to expand the network boundaries while staying true to the organization’s core domain and purpose (Wenger et al., 2002). The associated tasks include finding a place in the institution as the community of practice gains more influence, and documenting the value of the network for both internal and external audiences.

References


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Responsible Engagement: Building a Culture of Concern

Irena Gorski, Eric Obeysekare, Careen Yarnal, and Khanjan Mehta

Abstract
As we scale up engagement with communities around the world, how do we ensure that the foundational engagement principles of responsiveness, respect, and accessibility are never compromised? While community engagement is important and can have a dramatic positive impact, it can also result in unintended negative consequences for all stakeholders, including community members, students, faculty, and staff. At Penn State, we are developing a framework for an Engagement Review Board (ERB) to proactively educate university members about the principles and best practices of engagement, and to work with them to ensure that collaborative projects benefit all stakeholders in spirit and substance. This article summarizes the larger challenge of equitable community engagement and makes the case that there is a need for additional protection such as through an ERB. The various resources and functions that can be provided by an ERB across the life cycle of engagement projects are described. The objective is to stimulate discussion on how we can collectively develop an infrastructure—undergirded by a “culture of concern” rather than a “culture of compliance”—to strengthen and mainstream community engagement without making it more onerous to all stakeholders.

Introduction: Setting the Context
In an attempt to help an orphanage in Zimbabwe—but without collaborating with the orphanage about community assets and needs—a college-level dental hygiene class with an embedded travel component organized an engagement project to collect and send toothbrushes to the orphanage. The well-meaning class gathered toothbrushes from donors in the US and traveled to the orphanage to teach lessons on dental hygiene. While the intention was to improve the dental health of the children and staff at the orphanage, the outcome had unexpected impact on the class, the instructor, and the community. The orphanage did not, in fact, need the thousands of toothbrushes they received. In reality, they needed food, money for rent and staff salaries, and mattresses—needs that the instructor and class members were unaware of. The orphanage did, however, use the toothbrushes as a form of currency to pay staff and to barter for supplies. As for the lesson the class taught on dental hygiene, class-members were surprised when orphanage staff were offended by how little the well-meaning students knew about existing dental hygiene practices and more important community needs. A community engagement expert would have quickly recognized the likelihood of these unexpected outcomes and might have advised the class instructor and the class about how to maximize the positive impact of their work. So where can an instructor, and other educators, turn for advice to ensure that community engagement work does no harm and has positive impact?

Universities across the United States and Canada are prioritizing community engagement. Engagement is the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local or global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2015). The Carnegie Community Engagement Classification is a classification that recognizes “excellent alignment among campus mission, culture, leadership, resources, and practices that support dynamic and noteworthy engagement.” Seventy-six colleges and universities held the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification as of 2006, with 361 institutions now holding the classification in 2015. The movement to prioritize engagement is driven as much by the evolving meaning of a land-grant institution (Weerts, 2005) as it is by community and student demands and expectations (Kirkwood, 2001).

There is a growing consciousness as well as boundless enthusiasm among university students to make a positive difference in the lives of people in developing communities (Bringle & Hatch-er, 1998; Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Ilustre, 2002). Faculty members are being challenged by this trend to enable students to play a larger role in becoming change agents. While all engagement efforts and experiences are important and can have a dramatic positive impact, they can also result in unintended consequences for students, professors, institutions, intermediaries, and
communities (Crabtree, 2013). Students can, for example, become disillusioned by the places they visit, gaining the skewed perspective that all developing countries and their citizens lack resources and “need to be helped” (Hinton, Ortbal, & Mehta, 2014). Professors can reduce the likelihood of tenure by devoting a significant amount of time to organizing and facilitating engagement experiences (Saltmarsh, Wooding, & McLellan, 2014). For the community, students can return home without completing projects, leaving community members with a net liability. Other negative outcomes for communities may include a disruption of community relations, conflict, disappointment, or dissatisfaction with where they live (Crabtree, 2013).

Good intentions and passion are not enough for successful community engagement (Easterly & Easterly, 2006). While community projects are usually well-meaning, creatively designed, and enthusiastically deployed, they do not necessarily result in a sustainable impact on the partnering communities (Mehta & Mehta, 2011). Projects fail, or do not realize their full potential, when local knowledge, perspectives, and frameworks are not integrated into the venture (Lissenden, Maley, & Mehta, 2015; Mehta, Alter, Semali, & Maretzki, 2013). Whether naïve or deliberate, the lack of consideration for the cultural and socioeconomic context inhibits innovation that is crucial for project success. The majority of the challenges confronted during community engagement projects can be attributed to cultural, social, economic, and ethical issues (Mehta & Mehta, 2011). Key challenges include designing, implementing, and evaluating appropriate systems (as opposed to individual projects or interventions); ensuring equity from, and between, all stakeholders; growing projects to reach more communities; engaging marginalized stakeholders in the project; understanding and managing power dynamics and privilege systems; and identifying and incentivizing champions (Mehta & Mehta, 2011). To successfully navigate through such challenges, university members involved in engagement programs need to understand the resources, challenges, social and behavioral norms, and innovation frameworks of the context in which they will be working. How can we ensure that good intentions and passion result in socioeconomic development? How can we ensure that engagement programs balance immediate student experiences with positive long-term impact on the partnering communities?

Across the world, Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) review proposed university research projects to ensure that they uphold the ethical principles of research involving human subjects: respect for persons, beneficence, and justice (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979). IRBs are crucial for protecting all stakeholders engaged in research, including the subjects themselves, the researchers, and intermediaries like translators and analysts. However, IRB protection lacks comprehensiveness and applicability for some projects and has a variety of interpretations from the university to federal level (Schrag, 2010). Due to non-comprehensive IRB policies in the US and potentially blurry lines of morality and legality, a recent article in Nature argues for the utility of ethics consulting services to provide additional advice, enabling researchers to reflect on their projects without the pressure of potential rejection that comes with an IRB (Dolgin, 2014). Such services can help researchers make ethically-sound decisions in situations where the IRB may not be supportive, comprehensive, or appropriate enough.

Expanding research and teaching outside of the university to engage with stakeholders in developing communities can lead to issues even further outside the scope of traditional IRB protection. For example, in developing countries where oral traditions are common, signing a consent form can make participants uneasy because they usually reserve signatures (or thumb impressions) for legal documents such as deeds (Anderson, et al., 2012; Bell, Dzombak, Sulewski, & Mehta, 2012; Harding, Harper, Stone, O’Neill, & Berger, 2011). Additionally, while IRBs operate under the assumption that researchers are more knowledgeable about their subjects’ conditions than the subjects themselves are, in the realm of community engagement, this is not necessarily true, and the principles of engagement are sometimes compromised.

As institutions scale up engagement with communities, how do we ensure that the principles of engagement are upheld? At Penn State University, we are developing the framework of an Engagement Review Board (ERB) to ensure that community-engagement projects are conducted appropriately. The objective is to pro-actively educate faculty and students about the core principles and processes of engagement and to work with them to create situations favorable for all stakeholders. The role of the ERB was developed based on the ideas of the authors as well as ideas from collaborative discussions during a workshop at the
2014 Conference of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC). The workshop included faculty and staff members from universities across the US and several other countries. After discussing the principles of engagement and the stakeholders, this article proposes the competencies needed for appropriate engagement, presents the conceptual framework of the proposed ERB, and explains challenges and opportunities for integrating engagement into the current university system. While the semantics of engagement differ across cultures, disciplines, communities, and universities, this article aims to address the core issues of the ethics and impact of engagement. The objectives of this article are to (1) make the case that there should be additional protection for community members involved in engagement such as through an Engagement Review Board and (2) encourage further discussion on how we can collectively develop the infrastructure—a “culture of concern” rather than a “culture of compliance”—without making community engagement more onerous for any of the stakeholders.

Principles of Engagement

In 1999, the Kellogg Commission, made up of 24 university presidents and chancellors, published a report, Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution, explaining the need for land-grant and public universities to realize their mission to better society while simultaneously responding to the effects of globalization—i.e. the need for engaged institutions. The report identified seven characteristics of engaged institutions: responsiveness, respect for partners, academic neutrality, accessibility, integration, coordination, and resource partnerships (Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999). This article is particularly concerned with three of these characteristics, defined here as the principles of engagement:

1. Responsiveness—Universities must be in constant communication with the communities where engagement is conducted and ensure there is a mutual understanding of engagement activities.
2. Respect for partners—Universities should respect the resources communities have to offer and not view engagement solely as an opportunity to show intellectual superiority.
3. Accessibility—All communities should be able to receive knowledge and resources so communities should be made aware of what universities have to offer through public awareness efforts.

Universities upholding the principles of responsiveness, respect for partners, and accessibility are recognized with the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2015). Further, the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) and the Engagement Scholarship Consortium offer the prestigious Magrath Award, given to engaged programs that exemplify responsiveness, respect for partners, and accessibility (APLU, 2013). Truly engaged institutions that uphold these three principles in their programs find ways to ensure that scholars are engaged in a way

Figure 1. Engagement Stakeholders’ Motivations

![Diagram showing Engagement Stakeholders’ Motivations]

- **COMMUNITIES**
  - **IMPACT**
    - Autonomous Improvement Projects
  - **RESEARCH**
    - Theoretical Research
  - **Engaged Scholarship**
    - Low-skill Volunteering
    - Hit & Run Research
    - Classroom Learning

- **FACULTY**
  - **LEARNING**
    - Applied Research
  - **Classroom Learning**
that does no harm. By doing so, they uphold a high standard of appropriate engagement and contribute to the socioeconomic development of communities around the world. Presently, many engaged universities have IRBs, Service Learning Offices, Study Abroad Offices, Community Engagement Offices, and/or other similar entities to advise scholars on best practices for engagement.

**Balancing Stakeholder Motivations in University-Community Engagement**

The stakeholders that participate in engagement often have differing motivations (Figure 1). Faculty may place high importance on research and define success in terms of publication of knowledge gained during engagement. Students may have a less research-focused definition of success and consider any hands-on experience to be of value. Finally, success to communities may revolve around successful projects and the acquisition of actionable knowledge from universities. While programs that incorporate one or two of these stakeholder groups’ interests are important and worthwhile, the best engagement programs consider all motivations (Ramaley, 2001). An ideal community engagement project might include (1) a discussion between all stakeholders about their motivations in the project; (2) a clear definition of roles, goals, and outcomes for the project; (3) delivery of a project that meets the goals and outcomes; (4) reflection on the results; and (5) dissemination of results to all stakeholders as well as the broader engagement community.

Faculty members are cautioned against “hit and run research” where researchers work in a community and gain knowledge but neither share it with nor use it to serve community members. Lack of researcher follow-up can damage relationships with partners who become disillusioned with participation in studies that they never benefit from (Ramaley, 2001). Engagement can be more mutually beneficial if there is a plan of continuity in place that is developed jointly with the community while also communicating transparently with all parties the longer-term intentions of the project (McNall, Reed, Brown, & Allen, 2009). Not all engagement can be a long-term effort, but universities and communities can be more upfront about their expectations for the project.

Projects with multiple stakeholders are often a difficult balancing act. Engaging with communities is often more successful and mutually beneficial when everybody involved is aware of the various motivations involved in their project. ERBs, with their experience working in engagement, could play a pivotal leadership role in providing context-appropriate guidance and situation-specific scaffolding to ensure that the motivations of all stakeholders are understood and taken into account throughout the lifecycle of the project.

**Preparation for Engagement: Competencies to Avoid and Deal with Failure**

Community engagement initiatives fail due to a wide breadth of reasons including expectations and motivations, position and power, tension and disagreement, and ownership and agency (Hinton, Ortbl, & Mehta, 2014). Three categories of competencies emerged from the ESC 2014 conference workshop: foundational, program-specific, and engagement (Figure 2). Successfully cultivating these competencies will in turn foster the culture of concern that is needed to ensure the long-term success and growth of engagement programs.

**Figure 2. Continuum of Competencies for Engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundational Competencies</th>
<th>Program Specific Competencies</th>
<th>Engagement Competencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Critical Thinking &amp; Questioning</td>
<td>Conflict Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject Matter Expertise</td>
<td>Openness to Feedback</td>
<td>Equitable Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual Knowledge</td>
<td>Cultural Awareness</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proactive Scenario Planning</td>
<td>Ethical Reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust-based Relationship Building</td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Personal Awareness &amp; Maturity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Interpersonal Skills</td>
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</table>
Students and faculty can always improve upon foundational and engagement competencies, which are therefore represented on a continuum in Figure 2. Foundational competencies, such as interest and commitment, professionalism, personal awareness, interpersonal skills, leadership, critical thinking and questioning, openness to feedback, and adaptability develop during a student’s college career through curricular, co-curricular, and life experiences. Program-specific competencies, including cultural awareness, subject matter expertise, and contextual knowledge are important for students to gain prior to each individual engagement experience and are often transferred from the faculty leader to participants. Engagement competencies primarily deal with preparing for, avoiding, and moving past failure. In order to successfully complete projects and navigate failure, it is important to build skills in conflict resolution, trust-based relationship building, equitable collaboration, proactive scenario planning, ethical reflection, and empathy (Hinton, Ortbal, & Mehta, 2014). The experienced engagement practitioners at the ESC 2014 conference workshop validate that these competencies help students and faculty avoid common failure modes and enable a successful engaged scholarship program. How can we ensure that students and faculty members who are engaging with communities have these competencies?

Conceptual Framework of the ERB

Community engagement endeavors can be supported and elevated through an Engagement Review Board, a university entity whose primary goal is to ensure that engagement efforts do not violate the fundamental canon of engagement: Do No Harm. Engagement programs would benefit from increased intellectual and logistical support, accountability mechanisms, and most importantly, the credibility and legitimacy that would emerge from an independent body supporting, validating, and certifying engagement activities. This section describes some of the roles that an ERB could play and types of resources the board could offer to strengthen and mainstream engagement and engaged scholarship.

**ERB Structure**

ERBs are currently envisioned as independent entities that include various stakeholders who are highly experienced with engagement to review protocols and make informed judgments on the ethics of proposed projects in order to bring best practices learned through years of experience into the decision-making process. Unlike IRBs, which often consist only of members with extensive knowledge of medical and psychological studies (Schrag, 2010), ERBs could also provide a wider perspective by including faculty from all disciplines at universities where engagement takes place. Furthermore, community members, who have a large stake in engagement, should be included in the process to uphold communities’ perspectives and interests. Finally, students could provide valuable insights to ensure that student interests and abilities are weighed into engagement programs.

**ERB Activities**

The proposed ERB would conduct many of the same activities as IRBs with the goal of ensuring that institutions uphold the principles of engagement and prepare students with the competencies necessary for successful engagement. The ERB’s responsibilities would span concerns throughout the lifecycle of community engagement initiatives and balance the needs of all stakeholders without privileging any of them. Figure 3 shows a timeline of the proposed roles and responsibilities.

**Pre-Engagement**

1a. **Online Training Modules**—The first step in the process toward ensuring that uni-
University members engage in a mutually beneficial way with communities is to educate and sensitize individuals prior to getting involved. The ERB is envisioned to have online modules packaged as a training regimen for certification similar to those offered by the Office of Research Protection (or equivalent) at many universities. Since foundational and program-specific competencies cannot be covered through the same modules for every student, ERB training modules could focus on educating students on engagement competencies to prepare them for the problems they could face when working with communities. Delivering the modules online would allow them to be completed effectively and efficiently. An engaged institution could integrate the modules into introductory courses at the university so that students begin thinking about engagement issues early on in their college career. Separate modules could be created to prepare faculty and staff, educating them not only on the same engagement competencies as students but also on how they would interact with the ERB at various points in their engagement journey.

1b. **Program Design Assistance**—Some professors may need assistance with designing specific programs; the ERB could have staff to help. For example, a faculty member eager to start a new program but with no experience working in the field, or working across cultures, could get just-in-time support from the ERB team. The ERB could connect the professor to other practice-oriented faculty members and extension staff to collaborate with and provide contacts in the country of interest to develop stronger collaborative programs.

1c. **Proposal Review and Approval**—A protocol may be developed by the ERB to collect information about professors’ plans to engage with communities. The protocol would ask questions similar to IRB protocols in order to encourage professors to think through every aspect of their engagement process and the products they will create. In addition, it would ask questions geared toward community members. The ERB should provide a timely review process for engagement proposals. If a proposal is rejected, a member of the ERB would provide a detailed explanation to the faculty member about why the proposal did not make a clear case for a responsive, respectful, and accessible engagement program. Additionally, they would offer suggestions for improving the engaged program so there would be favorable outcomes for all stakeholders, allowing the professor to resubmit the proposal with revisions. Depending on the level of concern that the ERB reviewers have with the proposal, they may require the professor to go through additional training or recommend another university member work with him or her to improve the program through added expertise on the program area or the partnering community.

**During Engagement**

2. **Problem Support**—Inevitably, problems will arise when university groups engage with communities. Being flexible and learning from failures will result in positive changes that allow programs to continue and improve. For those less experienced or anybody who faces difficult challenges while engaging with a community, the ERB could provide support and advice on how to advance appropriately. For example, consider a professor who brings his students to Mozambique to build a rainwater harvester for a school. If the professor has completed the online learning modules and has assistance from the ERB, he would know to organize a public meeting through the local leaders to engender community support. If upon the start of construction, the professor finds resistance from community members and is unsure how to handle this particular situation, he could then reach out to the ERB problem support team. The support team could advise as to how he could gain backing from local people such as by discussing with them if starting construction later in the morning would help ease noise issues; whether they think the project is going the way they want; or which community members, businesses, or social groups should be brought into the project.
3. **Reflection and Evaluation**—As with any project, reflection and evaluation is an important part of engagement: it verifies and validates that efforts are fulfilling the agreed upon goals. Reflection and evaluation may be conducted through internal audits, monthly meetings, periodic activity reports, or assessments conducted by external consultants. No matter what the process is, it is critical that all reflection and evaluation activities solicit and integrate insights from all the stakeholders. Such a process ensures transparency, builds trust, and encourages all stakeholders to stay aware and intercede in a timely manner if they see that something is wrong or want something to happen differently (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; CTSA, 2011; Hart & Northmore, 2011). Reflection and evaluation is an ongoing process, starting in the planning stages of a project and continuing well beyond project completion.

4. **Quality Assurance and Improvement**—As ERBs are implemented, problems are likely to emerge. Support within the ERB to refine policies as problems arise can help the ERB evolve and improve. There should also be a method for individuals outside the ERB to submit feedback to strengthen and streamline operations.

5. **Operations**—Support within the ERB for all of its operations—such as hotlines, a website, learning tools, and other resources as they emerge—would allow the ERB to run smoothly, easily moving past obstacles so it is always able to provide support, validation, and certification for engagement programs. Operations would require staff to provide feedback to people in the field in need of problem support and staff to maintain a website and online learning tools. The hotline would need to be accessible many hours of the day to be most effective considering that the staff would be working across time zones with faculty and students engaging around the world. The website and online learning tools would need regular maintenance and updates.

6. **Pro-Active Community Partnerships**— ERBs could conduct activities in the community to foster understanding of and commitment to the university-community partnership and projects completed in cooperation with the university. An important aspect would be identifying communities, building multi-stranded partnerships, and sensitizing them about equitable engagement opportunities and processes.

7. **Fostering a Culture of Concern**—As engagement is scaled up at universities, it is important that motivation to participate in the ERB review process stems from a concern for engaging appropriately, not simply complying with a set of arbitrary rules. Fostering a culture of concern would involve activities for education, recognition, and research. To educate everybody involved in engagement programs, the ERB could host workshops, guest lectures, and community-based educational forums and roundtables where ERB members share compelling examples that highlight the issue of potentially doing harm. Additionally, messaging on the importance of using the ERB to ensure no harm is done could be shared through the initial online training, where the importance of upholding the principles of engagement is stressed to make sure that those completing the training understand that they should be concerned about engaging appropriately. To provide recognition for stakeholders, there should be awards and newsletters celebrating exemplary projects, faculty, staff, students, and community partners. Finally, to spread the message further, as part of reflection and evaluation, the ERB should include in their periodic reports reasons for concern and how programs were helped by ERB. Through such reports, the ERB should identify common problems, study solutions, and disseminate them.

**Integrating an ERB into the Current System**

The success of creating ERBs at universities will rely on how well they can be integrated into the existing systems. Instead of simply hoping that faculty and students will suddenly become engaged when an ERB is created, successful implementation will include building a culture of concern, piloting the ERB with an appropriate model for the institution, and providing incentives to get involved.
Building a Culture of Concern

The current IRB structure is seen by some as creating a culture of compliance around the ethics of research (Schrag, 2010). It is essential that with the ERB, the pressure of compliance does not overshadow the importance of ensuring no harm is done. A barrier to creating an ERB is an increase in paperwork and staff members—but the opportunity to increase the university’s positive impact on the world is worth it. To increase support for the creation of an ERB, additional paperwork should be minimized, potentially through combining it with IRB paperwork, and the number of employees added to the university should also be minimized. Additionally, it is vital for universities to implement the ERB in phases, making sure members of the university understand the importance of upholding the principles of engagement and are therefore motivated to participate in measures to uphold them. The goal is that the ERB will be valued as worthwhile because all stakeholders understand how crucial it is that universities do no harm when engaging with communities and faculty see the direct positive impact on their programs when working with the ERB.

Piloting the ERB

Piloting the ERB would entail working with a small group of faculty members who agree to develop, test, and refine the various resources, protocols, and review processes. This would provide valuable data about how an ERB might work in practice. As the review of existing programs is completed, engagement experts could begin working with faculty members across many colleges and departments to create additional engagement programs. The ERB could be built up slowly, both in regard to the number of individuals involved and its responsibilities. This will foster a culture of concern organically with more members of the university jumping on board with the mission of the ERB as they participate in workshops, submit proposals, and share their successes with others.

Proposed Models of Integration

As mentioned earlier, many engaged institutions have existing offices that advise scholars on the principles of responsiveness, respect, and accessibility and take on some of the proposed roles of the ERB. It is important that the ERB blends well with existing entities; therefore, the way in which an ERB is implemented at each institution would depend upon what structures have already been established to ensure no harm is done. Two points for consideration when implementing an ERB are extending the IRB and having the ERB act as an overseer and connector.

1. Extension of IRB—Since the IRB already approves international research studies and any research that is to be conducted through engagement, it would be appropriate for the ERB to work closely with an institution’s IRB. As mentioned earlier, IRBs can lack comprehensiveness and applicability for engagement projects, but adding an ERB unit would fill in the gaps to ensure engagement programs uphold the principles of engagement. The marriage of the two boards could potentially minimize paperwork, with only one protocol submitted to the joint board and a section to be passed on to the ERB for engagement-specific items.

2. ERB as an Overseer and Connector—Many engaged institutions currently have an office or multiple offices for service learning, community engagement, and study abroad that already hold some of the responsibilities of the proposed ERB. The ERB is not meant to close the existing offices and take over all responsibilities. Rather, it is important that each institution assesses which responsibilities are currently taken care of by existing entities and allow the ERB to fill the gaps, assuming responsibilities that are not yet taken care of by existing offices. Additionally, the ERB can provide a conduit for improved communication between existing offices where silos may currently exist. The ERB would oversee all engagement-related activities and assume the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the university does no harm.

Incentives

While faculty and students are undoubtedly committed to developing engagement programs that will have impact, and may find them personally rewarding, incentives like certificates of completion and public recognition through newsletters and awards might help in gaining broader long-term participation. Integrity, credibility and validity, arguably the most fundamental values for academics, present the best leverage points to integrate ERBs into universities. ERBs can
provide an independent “gold star” (rather than a “seal of approval”) to engagement programs, and in doing so, validate, celebrate and mainstream them. In essence, ERBs can serve as a mechanism to bring more legitimacy, attention, and cohesion to engagement programs while acknowledging and supporting the faculty members who champion them.

Let the Conversations Continue!

The objective of this manuscript is to encourage discussion about how we can collectively develop an infrastructure, framed by a culture of concern, to further strengthen and mainstream community engagement. So what might an ideal community engagement project look like? It may include a discussion among all stakeholders about motivations; a clear definition of roles, goals, and outcomes; delivery of a project that meets the goals and outcomes; reflection by all stakeholders; and dissemination of results to stakeholders and the broader engagement community. Are these conversations happening in your projects, within your departments, colleges, and campuses? We believe that the time is ripe for pro-active conversations about responsiveness, respect for partners, and accessibility within our academic, administrative, and support programs and it is a moral and ethical imperative for institutions to conduct them.

We recognize that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to ensure that every engagement project at every institution will be conducted responsibly and that results will be optimal impact for all stakeholders. Each project, and each institution, should conduct its own dialogues in the search for approaches that are appropriate for their unique culture and context. At some institutions, there may be a perceived need for an ERB structure, or the ERB functions might be integrated into the existing administrative infrastructure, or all the actors might find it most appropriate to address these concerns without any formal processes and structures. Nonetheless, having these conversations will help stakeholders understand the challenges and opportunities that engagement projects present, and most importantly, build a thriving institutional–wide culture of concern that celebrates and commends responsiveness, respect for partners, and accessibility.

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Youth Engagement—Engaging for Change: Changing for Engagement

Yoshitaka Iwasaki

Abstract
This paper documents the incentives for, processes of, and outcomes from our multi-year community-based research project on youth engagement. In line with the theme of the 15th Annual Conference of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (ESC)—Engaging for Change: Changing for Engagement—this paper illustrates our project in terms of the conference’s three sub-themes: (1) Why engage?, (2) How do we engage?, and (3) What impacts are we having? Contextualized within these sub-themes, the paper describes opportunities and challenges of youth engagement from youth and professional perspectives by highlighting insights of our youth leaders and community partners, along with some reflective remarks by our university researchers. The paper provides tangible descriptions and illustrations for the significance of “strategic engagement” (Speer & Christens, 2013) by focusing on the use of “strategic youth and partner engagement.” Importantly, this strategic engagement centerpieces the voices and talents of our youth leaders, supported by our community agency partners, along with a background role of university researchers.

The 15th Annual Conference of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium brought together “academics and community members to explore, discuss, debate, and demonstrate why and how both universities and communities are changing.” The overall theme of the conference was “Engaging for Change: Changing for Engagement” that centerpieces the role of engagement in a change-inducing process. It was intended that the conference would provide a variety of opportunities for conversations that are “provocative and intense, calling on us to engage our whole selves in an examination of our motives, our rhetoric, and the impacts we are actually having.” These were strategically described as the three sub-themes of the conference, namely, (1) Why engage? (2) How do we engage? and (3) What impacts are we having?

My paper documents reflective accounts of my research partners who described the incentives for, processes of, and outcomes from our youth engagement research project, matched conceptually with the three sub-themes of the conference. The paper begins with a brief description of our ongoing youth engagement research project, followed by a detailed description of reflective experiences illustrated by our youth leaders and community agency partners who have involved in our multi-year project.

Youth Engagement Research Project
Conceptually, our community-based research project, which started in the fall of 2011, focuses on youth engagement. Engaging youth, especially, youth with high-risk conditions/behaviors (e.g., poverty, homelessness, abusive/addictive behaviors, mental health issues), presents a significant challenge in our society. The reason is that those “high-risk” youths are often disconnected and disengaged and typically distrust the existing support systems (Alicea, Pardo, Conover, Gopalan, & McKay, M. (2012) 2012; Gemert, Peterson, & Lien 2008; Jennings, Parra-Medina, Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006; Pearrow, 2008). Yet, effective youth engagement is a key factor for positive youth outcomes at personal (e.g., self-identity, empowerment), social (e.g., belongingness, social support, cultural identity), and community (e.g., system change) levels (Blanchet-Cohen & Salazar, 2009; Davidson, Wien, & Anderson, 2010; Lind, 2008; Wexler, DiFluvio, & Burke, 2009: Yohalem & Martin, 2007). Accordingly, youth engagement through integrating youth leadership is a key concept addressed in our research (Cammarota, 2011; Ross, 2011).

Our youth engagement research also involves engagement with community and university partners. It is recognized that a collaboration across diverse partners and the coordination of partner engagement present a significant challenge due to the differences in organizational culture and orientation, power imbalance, competitive funding structures, etc. potentially leading to a fragmented service-delivery model in our society (Abela & Hankin, 2008; Bashant, 2007; Gemert et al., 2008).
To counter this fragmentation, meaningful cross-sectorial and interdisciplinary partner engagement through ongoing relationship-building can promote a more effective and coordinated system of service-delivery to benefit target populations. Guided by this intention, we have initiated a homegrown project emerged from networks and dialogues with a number of government (i.e., municipal and provincial) and non-profit (i.e., youth and multicultural) agencies and university departments (i.e., extension, social work, human ecology, public health, and physical education & recreation studies) in a western Canadian city. Methodologically, we are conducting participatory action research (PAR; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Simich, Waiter, Moorlag, & Ochocka, 2009; Stringer & Genat, 2004) to engage our community and academic partners and facilitate positive changes. Consequently, our overall goal is that effectively engaging both youth and research partners in a mutually respectful way to build a trustful relationship can lead to a positive transformation and systems change in order to more effectively support our youth in our communities.

More specifically, the key questions being addressed in our research include: (a) how can we best engage youth?, (b) how can we more effectively facilitate the optimal development of youth?, and (c) how can we better support youth to become more engaged, successful citizens in our community? The overall focus of the research is on honoring/highlighting youth’s voice and mobilizing youth into actions for social change, specifically, the improvement of support systems (policy & practice) and environments (neighborhoods, schools, & communities), as guided by youth with the support of our community and university partners. Indeed, youth engagement and leadership are a central concept/process throughout the project to achieve the goal of our research.

Reflective Experiences with Project

This main part of the paper describes reflective experiences illustrated by our youth leaders (YL) and community agency partners (AP) who have involved in our community-based research project. Their descriptions and illustrations address (1) Why engage? (2) How do we engage? and (3) What impacts are we having? in line with the sub-themes of the 15th Annual ESC Conference.

Why Engage?

First, as for the question of “why engage,” the reasons for engagement described by these team members included: (a) having a common purpose, (b) being grounded in youth experiences through participatory research, and (c) advancing research into action through knowledge translation and practical application.

Having a common purpose. One typical response to this “why” question was having a common purpose despite the diversity in the youth leaders’ group composition. One youth leader (abbreviated as YL#1) spoke about a shared mission to challenge the status quo and promote a positive change through effective youth engagement:

We were complete strangers, had diverse life experiences but shared a common definition of youth. In addition, we shared a desire to change the status quo on how youth were being engaged with various organizations.

Another youth leader’s experience further supported the notion of having a common purpose to create greater opportunities for youth:

“I feel that our group worked well together in the sense that we were all there for similar reasons. Each of us had an interest in getting involved in creating more and better opportunities for marginalized youth” (YL#4).

One of the immigrant youth leaders was inspired by the desire to bring about a positive change to the community, along with learning from peer youth leaders and participants:

I chose to be a part of this research group because I saw a potential to be involved in something that will bring about a positive change to my community. I also was enthused by the opportunity to learn from and engage with other youth in my community whom I may not be able to associate with on my own. Over the past year and several months of partaking in the group, I have learned so much from the youth participants and my peers (YL#5).

Being grounded in youth experiences through participatory research. Another reason
for “why engage” was captured by a community agency partner who acknowledged the significant role of our participatory research in being “grounded” within the experiences of youth themselves. Youth-guided creation of a framework for youth engagement was appreciated by a community organizer (abbreviated as AP#8) of a multicultural agency:

Effectively and equitably engaging high-risk and marginalized youth within society can be a significant challenge, yet is crucial for the positive development and integration into society. The PI and his team of youth leaders have begun to address this challenge through their process of creating a youth engagement framework that is grounded in the experiences of youth themselves.

An executive director of a high-risk youth-serving agency pointed out the importance of providing a safe and responsive space/environment for dialogue among youth to voice their needs and explore issues integral to youth’s lives with its implication to have an impact on community practice and policy change:

The opportunity for them [youth] to further explore an issue that would initially appear beyond their influence, yet integral to many of their daily experiences, is encouraging. This project opens a space for dialogue for youth to express their needs in a safe and responsive environment and hopefully impact policy change (AP#9).

A project developer of another multicultural agency resonated with the importance of using this bottom-up or “people-up” approach in working with diverse partners/stakeholders that has implications for change at community and system levels:

It brings marginalized youth together with a wide range of stakeholders so that an effective and meaningful framework for engagement is co-created and articulated. This participatory way of work from the ‘ground-up’ resonates closely with our sense of what is needed and what will be effective. In recent years, the families and community leaders we work closely with have been expressing concern about the effects of exclusion and marginalization on newcomer youth as well as on those who are born here who are at risk of being marginalized. Engaging those who are marginalized is a very present and urgent matter for the communities we work with. And undertaking research to develop a framework for effective engagement that can be shared is an important endeavor. We notice that participatory methods being employed are respectful, effective and productive. We observe that youths are invited to explore and articulate the nature of their lived experience as it relates to the ways of engaging them that is most relevant and effective. As this information is shared with a wide range of stakeholders—from service providers to researchers to policy makers—there is a real potential for change at the community, service sector, and system levels (AP#6).

A cross-ministry coordinator from a provincial government agency praised our project that engages marginalized youth and involves dialogues around youth engagement through youth-centered participatory action research:

I am particularly pleased that the project has actively engaged vulnerable youth on the steering committee for this project. I appreciate this project’s efforts to initiate ongoing dialogues around youth engagement and youth-oriented participatory action research and the team’s leadership and commitment to the youth of our province. The educational, health and safety needs of all youth, including those who are urban-dwelling and marginalized, are important issues for us all (AP#11).

Advancing research into action: Knowledge translation and practical application. Our community partners have acknowledged implications of our project for knowledge translation and practical application to advance research into action, which was identified as another reason/motivation for their engagement with this project. This notion was nicely captured by an avid professional who work with hundreds of ethno-cultural youths:

This research advances the understanding of effective Knowledge Translation (KT),
improves the practice of KT, and supports
the use of research evidence in decision-
making not only for our organization and
partners but also for the youth we work
for, as its discoveries will lead to practical
applications. We see this as an excellent
opportunity for community-based and
youth-driven research to have an impact
on other institutions working with, or
considering working with, youth in the
community, and as a crucial next-step in
advancing research into action (AP#8).

A community service coordinator from the
municipal government stressed the importance
of “usability” to have an impact on community
practice and policy for better supporting youth by
sharing youth-informed knowledge at a systems
level:

Use of a participatory action framework
in this project ensures active engagement
of marginalized youth to give them a
voice towards improving youth outcomes.
Usability is important and so, this project
involves the application of the knowledge,
capacities, resources and experiences
gained from these youths in order to see
positive impact on practices, policy and
systems to better support youth living
in marginalized conditions. As a partner
involved in this collective effort, we
continue to reflect upon and share this
knowledge within our own and allied
systems (AP#12).

She recognized the potential of our project
to bring forward and mobilize the voice of youth
into the transformation of policy, practice, and
system, using a youth-guided participatory
action framework. Also, comments were made
by another community partner on the guiding
research question of this project and its implication
for mobilizing knowledge from research to
support policy and programming, as another key
motivation/incentive for partner engagement:

To examine the unfolding question:
How can practices and policies around
engagement at personal, social, and
community levels be changed to enhance
youth’s capacity to mobilize the resources
needed to promote youth development?

Specifically, as it relates to youth in
high risk conditions can contribute
to the knowledge transfer needed by
government, especially, to support policy
and programming that will have impact
on youth with complex needs (AP#9).

Attractiveness to having an impact on
policy and practice was echoed by an executive
director of a community agency committed to
ending homelessness, who appreciated “the use
of a collaborative, participatory approach with
youth and the focus on developing effective
youth engagement strategies to inform policy and
practice.” She stressed,

As an organization, we depend on
community-based, participatory processes
to develop strategies for addressing
homelessness and related issues in our
community. Being able to draw on the
knowledge and practical expertise of youth with lived experience strengthens
our ability to serve this population in a
meaningful and effective manner (AP#5).

Furthermore, a senior administrator from local
school systems emphasized this project’s synergy
with the school district’s vision for “improving
the lives and opportunities for marginalized youth
through working with community organizations.”
She also emphasized the role of participatory action
research in empowering youth and facilitating
positive change and growth for youth:

This project is very much in keeping with
our district’s vision for educating our
young people. We have a keen interest
in improving the lives and opportunities
for marginalized youth through working
with community organizations to better
facilitate the support and direct aid
that many of our youth require in order
to survive. The use of a participatory
action research approach empowers the
participants and leads to sustained change
and growth in programs that support
them. We are a part of this collaborative
project to engage targeted youth in
conversations about their futures as a
means of enabling them to become part
of the process of positive change (AP#13).
How Do We Engage?

As for the question of “how engage,” our community-based project uses the principles of participatory action research (PAR; i.e., mutual respect, co-learning, capacity-building, power-sharing, co-ownership of research, and commitment to social change) as an effective, coordinated way of engaging the team members (Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Simich, Waiter, Moorlag, & Ochocca, 2009; Stringer & Genat, 2004). In particular, our project involves the strategic use of a youth-guided/informed approach to youth engagement, while working with community agency partners. Our team’s youth leaders have been identified and recruited by our community agency partners that provide local youth programs. Our female and male youth leaders aged 16 to 24 (current n = 12) include Aboriginal and immigrant leaders. All leaders possess excellent interpersonal, communication, and leadership skills and are well connected to local youth culture. Our youth leaders collectively identified our team name, “Youth4YEG” (YEG stands for the city’s airport code), along with a creative team logo.

Our youth leaders have met over 130 times since October 2012. The structure of these regular meetings is youth-oriented, including youth-led ice-breaker activities, small working-group sessions, and all-inclusive dialogues (e.g., talking/sharing circles). One major outcome from those sessions was the youth-informed development of a framework of youth engagement, which has already been reported in an earlier manuscript elsewhere (Iwasaki, Springett, Dashora, McLaughlin, McHugh, & Youth4YEG Team, 2014). To plan for upcoming meetings, youth leaders took turns to attend planning meetings and set an agenda for a subsequent meeting. In between meetings, youth leaders were assigned to complete homework such as researching various approaches used by local youth agencies and preparing to contribute to a next session by responding to specific youth-engagement questions determined at a planning meeting. Once the framework of youth engagement was developed, this framework was pilot-tested through our youth leaders facilitating a series of engagement sessions (informed by the framework) with youth recruited locally. The learnings from this pilot framework-testing study have guided the planning and execution of the next phase of this overall research program that involves hosting a local youth forum (named “2K15 Youth4YEG Forum”) to inspire and work with youth to build tomorrow’s leaders, and building a youth-ally coalition to consolidate a large number of youth leaders and partners to collectively create a more effective change.

Youth-Oriented and Collaborative Research Processes

Relevant to the question of “how engage,” our youth leaders noted that this is a youth-oriented and collaborative project, guided by the talents, expertise, and lived experiences of the youth leaders. The sub-themes within this broad theme include: (a) honoring youth voice: “bottom-up process for youth by youth”; (b) co-learning and teamwork; (c) being flexible/adaptable and strengths-based; and (d) creating a safe, comfortable, and fun space.

Honoring youth voice: “Bottom-up process for youth by youth.” First, this project honors and highlights youth voice using a bottom-up process “for youth by youth,” as summarized by one youth leader: “I am proud to share that this project is for youth by youth. This bottom-up process gives youth a voice that they normally don’t get” (YL#1). Our youth leaders agreed that co-creating a framework for youth engagement was a youth-guided “rewarding” (YL#1) experience to incorporate their insights:

We worked well as a team to build the framework. There was a key purpose for the bi-weekly meetings. We all had chance to input our ideas of youth engagement and what factors it entails. We gained insight from many perspectives and fellow youth leaders’ personal experiences (YL#2).

Essentially, this framework development process was guided by youth’s lived experiences: “We have created the framework from nothing but our own life experiences” (YL#1). Through co-creating the framework, our youth leaders worked towards building a positive relationship while they appreciated being provided with a non-judgmental and non-threatening space to share their voices:

As a group at the end I felt that we did a great job building our relationship, while also building our framework. I felt comfortable each and every session, and was glad that I was given a non-judgmental environment where I could
speak up and share my ideas, while also learning from those around me (YL#3).

**Co-learning and teamwork.** As acknowledged in the last quotes above, learning from each other (i.e., co-learning) was a major attractive process for youth leaders’ gatherings:

This project was very unique in that it attracted both people that have learned about marginalization and ‘high-risk’ lifestyles as well as people that have lived it. This brought with it an incredible diversity and opportunity for co-learning” (YL#4).

This youth leader further elaborated the benefit of co-learning and team work: “Learning so much from one another through the process. It is a very unique experience to create a tangible document of [youth engagement] framework ‘from scratch.’ It truly shows determination and effective team work” (YL#4). Another youth leader concurred, “My experience with the research project has been one that is interesting filled with great learning experiences, which I could take with me for many years to come” (YL#3). Inspired by the desire to “bring about a positive change to the community” (YL#5), learning from peer youth leaders and participants was highlighted and appreciated by another youth leader: “Over the past year and several months of partaking in the group, I have learned so much from the youth participants and my peers” (YL#5).

This co-learning process involved learning about both benefits/opportunities and challenges of working collaboratively: “Overall, I have been so grateful to be part of such a unique project. I learned a lot about the benefits and challenges of working collaboratively and got to meet so many interesting folks along the way. I will take this experience with me in whatever work I continue to do” (YL#6). Our youth leaders came together by sharing a common interest in youth engagement and leadership, and community development: “Overall, I have had a good experience. I enjoyed meeting like-minded youth that were interested in leadership, working with youth, and making the community a better place” (YL#7). Another youth leader elaborated her passion and learning about the importance of communication, hard word, and helping others:

We embodied our framework, and for that reason, I really enjoyed doing my job and knew that I was doing something that I was passionate about. I began this when I was 15 years old, and later this year I will turn 18, it has been the greatest working experience I could ask for, and I learnt so much from my fellow youths. I have learnt the importance of communication and hard work, and the importance of helping those around me (YL#3).

**Being flexible/adaptable and strengths-based.** Once completing the lengthy co-creation of a framework for youth engagement for over six months, our youth leaders pilot-tested the framework by facilitating a series of youth engagement sessions (informed by the framework) with youth participants. Despite the challenge of recruiting “disengaged” youth participants, they were able to adjust and be flexible to address practical challenges:

Soon after, we started the engagement sessions with youth. We had a difficult time getting the youth to come, which in a sense was expected since we wanted to engage youth that were not engaged. We have learned to be flexible and adjust things as we go and I believe this gave the research the practical experience that we would have never foreseen (YL#1).

Another youth leader elaborated further about the importance of being flexible through effective communication to build trust and structure:

I learned that when working with high-risk, marginalized youth, one must be flexible. Communication is the key. Youth need trust in order to open up and the time it takes to build that trust may vary. Structure is important to an extent in order to garner data and results (YL#7).

The strategic use of a strengths-based approach was another related process throughout our project. This process started with getting to know the talents and strengths of our youth leaders:

We started out by getting to know each other through icebreaker activities and through learning from each other’s life
experiences. We realized the talents that each one possessed and how they could be important in understanding how to engage youth (YL#1).

Later on, during a pilot-test of our framework, our team purposefully relied on “youth leaders’ strengths to suggest potential activities to do with youth participants” (YL#2). Accordingly, the youth leaders planned to use a series of activities such as ice-breakers and art-based activities based on their skills and talents at engagement sessions with youth participants.

Creating a safe, comfortable, and fun space. One of the key factors for effective youth engagement was to create a safe, comfortable, and fun space during a pilot-test of the framework. One youth leader described,

We always keep communication and safety a priority and we consistently work at creating a safe and fun space for everyone and making sure everyone feels heard through the process. The fact that we had familiar faces come back every other week was very encouraging. We began to build bonds with one another, especially in the last year, making the space comfortable and fun (YL#4).

Another youth leader concurred, “I liked that the youth that came to the sessions had a safe, positive environment to get together with other youth and have fun. The youth that came did seem to enjoy their time there” (YL#7).

Another essential factor for constructive and meaningful youth engagement involved the strategic use of “check-ins and check-outs” (YL#2). Each session always started with check-in to get to know where each participant is at and get them oriented to the session, and ended with check-out to share her/his feedback, including things they liked and areas for improvement to more effectively engage youth; conclude each session in a positive, encouraging way, by bringing everyone together on the same page; and make some plan for looking forward to a next session. This point was recognized by another youth leader:

I feel like check-ins and check-outs should remain a key element of our meetings. As one of the agency members mentioned at the agency meeting, everything in between check-in and check-out can be chaotic but keeping a consistent welcome and closure is important (YL#4).

This youth agency partner shared that “everything in between can be chaos but it is crucial to have the check-in and check-out structure to help the experience be contained and create safety.”

Group Dynamics
Another key theme identified regarding “how engage” was about both opportunities and challenges involving group dynamics that include the sub-themes of: (a) dealing with transformation; (b) relationship and trust-building; (c) diversity, size, and commitment of youth group; (d) power issues; and (e) structural barriers.

Dealing with transformation. One key factor that worked well in the operation of youth leaders’ group was the way they dealt with the transformation of the group during the course of this multi-year project:

We handled the comings and goings at the transformations of the group quite well. For those of us that have decided to stay until this point, we were forced to adapt and adjust to some people only being partially committed and to some having to leave altogether. I felt that although it was disappointing when a key member had to leave, we all seemed genuinely supportive of that person’s situation and choice (YL#4).

On the other hand, the challenges of maintaining our youth-oriented, collaborative research process were identified by our youth leaders.

Relationship and trust-building. In particular, building a trustful, positive relationship with youth was a major challenge in itself. The following comment by a youth leader demonstrated this relationship-building issue, which was described as “asking for answers from youth prematurely”:

Despite our plan to execute activities with the youth, our meetings took a bit of a turn and we found ourselves not just hanging out and observing but searching for answers by asking the youth that attended very directly what they thought or experienced about certain issues. I found
the session when we asked the youth directly about their thoughts on homelessness to be problematic because I felt as though it was too soon and too intrusive. We had not yet created, in my opinion, a solid relationship with the youth for them to feel comfortable responding. Although our intentions were positive, I felt as though we were ‘using’ the youth for their answers in order to provide information to funders. While acknowledging that the financial side of this project is fundamental, I don’t feel that it is fair for the funding to sway the research so directly. I find that this will not provide us with authentic answers and defeats the purpose of “youth-led research” if topics are being pressured onto them (YL#4).

Despite our purposeful intention to bring forward the voices of our youth participants, asking sensitive questions such as poverty and homelessness in their lives might be judged as too intrusive if we failed to spend sufficient time to build a trustful relationship with them. It was echoed by another youth leader who was concerned about “some youth not feeling comfortable with what was to be carried out in sessions, when asking youth about sensitive issues such as homelessness without gaining their trust first” (YL#2). Although we hoped to provide youth-oriented opportunities to uncover voices of youth participants, it did not seem well received by both youth leaders and participants, as summarized by the following comment:

There was so much concern with being careful about the types of questions that are ‘acceptable’ to ask the youth participants regarding their personal experiences with poverty, homelessness, etc. I understood to some extent these concerns; however, I wish we were more creative in finding ways to get certain conversations started, which would give us some insight to each other’s experiences and possible suggestions... I liked that many of the youth participants who come to the meetings are consistent in attendance and they seem to enjoy the gatherings. I see this as some sort of achievement on our end that we were able to keep their interest (YL#5).

Rather than directly asking sensitive questions, this youth leader was insightful to suggest using a more creative approach to engaging youth in conversation (e.g., short video-showing, art-based activities such as painting), while admitting that we were able to see consistent attendance by many youth participants in our sessions. A key lesson described by this youth leader’s saying that “I wish we were more creative in finding ways to get certain conversations started;” is extremely important as an essential reminder for our future work. This point was echoed by another youth leader’s observation that although “our group started out idealistically agreeing to make collaborative and consensus-based decisions…. in reality, there is a lot of trust, time and energy that must go into that process” (YL#6). This observation underlines a very important reminder about trust-building with you through investing “time and energy.”

Nonetheless, it was encouraging to see youth leaders’ observation about evidence of building a positive relationship with youth. One way of effective relationship-building was through the use of “debrief” within the youth leaders’ group. It was described that “we became good at debriefing and honestly voicing our thoughts and feelings. I appreciated how we were able to do this quite well near the end. It is very helpful” (YL#4). The same youth leader stressed the importance of using an inclusive, mutually respectful approach: “Assuring space for everyone was something we worked at continuously. It became important to allow everyone space to speak by not cutting the speaker off, giving a person time to respond, and listening to what was being shared” (YL#4).

Another key factor for effective relationship- and trust-building involved the maintenance of accountability, as well as the importance of flexibility to understand the unpredictable nature of youth’s lives:

Depending on what is feasible to the members of the new group, it would be a good idea to maintain some sort of accountability or stability in order to keep the process running smoothly. Ensuring that the members who are committing to the project remain engaged is important. Stability is one of the elements of our framework and it would be important to reflect that. Flexibility and understanding of the unpredictability in each of our lives and in the lives of the youth is also
something we did well and should keep an open mind about (YL#4).

**Diversity, size, and commitment of youth group.** As noted earlier, our research project strives to appreciate diversity within the youth population. Within the context of group dynamics, a youth leader commented on internal group structure:

One of the major learnings from this research project has been from the internal group structure, makeup, and dynamics and its shifts throughout the past year and a half. When I first joined this project I was not sure what to expect. I was excited to see the diversity in the room, the variety of youth present, and the multitude of lived experience represented. This truly was a major strength of the project (YL#6).

Another youth leader further elaborated the complexity of the internal group structure, which made the process “interesting and frustrating yet rewarding”:

Creating the framework with about 17 youth who were at different stages in their lives and had diverse life experiences was interesting and frustrating yet rewarding. The discussions always went in circles and it became a routine for them to take the whole meeting. However, as we started to see the framework come to life, we appreciated the process and saw utility in having gone in circles because that is how youth in general were going to understand it. The project started to make sense but we also started to lose some of the youth leaders due to life changes. The group lost some of its diversity that made it unique especially in a university setting. This mishap made the group draw closer to each other and it made the discussions go much smoother because everyone would have a chance to speak and be heard in the discussions (YL#1).

Gradual reduction of the size of the youth leaders’ group brought unforeseen benefits: “With fewer youth leaders provided more ease of getting to know each other better over the weeks. More youth leaders’ voices were being heard in a smaller group. Group work was more efficient” (YL#2). Another youth leader spoke of the benefit of having a more committed youth group to co-create a framework of youth engagement:

In the beginning, it was very difficult to feel like we could get any work done or have our voice heard because there were so many people. This made the process quite slow and at times seemingly ineffective. As time went on, the group got much smaller. By September 2013 there was a fairly consistent 16 members or so that would come regularly to meetings. Although losing some key members who, I felt, provided a lot of good insight and experiences was difficult, the smaller, more committed group made it much easier to move forward. We started to agree upon what we felt the basis, the philosophy, and the outcome of this framework should be. We narrowed down our targeted demographic and decided upon wording we were comfortable with. Finally, in November or December 2013, we had a skeleton framework that most of us seemed pleased with (YL#4).

However, the challenging life situations of youth seem to make it very difficult to fully commit to a labor-intensive research project like ours:

Whether that be in numbers, people’s ability to commit fully, or the time in between meetings, this made it quite difficult to move forward. Though this was a paid project, I think, most, if not all, of us could not depend on this job alone to support us financially. Because of this, our full-time work would take precedence at times, making it difficult to be 100% committed to every meeting (YL#4).

**Power issues.** Another significant factor for the research process described by our youth leaders was power issues. Our research project’s strategic focus on power sharing with youth was greatly appreciated and ensured innovation and uniqueness of the project, identified by a youth leader:

In the agency sharing meetings, I appreciated the youth workers/
professionals admitting that they often have a hard time giving youth the power to run the programs that include them. This formalized what we were doing and finally made sense why it was a unique research project (YL#4).

However, this type of funded research projects created other power issues, one of which concerned funding from granting agencies. A youth leader voiced that “details about funding were unclear; there was not always enough transparency for the youth leaders. Power dynamics seemed to limit our voices in some circumstances” (YL#2).

Another related power issue was about ensuring that decisions made were in consultation with the group. A youth leader described this matter when the group had an option of inviting a provincial judge to one of the youth engagement sessions with high-risk youth:

It is important when dealing with this type of group that all decisions made are consulted with the group. For example, when the judge wanted to come, I think it was important that firstly the youth leaders have a say in whether or not that was okay and secondly that the youth have a say. If we are remaining true to our framework, we want this to be a safe and youth-led space so transparency is crucial (YL#4).

As emphasized by the above two quotes, “transparency” was identified as an important factor for mutually respectful relationship-building with youth. A comment was made to remind us of being more critical and conscious about whether this research project is indeed “youth-led/youth-guided”:

A major frustration I faced over the last year and a half was the presumption of this project as being a youth-led, youth-guided initiative. I do believe in the last few months we have begun to address this, but the challenges are something to acknowledge. I believe phase two of this project can start fresh with the learnings from phase one (this past year and a half). For a large part of the project, I believe the project was largely dictated by funding needs and to some extent the project-lead. Although I can understand limited funding and financial strains impact choice and options, we should not have been told that we had agency to make decisions about topics outside of our control (YL#6).

In spite of our conscious efforts to make the process more youth-guided, the complex power issues such as meeting the funders’ needs and university researchers’ positions/roles became a major challenge even unconsciously. The same youth leader voiced her uneasiness in expressing dissent and critique:

I believe it took our group a while to feel comfortable expressing dissent and sharing opinions. This led to the youth leaders (myself included) not feeling like they could challenge or critique the course of the project. I believe this was in part due to the lack of a clear process and understanding of the project. It was many months into the project before everyone fully understood what we were taking on. Putting more time and energy into determining an inclusive decision-making process may have helped mitigate some of these frustrations (YL#6).

This youth leader was insightful to suggest the use of conscious ongoing efforts and commitment to “an inclusive decision-making process” by respectfully engaging youth.

**Structural barriers.** Apparently, these power issues are linked to structural barriers. The experiences from our research project uncovered structural factors that seemed to prevent many disadvantaged youth from continuing to involve in efforts to improve a support system for high-risk youth. Comments were made on perpetuating the societal/structural problems:

As the project moved forward, the frustrations of the group increased, because the purpose and intention of the project became muddled and unclear. The group also lost a few youth leaders who brought important perspectives. I believe this is an important piece to note. Although we (as youth leaders) got paid to attend, share our thoughts and opinions, this project once again
perpetuated the same structural problems in society. Many youth leaders who would have liked to stay involved were unable to, because of life situations, unstable homes, jobs and financial challenges. Again, this shows that not everyone has the same access to having a voice and being heard, regardless of the desire to participate. This is not something that can be easily fixed or addressed but is important to note (YL#6).

This youth leader’s critical observation that “not everyone has the same access to having a voice and being heard, regardless of the desire to participate” is extremely important, because this reality seems to be conditioned by the socio-economic, structural challenges that many of the high-risk youth face on a day-to-day basis.

**Collaborative and Coordinated Process in an Iterative Way**

Not only do the issues of group dynamics involve youth leaders, but these issues also involve the other community partners. Besides being guided/informed by our youth leaders, our project periodically engages our community and university partners to seek their professional and academic guidance on the process of our PAR project. This partner engagement provides opportunities for those community agency and university partners to give inputs on our youth-guided/informed process in order to ensure that the process implemented is meaningful and rigorous and has the potential of producing useful outcomes.

In fact, our community partners showed great appreciation for the use of a collaborative and coordinated process of the project that enables an iterative and evolving way of project planning and execution. The supervisor of a provincial government’s high-risk youth division nicely articulated this notion:

> I realize that uniqueness of this research involves the use of a respectful collaborative approach in an iterative and evolving way, by appreciating and integrating diverse perspectives into coherent and meaningful research. This team consists of diverse interdisciplinary and cross-sectorial partners. The use of this collaborative, team-based approach is essential to co-develop and co-implement our research. Our team meetings, as well as email conversations, provide a respectful, safe space and opportunity to discuss and have dialogues on key issues that our community faces and on meaningful approaches to addressing these issues. By directly responding to the needs of our community based on a grass-roots approach, this research is grounded in the community with the support of our diverse community-university partnership (AP#2).

Appreciation for “a stellar network of collaborators for this project” was further elaborated by another community partner since this network is essential to improving community practices:

> Our partnership is well placed and a logical collaboration of agencies and institutions with the necessary skills and understanding to support the youth in exploring the identified issues and topics, while also learning about the best practices to engage youth more broadly. This network of partners has been working together for over 3 years to explore this research area. I congratulate the primary researcher in his effort to bring together a stellar network of collaborators for this project (AP#9).

The use of a collaborative and coordinated process in an inclusive and meaningful way was acknowledged by our community partners exemplified by the following comments by an executive director of a youth-serving agency:

> We observed significant support from fellow community agencies at Youth4YEG meetings, which is a true barometer of the quality of work being undertaken by the team and its acceptance in the community. It is a pleasure to witness community organizations working in coordination with others in support of youth wellbeing, as we are continually being challenged with limited resources and ever-increasing youth needs. The research Youth4YEG is undertaking is significant in identifying how our community can best serve a highly
marginalized population in meaningful ways. Working alongside of organizations such as Youth4YEG has been an honor and we fully support their endeavors towards building an increasingly strong and dynamic young adult population for years to come (AP#10).

Within the context of limited resources and growing youth needs, the effective coordination of community resources in a more collaborative way is vital to support optimal youth development, as stressed by the above comment.

What Impacts Are We Having?

Finally, in terms of “impacts,” our PAR project has started to show tangible benefits for both community youth-serving agencies and youth themselves. They spoke about a number of benefits from this youth-oriented collaborative research, including: (a) capacity-building; (b) inspirational, meaningful youth engagement at a positive and safe space; (c) demonstrating positive youth outcomes; and (d) activating the voice of youth for social change.

Capacity Building

Evidently, our research project has had an impact on capacity building of youth-serving agencies, as well as capacity building of youth as observed by our community partners. A program evaluation coordinator of a largest youth-serving agency in the region appreciated insightful information on effective youth engagement approaches from the research. She also described her observation for positive impacts (e.g., skills and confidence) on youth leaders from her agency who have involved in the research:

As we work with youth both in our after-school program sites and as teen mentors, being part of this project has provided us with valuable insights and information on the youth in our community and how we can work with them more effectively. The youth from our organization who have involved in this project have stated that they are very pleased to be a part of it and really feel that their voices are being heard. It has added to their confidence and to date several of the participants have gone on to speak out and advocate at all government levels—municipal, provincial, and federal—for all marginalized youth. Being a part of this project has really given them confidence and skills that will serve them well throughout their lives and offers the hope that they need right now to feel successful and inspired to make a difference for themselves and others (AP#1).

A coordinator of a high-risk youth unit at a provincial government agency admitted the benefits of co-learning, capacity building, and youth-guided knowledge mobilization:

Our diverse, respectful partnership provides a mutually beneficial space and opportunity for co-learning and mutual capacity building and for co-creating ideas and approaches to our research. I strongly believe that this research has the potential of making a real difference in better supporting our youth, by mobilizing youth’s voices and talents into actions for changes, especially for youth who live in marginalized conditions (e.g., poverty) including Aboriginal, immigrant, and refugee youth (AP#2).

Specifically, one tangible impact in the community was the role of this research in building capacity of community agencies on effective youth engagement: “Continued exploration of the framework builds capacity for more agencies to understand how to engage youth more effectively” (AP#3).

A program evaluation director from a public school board concurred:

This project enables professional learning, community engagement, and capacity-building among stakeholders in our educational community, contributing to the process of making a real difference for our youth and families in our community” (AP#4). T

The director of a government-funded community agency dedicated to ending homelessness acknowledged, “The project is directly relevant to our current work enhancing community capacity to address the needs of homeless and at-risk youth in our city” (AP#5).
Also, this project’s contributions to capacity-building and understanding of the complex lives of marginalized youth reached an immigrant-serving agency:

This project addresses an important need in relation to marginalized youth—some of whom come from immigrant or refugee backgrounds. This research deepens our understanding of the complex web of factors that impact the lives of marginalized youth, and also illuminates some of the unique barriers to inclusion that are faced by those who are newcomers (AP#6).

Furthermore, a regional funding agency who oversees coordinated efforts to address complex community issues including poverty and education emphasized the importance of learning from marginalized youth and implementing research findings to improve youth outcomes:

We work with numerous partners in order to address complex community issues, and our numerous investments support organizations and initiatives delivering a broad spectrum of services to vulnerable individuals and families. As an organization committed to reducing poverty in this region, it is imperative that we understand the challenges experienced by marginalized youth in achieving important milestones, like high-school completion, as a foundation for significantly improved outcomes in their future. The results from this project enable all of us to learn from marginalized youth and allow us the opportunity to implement our findings and improve outcomes for youth in years to come. There is a great deal of energy in our region right now to work together differently and in a much more coordinated fashion to promote better outcomes for youth. The timing for this research is terrific and we’re thrilled to be part of it! (AP#7).

“’The framework and format that this project has initiated could be a good starting point towards having a youth council at many organizations in order to maintain the youth-led perspective. Maybe our youth can be a part of this?” (AP#8).

**Inspirational, Meaningful Youth Engagement at a Positive and Safe Space**

Our community agency partners have had opportunities to witness the youth-informed process of our research and commended the provision of a positive, safe, and responsive space for meaningful and inspirational engagement with high-risk youth. For example, a director of a community youth-serving agency was impressed with the integrity of our research project, especially regarding its commitment to youth-oriented engagement:

As a community-based agency, we have been delighted to participate in their endeavors toward identifying meaningful youth engagement processes in our community. Youth4YEG provides opportunities for young individuals who are deemed at risk to engage in vital research and gain positive experiences in our community. We are very impressed with the integrity of Youth4YEG in a community climate that is experiencing ever increasing needs for youth engagement opportunities (AP # 10).

Another comment was made by the principal of a local charter school that serves a large number of young people (14 to 19 years old) with high-risk life conditions (e.g., poverty, homelessness, abusive/addictive behaviors) who have previously experienced interruptions in their formal learning:

Our students began attending the Youth4YEG engagement sessions in February 2014. In the weeks since their first experience, I have personally observed (through my own support in ensuring students are informed and have access to the program) an opportunity for meaningful engagement and agency that supports young people who have experienced challenging circumstances in their lives. Youth4YEG offers young people who would otherwise not have
access to a positive space, a place to explore their own interests free from drugs, alcohol or violence (AP#3).

In fact, several students from the school have become new members of our youth leader group and have started to make an important contribution to “inspiring today’s youth by creating community through relationships in a fun, inclusive environment to help youth achieve obtainable success” (i.e., new tentative mission of Youth4YEG).

Demonstration of Positive Youth Outcomes

Our community youth-serving agencies showed a keen interest in promoting positive outcomes for high-risk youth since they are accountable for having an impact on the community, especially on vulnerable population groups including high-risk youth and their families. For example, a community program coordinator who has known and worked with many of our youth leaders has already observed positive tangible outcomes, such as belongingness, confidence, and achievement: “This project has already improved many things for this group of marginalized youth including, but not limited to, a feeling of belonging, self-confidence, and achievement” (AP # 8). An executive director of a community agency spoke about empowered youth with pride:

In our time participating in the Youth4YEG project, we have observed a high quality of youth participation and research activity. YEG youth leaders communicated with a sense of empowerment and pride during activities and dialogues, which focused on vital youth engagement issues (AP#10).

A youth program coordinator of the same agency reiterated that our research “brought out a lot of strength and hope,” along with a meaningful relationship to promote a sense of belonging: “Relationship, youth want to make connection and community, desire to belong” (AP#10). A municipal government’s community coordinator enthusiastically mentioned the strengths of our project that “builds upon and enhances the capacity of youth to influence systems and services for the benefit of vulnerable youth and empower these youths to find their voice and to make a difference!” (AP#12).

An executive director of a local high-risk youth agency convincingly suggested the use of a strengths-based approach to working with youth, as opposed to a deficit-based approach: “From a strengths-based approach, tapping into the strengths offers more empowerment than trying to tackle bringing the weakness up to the ‘do’ level” (AP # 9). The same community partner articulated the value of our project on youth engagement as a means of youth empowerment and community development:

Activities that provide a self-determination measure of success and engagement to pursue further goals and a way out of poverty with stabilization of risk factors are essential, by striving to connect youth to engagement that will be empowering and offer lasting traction in the participants’ lives and in the local community. I value that this is the aim of YEG4Youth (AP#9).

Activating the Voice of Youth for Social Change

Indeed, a most innovative, unique aspect of our project observed by our community partners has been our strategic efforts to activate the voice of marginalized youth as the “driver” of the research:

This is a project that activates the voice of the marginalized youth that our agency serves. This project places the youth in the role of co-researcher and “driver” of the research. The key to success with this demographic is the relationships youth form with trusted workers and agencies; the youth must determine the trajectory and the outcome throughout the process (AP#9).

This community partner’s observation and suggestion for the use of this youth-guided approach are extremely important. To achieve this goal, building a meaningful relationship with youth is vital although the challenges of facilitating this process should be recognized as described earlier.

To reiterate these challenges, one community partner from a provincial government reminded of the importance of “non-judgmental” relationship-building with youth in response to our regular update on the project:
What youth are looking for is defined by the youth, and a theme that comes up repeatedly in my experience, and this update, is being non-judgmental. This is so important and certainly speaks to how sensitive youth are about interaction with adults that is judgmental. [In the update] the theme of peer interaction, caring and trustworthy people, and doing things in groups continues to repeat the importance of relationship at many levels, and having the ‘safety net’ in place. As adults, I think we continue to under-estimate the value youth put in the connections with adults they see as safe (AP#2).

Furthermore, the same community partner acknowledged that our research project is indeed an “anti-oppressive practice” in itself and that the project engages youth as key contributors/enablers to a social/system change:

The update does a wonderful job of capturing the thoughts of youth leaders around oppression, racism, discrimination, and stigma. Obviously, the participation of youth in all aspects of this project is an exercise in anti-oppressive practice and speaks to how youth should not be overlooked as important contributors to a system change (AP#2).

Regarding a system change, another partner from a largest regional youth-serving agency not only admitted the difficulty in letting go of agency control, but she also reminded of the need for a societal change:

We are an organization that has been around for a long time but we don’t have a youth council that can guide our program. It is difficult to let go of control, but the framework helps us do that; this helps us change how we think of ourselves as a society (AP#1).

As acknowledged by this quote, our youth-informed framework of youth engagement has the potential of facilitating this social change as guided by youth.

Contextualized within a social change perspective, another key concept identified was about the role of youth leaders as a conduit for sourcing youth views on social justice issues: “Youth4YEG should be the mechanism by which anyone who is interested in youth research connects to, and the youth leaders are the conduit for sourcing/researching youth views on current social justice issues” (AP # 9). Broadly, our research project addresses significant social justice issues that influence youth (including youth with high-risk conditions/behaviors), as a youth-oriented way of activating the voice of youth and mobilizing youth and community partners into action for social change. An avid community partner described her experiences in involving in our research project for over three and a half years, as an “amazing journey”:

It has truly been an amazing journey and what a pleasure it has been for me to see the changes in some of these young adults, for whom I have known for many years. Some of them have spoken to me about how they feel that they belong no matter what their background or circumstances have been in life. They are truly inspired to continue on with this work. Needless to say, the work that the youth have done on this project has been incredible, along with the expertise of community representatives, and the willingness to share their time and knowledge has also been a very positive experience to date for myself. It truly has been an invaluable experience and one that needs to continue along! (AP#1).

We have already witnessed some tangible milestones exemplified by these positive remarks on changes/transformations of youth and community partners who have been inspired by this project.

Brief Remarks by University Investigators

This PAR project has started strategically to centerpiece the contributions of youth leaders and community agency partners to the planning and implementation of our research; thus, university researchers have primarily played a background role. This background, supportive role has included university researchers’ contributions to securing research funding and other resources (e.g., the use of university facilities for meetings and youth engagement activities), offering theoretical (e.g.,
youth and poverty, youth and homelessness, cross-cultural issues) and methodological (i.e., PAR and qualitative research) expertise, and reminding the team members of the PAR principles and rigor and impact of research (e.g., capacity-building, knowledge mobilization).

Briefly, I share some reflective statements by university researchers (UR) on our PAR project (their identifications being coded as UR#1 to #4 below). First, those academic investigators are conscious of the use of terminologies that may stigmatize or marginalize our target population. For example, one university researcher noted, “I wondered about the term ‘high risk’ and I know it is common in the literature but I wonder if we might consider at least acknowledging that this term can be marginalizing in itself” (UR#1). In fact, the literature cautions the use of these terminologies (Blanchet-Cohen & Salazar, 2009; Caine & Boydell, 2010; Cammarota, 2011).

Another university investigator was critical about the use of term, “giving voice” to youth:

I am a bit apprehensive about using the word ‘giving voice’ because this almost implies that we have the power to give. They [Youth] indeed have their own voice—we haven’t given it to them—we have just highlighted them. I am wondering if we can just write ‘highlighting youth voice’ or ‘supporting youth voice’ (UR #2).

This researcher’s point is in line with “power issues” described earlier. Still, another academic researcher with extensive experiences in PAR reflected on the significance of “time and relationship,” within the context of youth’s challenging lives:

What strikes me most is the importance of time and relationship—this comes up again and again and tends to be in the background rather than the foreground. Here time had its pros and cons. Time was needed for the engagement process but was limited by structural constraints with respect to funding, but time also meant in the chaotic lives of youth that some were lost. Time also means they grow up and move on and new young people need to be engaged. The other issue is that we focused on youth who already had leadership skills and this, if you like, was an asset, which may not be found elsewhere—i.e., there were preconditions to a successful process (UR#3).

Importantly, she highlighted multidimensionality of time as the basic for engagement at structural, transitional, and developmental levels, as well as the issue of “preconditions” to a successful engagement process (specifically, speaking about leadership skills of youth in this project).

Furthermore, another university researcher’s observation focused on a transformational process of our youth leaders with respect to power dynamics, which portrays the challenge of ensuring the research process to be truly youth-led:

It occurs to me that what the youth may be experiencing, as they begin to question how truly youth led the process was, was a bit of the transformation. The power dynamic must shift as the youth gain experience and confidence with each other and with the process, and begin to assert themselves more. It seems that until that point it would be difficult to be fully youth led. It is great to be able to see this “process” in the data (UR #4).

Overall, as the principal investigator of this project, I learned about the opportunities and challenges of using youth leadership (especially, the role of our youth leaders) in community-based PAR through working with cross-sectorial community partners to inspire and engage broader youth groups in a constructive, meaningful way and help them become capable, contributive members of our society. It is encouraging to see impacts of our project reported in this paper; yet, efforts should continue to achieve the goal of transforming a system to more effectively support youth (especially, youth with high-risk conditions/behaviors) and meet their diverse needs.

Conclusion

This paper described the reflective experiences of our PAR team members, contextualized within the theme of the 15th Annual ESC Conference, namely, “Engaging for Change: Changing for Engagement.” I believe that these reflective accounts of my research partners effectively portrayed the incentives for, processes of, and outcomes from our youth engagement research.
project, which were matched nicely with the sub-themes of the conference: (a) Why engage?, (b) how do we engage?, and (c) what impacts are we having? Broadly, “engagement” is a core activity of our project to facilitate “change” and transformation at personal, social, and system levels, which, once again, reiterate the significance of the overall theme of the ESC conference.

Recently, Speer and Christens (2013) spoke about “strategic engagement” to develop “social power” to promote change in communities. In particular, strategic engagement gives attention to the role of power in community decision-making in order to enhance community capacity and impact including the transformation of policy and practice. According to Speer and Christens (2013), strategic engagement “democratizes the research process” to build social power with the aim of making change and improving social conditions. A key factor for achieving this goal, however, includes long-term relationship-building with “powerful” community partners who are “attentive to social power dynamics in community decision-making and capable of mobilizing their fellow citizens to influence these processes” (p. 743). I believe that our PAR project reported in this paper has provided convincing tangible illustrations for supporting/echoing the significance of strategic engagement, by focusing on the use of “strategic youth and partner engagement.” Importantly, this strategic engagement centerpieces the voices and talents of our youth leaders, supported by our community agency partners, along with a background role of university researchers.

Essentially, facilitating engagement, development, and wellbeing of high-risk, marginalized youth is a shared responsibility across all systems and sectors (Delgado, 2002; Ersing, 2009; Zahradnik, Stewart, O’Connor, Stevens, Ungar, & Wekerle, 2010) to promote practice, policy, and social changes and improve a support system for high-risk youth and their families/care-takers (Gemert et al., 2008; Zahradnik et al., 2010). Further efforts are required to more effectively address these needs for transformational changes that are identified as a significant gap in research (Abela & Hankin, 2008; Caine & Boydell, 2010; Curran, Bowness, & Comack, 2010; Lynam & Cowley, 2007; Wearing, 2011), by using a youth- and community-oriented engagement approach in an inclusive, collaborative way. Undoubtedly, engagement plays a key role in this change-inducing process and vice versa (i.e., in turn, change can induce/promote further engagement) in a dynamic and sustainable way.

References


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Abstract

How does a public university with over 80,000 students across 24 campuses provide every student with an engaged scholarship experience? This article chronicles the first steps of this ambitious journey to educate a new generation of engaged scholars by building engagement ecosystems: networks of students, faculty, courses, and communities working together on compelling socially relevant projects around a common theme. By incorporating projects from an impact-focused community engagement program into a cross-section of existing classes, universities can expand engagement opportunities from a select few to the vast majority of the students. This article reviews current approaches to scale engagement opportunities before describing the principles and mechanics of the Engagement Ecosystem model. A case study of the pilot implementation of this model is presented with preliminary assessment results (n=1,165), key lessons learned, and future expansion plans.

Introduction

Now more than ever, in the heart of the engaged scholarship movement, there is high student and faculty interest in engaging with communities, locally and worldwide. As of 2015, 361 colleges and universities have demonstrated their commitment to integrating engagement into the mission and operations of their institution by earning the distinction of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2015). Unfortunately, despite strong interest and commitment, only a limited number of students and faculty members get involved in engagement opportunities (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2009). Universities are innovating and adopting a plethora of approaches to expand engagement opportunities from a select few to the vast majority of the students. Depending on their size, location, history of engagement, and access to resources, there are different kinds of approaches to integrate and expand engagement opportunities:

(1) Engagement within or outside of class time. Expecting students with packed schedules to commit their time outside of class voluntarily to community engagement may not be reasonable. At the same time, many courses have no room for integrating engagement into class time. Jenkins (2011) arranged for her students to complete service learning during regularly scheduled class time and reported that the negative impact that reduced face time might have had on her course outcomes and course evaluations was offset by the positive impact of the service-learning project. Jenkins’s model solved the problem of engaging students with significant demands on their time, but she had to alter her course’s learning outcomes to integrate the engagement experience.

(2) Engagement championed by individual faculty members or a college- institution-wide approach. UMASS-Lowell’s College of Engineering has integrated service learning into all of its core courses (Duffy, Barrington, West, Heredia, & Barry, 2011), while smaller institutions like Tougaloo College and Wittenberg College have made service learning a requirement for all students (Tougaloo College, 2015; Wittenberg College, 2015). Some universities have been successful in attracting resources from private donors to support more faculty and students getting involved (Weerts & Hudson, 2009; Cornell University, 2015), while others have raised funds by increasing tuition after a successful student vote (Bernhardt, 2015). All of these college- and institution-wide models require significant resources and may not be feasible at larger institutions where the number of students would likely overwhelm community partners and would require heavy commitment from a large number of faculty. It would also not be feasible to require all students to do service learning in areas with low population densities, i.e. rural areas where land-grant institutions are located and there are relatively few community partners to work with.
(3) Real-time engagement or virtual experiences. While real-time, in-person community engagement is the norm, virtual approaches to develop student competencies and prepare them for deeper engagement have been championed. Michigan State University has integrated online lessons (“Tools of Engagement”) that introduce students to the concept of university-community engagement and develop their community-based research and engagement skills (Michigan State University, 2015). The online lessons are a scalable approach to get more students interested in community engagement because they are created once for use over and over again, are relevant to students from all disciplines, and can be integrated into existing courses. At the individual course level, a faculty member created a virtual service-learning project for his online students where they used the website Appropedia.org to coordinate an information campaign on saving money and energy by retrofitting traffic lights with LED bulbs (Pearce, 2009). Another course used a problem-based service-learning model where students acted as consultants for a nonprofit, completing and delivering commissioned assignments to them via email (Dallimore, Rochefort, & Simonelli, 2010). Both the Appropedia and problem-based service-learning projects provided non-travel-based engagement experiences where the project enhanced course-based learning while delivering valuable services to a community partner.

Alongside these approaches, there is a need for new organizational and pedagogical models that overcome the barriers of limited time and financial resources for students and faculty and limited access to community partners. The quest is for lean and scalable organizational models that can seamlessly integrate virtual and in-person engagement, in-class and community-based activities, and involve faculty and students in different ways with different degrees of engagement. A balance between delivering self-determined community impact and developing students’ engagement-related learning outcomes that encourages deeper engagement is essential. At Penn State, we are testing various models to determine how to get every single one of our 80,000 undergraduate students across 24 campuses—a diverse student population ranging from freshmen through adult learners, online distance learners through returning military veterans on campus—to graduate with an engaged scholarship experience by 2020. This monumental goal, reflected by other comparable institutions, cannot be achieved via a singular approach or definition of engagement; rather, we need a multiplicity of organizational, operational, and pedagogical models that meet the needs of students, faculty, departments, and colleges with varying priorities and buy-in for community engagement.

One potential program architecture is the Engagement Ecosystem (EE) model that focuses on carving out projects from impact-focused community engagement programs in the United States and abroad and integrating them into classes that do not have an engagement component. An impact-focused community engagement program is a program where students work shoulder-to-shoulder with diverse partners to develop, incubate, and launch self-sustaining projects identified by community partners. This article delves into the architecture, logistics, and mechanics of the EE model. A case study of the EE model, from the spring 2015 semester, is presented with results and discussion of the assessment approach in terms of impact on students and faculty. This article is of particular interest to universities striving to expand their engagement opportunities in a lean fashion without overwhelming community partners.

The Engagement Ecosystem Model

Similar to other large land-grant universities, Penn State has countless opportunities for students and faculty to engage with the world outside of the university through a wide assortment of majors, minors, and certificates; over 200 study abroad programs; and research and engagement centers with diverse thematic and geographical foci. Despite countless opportunities to engage with communities, many faculty and students do not get involved. Over a three-year period, Penn State’s Service Learning-Student Engagement Task Force (2012) identified several factors that contribute to students and faculty members not participating:

1. Students want to partake in community engagement efforts but struggle to integrate them into their busy schedules, cannot afford travel-based experiences, or find out about such opportunities too late in their academic career.

2. Many faculty members are interested in starting community engagement programs but don’t know how to proceed and get institutional buy-in. Established programs with regularly offered courses and engagement experiences often do not have sustainable revenue models to sup-
port faculty and student travel which compromises their ability to recruit students year-after-year, and lower student numbers further hurt program sustainability. This results in many programs shutting down after a few years when the faculty get burned-out. Community relationships often get frayed when this happens.

(3) Numerous faculty members want to play a role in community engagement but do not have the desire, time, or experience to directly engage with communities. Rather, they would like to work on meaningful projects that are mediated by reliable and more experienced faculty or staff members with strong community partnerships.

How can we integrate different kinds and levels of faculty and student interest across the engagement continuum that spans from learning about engagement to stand-alone short-term experiences to long-term impact-focused collaborations? The EE model engages students early in their college career while building pipelines into impact-focused programs. Experienced consultants help faculty members embed meaningful projects into existing courses to form engagement ecosystems: networks of students, faculty, courses, and communities working together on compelling socially relevant projects around a common theme. Depending on the nature of their course, their personal preferences, and departmental buy-in, faculty participate in this ecosystem in different ways. Courses involved at low and medium degrees of engagement tend to focus on lower-division students and serve as pipelines for the high degree and impact-focused courses and programs. While a small group of students travel and work directly with communities to address problems around this theme via the impact-focused program, six courses work on projects that directly help the impact-focused courses, and another twenty courses can offer students an exciting learning experience related to the community project. Students that do not physically travel can have their “minds travel” by working on projects that are based in different cultural and geographical contexts.

This innovative ecosystem model has been validated before with a single professor teaching two courses but engaging over 800 students in 12 other courses in engagement experiences (Mehta, Brannon, Zappe, Colledge, & Zhao, 2010). To test its ability to strengthen students’ engagement-related competencies in a lean and sustainable manner, engagement ecosystems can be built using these five tenets:

(1) Participating in the ecosystem is elective.
(2) The ecosystem has broad themes that are relevant across the university. Having broad themes such as water, digital music, and geriatric care make it easy to get buy-in and develop projects for courses across multiple colleges. Ecosystem themes emerge organically based on societal relevance, community demands, and alignment of the ecosystem’s theme with faculty members’ courses and research interests.
(3) The ecosystem is built around an impact-focused community engagement program to bring realism to the projects and ensure that the collective efforts lead to self-determined and sustainable short-term and long-term impacts for community partners. The impact-focused program can have a local or global focus but must espouse the core principles of engagement: it must be responsive to, respectful of, and accessible to community partners.
(4) Faculty and support staff work with participating professors to carve out projects related to the overarching theme. The degree of engagement should be tailored to the flexibility of the course so that projects within the ecosystem fall on a spectrum of engagement (Figure 1) with opportunities for students to engage at a low to high degree with both travel and non-travel-based experiences (Table 1). For more introductory courses with a strict schedule of content, lower degree projects are implemented that entail a lower percentage of the course grade as well as lower impact and relevance for the high impact program, with the primary objective to enhance student learning. For courses with more freedom in the curriculum, larger projects worth a larger portion of the final grade, and tighter coupling with the impact-focused program are implemented.
(5) Courses involved need to have a project component, which opens the door to integrating projects where students take their class-specific knowledge and apply it to a problem presented to them that relates to the theme and is defined and driven by real needs of the impact-focused program. To be successful in the course, students must understand theme-related content and meld this knowledge with their own findings to reinforce the class-specific learning outcomes while gaining additional competencies in engagement-related learning outcomes.
To illustrate how the EE model can be implemented, we present a pilot case study with an ecosystem built around Penn State’s Humanitarian Engineering and Social Entrepreneurship (HESE) program. The HESE program engages about 50 students every semester in the rigorous research, design, field-testing, and launch of technology-based social enterprises in resource-constrained environments. HESE ventures are multi-year endeavors that have emerged organically from engagement with developing communities in countries including Kenya, Mozambique, and Sierra Leone. Faculty-led multi-year ventures provide students with immersive frameworks for learning, research, and entrepreneurial engagement, while advancing ventures towards large-scale dissemination. HESE ventures include affordable greenhouses, telemedicine systems and low-cost diagnostics to screen for diabetes and urinary tract infections. For the engagement ecosystem pilot, the greenhouse and test strip venture teams identified sub-projects to integrate into courses in the ecosystem. Additionally, themes relevant to HESE, including international development and design for low-resource contexts, were integrated into courses in the ecosystem.

A recent graduate was hired by Penn State’s Council on Engaged Scholarship as a research and coordination assistant—i.e. an ecosystem manager—to help build and manage ecosystems. Personal networks and campus-wide listservs were leveraged to identify faculty members with an interest in aligning their course projects with the HESE ecosystem. Lower level general education courses were particularly targeted to get freshmen and sophomores involved. Once interested professors were identified, the ecosystem manager and the director of HESE met to discuss the content of the interested professor’s course(s) and how a HESE-related project could be integrated into the course.

After the initial meeting, projects were developed through emails and further meetings.
between the professors, the ecosystem manager, and the HESE director. Once professors approved the project and assigned it to their students, the ecosystem manager provided additional resources for the courses. A website was created to provide a background of the HESE program and its philosophy, the operational context (geographical and cultural), content of the HESE courses, and specific information about the ventures. For courses that required a significant amount of background in the content of the HESE courses, an introductory seminar course on Design for Developing Communities (EDSGN 453 – see Table 2) was streamed live and made available on-demand for all students. To answer specific questions about HESE and projects as well as get students excited about their projects and role in the ecosystem, the ecosystem manager, as well as the HESE director and students directly involved in HESE ventures, visited the courses on an as-needed basis. The ecosystem manager answered additional questions from both professors and students in the ecosystem via email throughout the semester.

Figure 2 shows the breakdown of the degrees of engagement at which courses were engaged and Table 2 provides detail on the specific projects given to courses in the HESE ecosystem.

Preliminary Assessment of Engagement Ecosystem Model

To assess the efficacy of the EE model for scaling engagement, we assessed the impact of the activities on the students’ self-reports related to one or more of four engagement-related learning outcomes: multicultural awareness, civic responsibility, ethical decision making, and systems thinking. We were specifically interested in whether students in the non-travel-based courses would have similar learning outcomes as those students who participated in the travel-based impact-focused program. Specifically:

1. Would the students in the ecosystem overall significantly improve in any of the learning outcomes from pre-test to post-test?

2. Would the students in the lower-intensive pipeline courses generate any significant learning outcomes from pre-test to post-test?

3. Which courses were most successful in building student competencies in the engagement-related learning outcomes? What were their effect sizes?

Participants and Procedure

The preliminary assessment targeted a total enrollment of 1,165 students in the ecosystem from 14 courses instructed by 15 faculty members. Due to the varying course objectives and time that could be devoted to an assessment, each course instructor chose the learning outcomes that best fit with their course’s project and which survey would be most appropriate for assessment. Table 3 displays the learning outcomes assessed in different courses. For this initial pilot, a control group was not used because the courses did not have several sections and splitting the classes in two would have presented additional difficulties for the professors.

The instructor administered the paper-and-pencil surveys to students at the beginning and end of the course. Students’ participation was voluntary. Response rates on pre-test and post-test were 82.5% and 52.5% respectively (see Table 3). The response rate declined dramatically because four instructors did not involve their students in the post-test due to time and curriculum issues. Further explanations of the dropout rate from pre- to post-survey are in the Discussion section. Table 4 displays students’ demographic information.
### Table 2. Course Projects in Engagement Ecosystem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Student Project Description</th>
<th>Course Enrollment</th>
<th>Course Grade %</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>HESE Teams</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSGN 452A</td>
<td>Worked on research, design, testing, commercialization, business model, and implementation of greenhouse venture</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Impact-Focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSGN 452B</td>
<td>Worked on research, design, testing, commercialization, business model &amp; implementation of test strips venture</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Impact-Focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSGN 452C</td>
<td>Developed new ventures around telemedicine systems and biomedical devices</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Impact-Focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSGN 454</td>
<td>Traveled to project sites for 3 weeks to field-test technologies, implement business models, &amp; gather data for research projects, working closely with community partners.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Impact-Focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSGN 453</td>
<td>Learned about humanitarian engineering, user-centered design for affordability, and social entrepreneurship</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greenhouses / Food Security</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSGN 100</td>
<td>Developed design solutions to keep greenhouse material sturdy at corners</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIOL 415</td>
<td>Created brochures on best management practices of pest management for greenhouses</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGL 202A</td>
<td>Created grant proposals, literature reviews, and brochures for greenhouses</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGL 202B</td>
<td>Made videos on greenhouses for HESE teams to show to smallholder farmers, donors, and students</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASTRO 001</td>
<td>Created brochures about motion of sun as it relates to the placement of greenhouses</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Test Strips / Global Health</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSGN 100</td>
<td>Developed design solutions for administering test strips to patients</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHEM 112H</td>
<td>Solved problems around speeds and sensitivities of the test strips, and stabilities of the tests to field conditions</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IST 440W</td>
<td>Improved simple health equipment to collect basic data alongside the test strips</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCIED 411</td>
<td>Designed &amp; tested a short lesson on urinary tract infections</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IST 402</td>
<td>Interviewed former test strip team member to learn about emerging issues with technology</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HESE Topics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME 401</td>
<td>Provided specific design insights based on simulations and prototyping pertaining to the biomedical devices being designed by the HESE teams.</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDFS 429</td>
<td>Wrote paper about risk and resiliency of children in Sierra Leone after the civil war &amp; Ebola outbreak</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHYS 251</td>
<td>Completed activities on physics in low resource contexts (i.e. reflective solar water heaters and origami microscopes)</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDFS 229</td>
<td>Guest lectures on toys in developing countries versus the US and their role in infant and child development</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHS 402</td>
<td>Completed outside learning activities and presented on RHS topics in countries that HESE works in</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Abbreviations**

- EDSGN 452A – Greenhouse Team
- EDSGN 452B – Test Strip Team
- EDSGN 452C – Other Project Teams
- EDSGN 454 – Field Experience
- EDSGN 453 – Seminar
- EDSGN 100 – Introduction to Engineering Design
- BIOL 415 – Ecotoxicology
- ENGL 202A – Writing in the Social Sciences
- ENGL 202B – Writing in the Humanities
- ASTRO 001 – Astronomical Universe
- CHEM 112H – Honors Chemical Principles II
- IST 440W – Information Sciences and Technical Problem Solving
- SCIED 411 – Teaching Secondary Science
Measures

The engagement-related learning outcomes assessed were drawn from the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) essential learning outcomes. We employed VALUE rubrics developed by the AAC&U as a foundation to develop assessment tools such as rubrics and self-report surveys for multicultural awareness, civic responsibility, ethical decision-making, and systems thinking. In this preliminary assessment, we only used the self-report surveys. Survey items were written based on rubric descriptions or were adapted based on existing scales or concepts in literature (Caban, 2010; Kuusisto, Tirri, & Rissanen, 2012; Olney & Grande, 1995; Simonis, 2009). Table 5 demonstrates example items from the four scales. Students rated each item on a four-point Likert-type
scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) or from 1 (never) to 4 (often). An average score across the items represents a student’s score on that learning outcome. Data supported the unidimensional structure of the four scales with all Cronbach’s α values greater than 0.80 (Table 5).

In addition to using the self-report surveys to assess student learning outcomes, we designed a faculty survey to gather instructors’ feedback. The survey included 13 short answer questions covering topics such as perceived benefits and costs of incorporating engagement activities into the curriculum, reflection on collaboration and communication, and satisfaction with and future involvement in community engagement. The online survey was emailed to the course instructors at the end of the semester.

Table 4. Demographic Information of the Sample in Pre-test and Post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variable</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>54.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class standing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>34.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Super senior</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural Sciences</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts and Architecture</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earth and Mineral Sciences</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Human Development</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Sciences and Technology</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eberly Science</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Arts</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undetermined</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>897</td>
<td>93.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

We used paired t-tests to examine whether students had significant gains across the semester.
### Table 5. Definitions, Example Items, and Internal Consistencies of the Four Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Expected Learning Outcomes</th>
<th># of Items</th>
<th>Example Item</th>
<th>Cronbach's α Pre</th>
<th>Cronbach's α Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Awareness</td>
<td>To demonstrate sensitivity toward human differences and apply diverse perspectives to complex subjects.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>I am sensitive to the feelings of culturally different others.</td>
<td>.825</td>
<td>.809</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Responsibility</td>
<td>To identify civic identity and to demonstrate an ability to work collaboratively and effectively within community contexts to achieve a civic aim.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>I think that people with more social resources should help people with needs.</td>
<td>.861</td>
<td>.854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Decision Making</td>
<td>To develop a sense of personal integrity and clarify personal values, and to apply knowledge and abilities to solve societal problems in ethical ways.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>I try to consider another person's position when I face a conflict situation.</td>
<td>.832</td>
<td>.861</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems Thinking</td>
<td>To use a variety of inquiry strategies incorporating multiple views to make value judgments, solve problems, answer questions, and generate new understandings.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>I examine how different parts of a system may influence each other.</td>
<td>.857</td>
<td>.885</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of Four Learning Outcome Scores by Engagement Degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Outcome</th>
<th>Engagement Degree</th>
<th>N&lt;sup&gt;*&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Awareness</td>
<td>Impact-focused</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.33 (0.404)</td>
<td>3.40 (0.342)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3.03 (0.386)</td>
<td>3.10 (0.321)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>3.09 (0.380)</td>
<td>3.14 (0.355)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>3.09 (0.392)</td>
<td>3.15 (0.351)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic Responsibility</td>
<td>Impact-focused</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.41 (0.395)</td>
<td>3.36 (0.330)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3.13 (0.320)</td>
<td>3.12 (0.348)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.02 (0.482)</td>
<td>3.08 (0.431)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3.07 (0.350)</td>
<td>3.02 (0.429)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>3.15 (0.411)</td>
<td>3.14 (0.408)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical Decision Making</td>
<td>Impact-focused</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.33 (0.370)</td>
<td>3.40 (0.388)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>3.24 (0.315)</td>
<td>3.28 (0.379)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>3.25 (0.324)</td>
<td>3.30 (0.382)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems Thinking</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3.32 (0.332)</td>
<td>3.33 (0.355)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>3.32 (0.332)</td>
<td>3.33 (0.355)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * Only cases that responded to both pre- and post-tests are included. Not all learning outcomes were assessed in all engagement levels. Standard deviations are in parentheses.
However, since more than one t-test was conducted, the p-values of the later tests were adjusted by dividing 0.05 by the number of tests conducted to avoid inflation of Type I error. Since significance testing depends on sample sizes, we also calculated effect sizes indicated by Cohen’s $d$ on each learning outcome generated by different courses. Effect size measures the standardized magnitude of relationships between variables. The conventional thresholds to interpret Cohen’s $d$ are small (0.2), medium (0.5) and large (0.8).

**Results**

Since we only assessed systems thinking in one non-travel-based course, we did not have enough data for analysis, though its descriptive statistics are summarized along with the other three learning outcomes in Table 6.

**Multicultural Awareness**

Students from five courses participated in the multicultural awareness assessment on both pre- and post-tests. The five courses included one impact-focused course and four non-travel-based ecosystem courses. 264 cases had matched responses on pre- and post-tests. Students from the five courses overall had significantly higher multicultural awareness score on the post-test (M=3.15, SD=0.351) compared to the pretest (M=3.09, SD=0.392), $t$ (263) = 2.936, $p$=.004<.05. On average, students in the ecosystem improved multicultural awareness after one semester.

We were especially interested in whether the four non-travel-based ecosystem courses led to similar learning outcomes as the impact-focused program. The four ecosystem courses had significant gains in multicultural awareness scores across the semester, $t$ (236) = 2.634, $p$=.009. The effect size (Cohen’s $d$=0.17) was comparable to that of the impact-focused course (Cohen’s $d$=0.19).

When examining individual course data, we found that three out of the four non-travel-based courses generated effect sizes similar to the impact-focused program (Table 7). One non-travel-based course (i.e., HDFS 229) achieved a statistically significant post-pre gain in multicultural awareness, $t$ (109) = 2.235, $p$=.027.

**Civic Responsibility**

Students from five courses participated in the civic responsibility assessment on both pre- and post-tests. The five courses included one impact-focused course and four non-travel-based ecosystem courses. 116 students had matched responses on pre- and post-tests. Students overall had no significant gains in civic responsibility scores, $t$ (115) = 0.493, $p$=.623. None of the courses had significant gains in civic responsibility scores, all $p$>.10, and the effect sizes ranged from none to small.

**Ethical Decision-Making**

Students from one impact-focused course and three non-travel-based ecosystem courses participated in the ethical decision-making assessment on both pre- and post-tests with 264 cases’ responses matched. Students overall had marginally significant higher scores on the post-test (M=3.30, SD=0.382) compared to the pre-test (M=3.25, SD=0.324), $t$ (191) = 1.878, $p$=.062. The non-travel-based ecosystem courses as a whole failed to lead a significant increase in the ethical decision-making score. However, students from two out of the three non-travel-based courses improved their ethical decision-making scores over the semester. For BME401, $t$ (58) = 2.254, $p$=.028, Cohen’s $d$=0.25.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Cohen’s $d$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENGL 202A</td>
<td>3.12 (.269)</td>
<td>3.20 (.201)</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDFS 229</td>
<td>3.06 (.384)</td>
<td>3.14 (.353)</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HESE*</td>
<td>3.33 (.404)</td>
<td>3.40 (.342)</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSGN 100</td>
<td>3.02 (.403)</td>
<td>3.08 (.336)</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASTRO 001</td>
<td>3.16 (.360)</td>
<td>3.13 (.365)</td>
<td>-0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Cohen’s $d$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIOL 415</td>
<td>3.22 (.307)</td>
<td>3.38 (.371)</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BME 401</td>
<td>3.28 (.325)</td>
<td>3.36 (.343)</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HESE*</td>
<td>3.33 (.370)</td>
<td>3.40 (.388)</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDSGN 100</td>
<td>3.22 (.313)</td>
<td>3.18 (.390)</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *HESE is serving as a reference. Standard deviations are in parentheses.
For BIOL415, $t(30) = 2.329$, $p = .027$, Cohen’s $d = 0.46$. The effect sizes of these two pipeline courses were even larger than that of the impact-focused program (Cohen’s $d = 0.18$) (Table 7).

Faculty Feedback

During meetings with the ecosystem manager, five of the fourteen professors of non-travel-based courses expressed interest in traveling to the countries where the projects in their courses were set in order to gain a better understanding of the context. Four of the fifteen instructors returned the faculty surveys. The instructors perceived that the engaged component enhanced student learning, e.g., “broadening my students’ understanding of biology and its application,” and stimulated multicultural and global awareness, e.g., “providing a way for our students to learn about different cultures…to enable our students to be global citizens and to be prepared to tackle global problems.” Professors also appreciated how the engagement projects aroused students’ interests and emotions, e.g., “many of them were quite interested to learn”; “the students enjoyed the projects…most of them were very proud of their work”; “students get an intuitive understanding as well as mental awareness. I find that people learn better when positive emotions are involved.” Considering the nature of these engagement projects, it was not surprising that the students faced challenges as indicated by one instructor, “The biggest challenge is the number of unknowns at the start of the project….The freshmen don’t quite know how to deal with unknowns, so it was a struggle.” But it turned out to be encouraging, with one professor saying, “However, in the end, I think most of them were very proud of their work.” All four instructors indicated satisfaction with their experiences and future commitment.

The instructors valued the assistance they received from the ecosystem manager and HESE director, such as project templates (e.g., “Most helpful were my meetings with [them] to develop the engagement project…and providing me with the brochure template.” “The three engaged adventure activities created by the pilot committee were a good start.”) and guest speaker support (e.g., “I appreciated having [them] come to my class and talk.” “[The ecosystem manager] was helpful at the end when our students presented their work.”) One instructor pointed out the need for refining the process to integrate the engaged projects into the curriculum: “One of [the engagement activities] couldn’t be implemented this semester since the adventure was too distinct from the course activity it would have been embedded in, though I am going to revise the course activity for fall to make it fit better.” Other instructors felt the need to enhance collaboration, e.g., “I think a bit more on the big picture and expectations for the students would have been nice to delve a bit deeper into.” “I’d like to learn more about what other faculty are doing.”

Discussion

The preliminary assessment results indicate that the students in the engagement ecosystem improved multicultural awareness and ethical decision-making over a semester. The results were consistent with previous findings that students increased multicultural awareness/competence (Dunlap, 1998; Einfeld & Collins, 2008) and ethical reasoning (Donahue, 1999; Leming, 2001) through getting involved in community engagement. More interesting is the question of whether the non-travel-based ecosystem courses would expand opportunities for more students to achieve engagement-related learning outcomes. Our results show that students in some ecosystem courses had significant gains in multicultural awareness and ethical decision-making over a semester, and these courses generated effect sizes comparable to the travel-based impact-focused program. Zooming into individual engagement ecosystem courses, the effectiveness of building competencies in each learning outcome depended on factors such as faculty preparation, curriculum focus, and assessment sensitivity. Three out of the four non-travel-based courses generated effect sizes in multicultural awareness comparable to the impact-focused program. The only course that was ineffective in achieving the outcome was a large introductory course with fluctuant attendance. Less emphasis on a multicultural issue in the curriculum and high dropout rate for the post-assessment might explain the results.

The BIOL 415 course had the largest effect size for ethical decision-making. The result might be explained by faculty preparation since the instructor attended workshops on teaching ethics while incorporating the engagement projects in her course. The BME 401 course also generated an effect size in ethical decision-making comparable to the impact-focused program. This instructor had incorporated non-travel-based engagement experiences in the curriculum for several years.

Students failed to show any gains in civic
responsibility. Several factors may explain these results. Most importantly, civic responsibility was never discussed as an explicit topic in any of these courses including the impact-focused courses. It is also possible that students do not necessarily have the vocabulary to self-report their improvements. Finally, it is possible that our assessment tool might not be sensitive enough to detect the pre-post change. Only two ecosystem courses (CHEM 112H & ENGL 202B) showed small effect sizes (Cohen’s $d = 0.20$ and 0.17 respectively). The slight gains might be explained by dispersing the projects across a semester-long timeline.

**Lessons Learned: Areas for Improvement**

Can we integrate different kinds and levels of interest in community engagement amongst students, faculty members, and their administrators so that their collective impact is much larger than the individual efforts? Yes, but the model needs a significant amount of fine-tuning. In order to make this model more effective, we need to improve faculty preparation and support, faculty and student buy-in, coordination logistics, and assessment strategy.

**Faculty Preparation and Support**

As seen with BIOL 415 and BME 401, faculty preparation in understanding the concepts and appropriate vocabulary as well as being able to seamlessly relate class content with the projects leads to improved results for students. This understanding and ability will grow with experience but can be accelerated through faculty workshops, one on one support from pedagogy experts, and lateral knowledge sharing between professors in the ecosystem.

The projects that stretched across the semester as opposed to those completed over several weeks had students thinking about the context and problems over a longer time period, which seems to have lead to higher gains. First time around, faculty members wanted to do a shorter project but now they are excited about longer projects, which will likely further improve outcomes. Therefore, this model needs to be set up as a multi-semester effort to help faculty gradually step out of their comfort zones and find the right kind and level of engagement that works for their class and leads to stronger and sustainable student outcomes.

Several professors backed out of the pilot upon not receiving support from their course coordinators and department heads. This problem arose from junior faculty who were eager to try something new but were encouraged to get more experience before changing their course from the common framework. Fourteen faculty members were ultimately recruited for non-travel-based course projects and eleven were teaching faculty – this model provides an opportunity to engage non-tenure-track faculty further. The ecosystem manager can leverage several interests to recruit a wider range of faculty members: offering guest speakers (either themselves or experts on the ecosystem themes) to fill classes where the professor may have a conference and offering recognition, through university news forums, awards, newsletters, etc.

**Faculty and Student Buy-In**

During class visits, the ecosystem manager observed that some courses were generally more excited than others about their project. Faculty feedback further indicates that this was a result of (1) the course being a required course for a major where the students genuinely cared about the material versus a general elective the students just had to get through and pass, and (2) how passionately the project was presented to them. The ecosystem manager must ensure that the students see a clear connection between their projects and the real world community partners. There was significantly more interest from students when they could see that their project was an essential part of a real project and HESE students as well as community members were leaning on their efforts to accomplish something significant. The key to making this model work and for the students to give it their very best was this sense of community; it wasn't about a grade anymore. Sharing past stories and pictures and keeping them posted on field updates further reinforced this sense of community and belonging.

Do the projects serve to get the students involved further in the high impact program? The ecosystem manager observed that participating in the pilot made students and professors excited about getting further involved in community engagement programs, raised awareness about the high impact program, and produced directly useful deliverables for the high impact program. While we know that a few students were inspired by and decided to partake in more engaged courses and programs, we need more data over a longer time horizon to assess the outcome of students actually joining high impact programs as a result of participating in a course in the ecosystem pipeline.
Coordination Logistics

The ecosystem manager spent six to thirty hours to set up each course and provide support throughout the semester. While the ecosystem manager can help establish and support at least three ecosystems per semester, they need to have a source of information and credibility from each program that an ecosystem is built around. While the director of HESE acted as this source for the pilot, for future ecosystems, an accessible, knowledgeable, and passionate ecosystem ambassador should be used to minimize the time needed from an already busy faculty member running an impact-focused program. An ecosystem ambassador should be a student, faculty, or staff representative from the impact-focused program who is well-informed of and experienced with the program, and able to stimulate the interest of the students in the ecosystem courses.

Assessment Strategy

Our preliminary assessment has limitations in its design including not having a control group to eliminate maturity as a confounding factor. To validate the impact of the engagement ecosystem, in the next phase, we will compare courses in an ecosystem with matched courses without engagement experiences. The high student dropout rate from courses as well as some professors’ difficulties fitting the post-survey into the tight schedule in the last week of the semester was another problematic issue, leading to fewer matched pre-post cases.

Developing sensitive but easy-to-administer assessment tools is challenging. Most faculty members had trouble integrating one survey, let alone four subscale surveys, due to time constraints in their course. Using self-report surveys to compare the impact-focused program and the non-travel-based courses was limited because skills and competencies are best assessed using direct measures, such as rubrics. In the future, we will apply rubrics to assess students’ projects to get qualitative information of engagement-related learning outcomes.

Future Expansion

Due to the promise of the EE model to be a lean and scalable strategy for getting more students involved in engagement opportunities, we will continue to test and refine the model. In the next round of implementation, the ecosystem manager will build from the lessons learned to improve upon preparing and supporting faculty, getting students excited about their projects, coordinating the ecosystems effectively and efficiently, and making simple and accurate assessment tools. It will take several years of dedicated and persistent effort for the EE model to reach the majority of university students. The plan is for the ecosystems to form organically as faculty and students get further drawn in to the culture of engagement at the university. The ecosystem manager needs to gradually develop relationships with professors, departments, and centers in every college and campus of the university, throughout Pennsylvania as well as the online community.

The EE model helps impact-focused programs emerge, stabilize, and scale by developing an ecosystem of courses around them. Two departments have expressed interest in building ecosystems around their research themes of sustainability, the natural world, and geriatric care. Similarly, two campuses have expressed interest in building ecosystems around themes of local interest: livable cities, solar ecology, and materials for humanity. As more ecosystems emerge, the ecosystem manager will search for ways to include more diversity in the ecosystems, bringing in students from various cultural and economic backgrounds, while ensuring that the collective efforts of thousands of students is reflected in the ultimate community impact.

Conclusion

The EE model has provided opportunities for students and faculty to engage at a variety of different degrees through travel and non-travel-based experiences embedded into existing courses. This approach of providing faculty-specific scaffolding to engage more faculty is not a one-semester effort but rather a gradual, yet determined approach to build over time. For Fall 2015, we already have ten new professors in addition to previously-engaged professors involved; over 1,300 students will be involved in the HESE ecosystem. In addition to an ecosystem around HESE, we have two additional ecosystems starting to emerge in Fall 2015, with five more planned in Spring 2016. For universities challenged with a dearth of potential partners, this is a great way to engage without overwhelming the community. Ongoing assessment is expected to provide more insights into the efficacy of the model and the desired levels of achievement for the cross-section of the students in colleges throughout the university and will help to determine whether the less intensive, non-travel-based levels of engagement can build pipelines into impact-focused programs.

The EE model is just one of many approaches and pedagogical models that Penn State is piloting to scale engagement opportunities. Other approaches include showcasing engagement opportunities to large general education courses that are relevant to
their course content, sparking interest in engaged scholarship through delivering flipped classroom modules to cancelled classes on engagement-related topics such as sustainable development and an entrepreneurial mindset, and promoting engaged scholarship through a student ambassador group. It is important that all of these efforts are happening concurrently with the EE model in order to meet the varying needs of faculty and students and achieve Penn State’s 2020 goal.

References


Penn State Service Learning Student Engagement Task Force. (2012). Final Report, available on ANGEL, the official course management system used by Penn State instructors and students.


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Hear Our Voices: Case Study Connecting Under-Represented Communities to Research and Legislators on Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation

Huda Ahmed, Khalid Adam, Karen Clark, Felicia Wesaw, Sarah Gollust, and Marilyn S. Nanney

Abstract
Although research indicates the built environment influences the walkability of a geographic region among a general population, less is known about the built-environment influences among communities that face health and socio-economic disparities. Built-environment initiatives like Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation that do not take into account the unique assets/barriers of these communities can inadvertently widen disparities. With a health equity lens, this project focused on bridging information gaps that exist between underserved communities, research, and health policy-making. Community listening sessions focusing on Safe Routes to School/Active Transportation were held in the spring of 2014. Over 180 participants from some of Minnesota's communities of color (Native American, Somali/Oromo, and LGTBQ Two-Spirit) generated recommendations for policy and program decision makers. These recommendations illustrated that in addition to the built-environment Safe Routes to School/Active Transportation address, public safety concerns needed to be addressed for successful implementation of Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation in their communities.

Introduction
Minnesota is repeatedly ranked as one of the healthiest states in the country (http://www.health.state.mn.us/ommh/publications/legislator-verpt2013.pdf). This ranking, however, does not tell the whole story. Despite being healthy on average, Minnesota ranks among the states with the worst health disparities. This means that the opportunity to be healthy is not enjoyed equally by all Minnesotans. According to a recently released from the Minnesota Department of Health, examples that highlight such disparities include:

African American and American Indian babies die in the first year of life at twice the rate of white babies. While infant mortality rates for all groups have declined, the disparity in rates has existed for over 20 years. American Indian, Hispanic/Latino, and African American youth have the highest rates of obesity. Gay, lesbian and bisexual university students are more likely than their heterosexual peers to have struggles with their mental health (http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/chs/healthequity/ahe_leg_report_020414.pdf).

Despite health disparities nationally being highlighted as an issue decades ago (Nickens, H.1986), they continue to persist. According to the 2014 Advancing Health Equity Report by the Minnesota's Commissioner of Health; they persist because of structural policies and programs that routinely advantage one mainstream population (Caucasian) and disadvantage others (minorities). These policies and programs reinforce the disparities by taking a one size fits all approach that does not take into account the unique needs, assets, and culture of other communities, these same communities that are afflicted with higher morbidity and mortality rates. This calls for an upstream approach that engages disadvantaged communities as policies and program are being planned and developed so that resulting health policies and programs address their specific needs in a way that is appropriate to them.

Currently in Minnesota, there are many health policy projects underway that communities affected by health disparities, if equipped with relevant research best practices, can help shape and influence. These include;

1. Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP). SHIP is a state initiative that works on policy, systems, and environmental factors that need to be in place for a healthier community. Activities include: Farm to School to promote healthy...
eating; Safe Routes to School to have more kids walking to school to increase their physical activity; Physical activity in schools where schools are working to increase physical activity within the instructional setting; and Tobacco Free Campus (SHIP was behind the University of Minnesota (UMN) going tobacco free this year).

2. Community Transformation Grant (CTG). This is a federally funded initiative from the Center for Disease Control that in Minnesota, works to expand efforts in tobacco-free living, active living and healthy eating, and quality clinical and other preventive services, all toward a goal of addressing health disparities, helping control health care spending, and creating a healthier future.

Unfortunately, many of the communities that are affected by health inequities are not engaged at these policy shaping discussions for the reasons discussed earlier. So, as certain communities become healthier by benefiting from the above policies and programs, others are at the wrong end of a widening health equity gap because they are not a part of the conversation.

“Bridging the Gap” Project Overview

Current research (Gollust, S.E., Kite, H.A., Benning, S.J., Callanan, R.A., Weisman, S.R., & Nannney, M.S., 2014) examining ways in which childhood obesity research evidence is used in the policymaking process highlighted several gaps, including engaging communities to have influence on policy decisions. Since legislators are accountable to community demands, communities that are engaged and knowledgeable about policy-relevant research findings can have an influential role in helping to advocate for policies to improve health. There needs to be a connection between research and policy and, even more importantly, to eliminate health inequity disadvantaged communities must be a part of this connection from the beginning. Often when policy-shaping discussions are happening and when important research findings are being disseminated, they are done in a way that leaves out communities that are not connected for many reasons. This continues to reinforce health inequities because it produces an information gap that leaves these communities lagging. This project offered the opportunity for communities to provide input to real time state and local policy making. By engaging these communities at the beginning and tailoring the engagement process to their needs, our approach ensured they were part of health impacting conversations from the start.

Our community-academic partnership implemented a robust community engagement process connecting policy-relevant obesity research findings with disadvantaged communities to mobilize them toward impacting policy decisions, specifically the legislative 2014 target of Safe Routes to School.

All partners recognized they have unique expertise that when combined moves the needle toward health equity for all. Researchers affiliated with University of Minnesota Program in Health Disparities Research (PHDR), have been involved in a study funded by the National Institutes of Health on use of research evidence in policy making decisions. This project, while including policymakers, advocates, and state agency staff, did not include any underserved communities, an important oversight that this project corrects. The community partners were key in bringing the two together due to their strong relationship with PHDR and their communities. A community dialogue series platform brought all three together; research, community, and the 2014 policy initiative of Safe Routes to School. This project was “shovel ready” for implementation and could serve as a model for engaging disadvantaged communities in achieving health equity initiatives. The University of Minnesota IRB determined the project to be exempt.

The Policy: Safe Routes to School

With the growing rates of childhood obesity around the country (Ogden, C.L., Carroll, M.D., Kit, B.K., & Flegal, K.M., 2012) the American Heart Association (2015)(http://www.heart.org/HEART-ORG/GettingHealthy/HealthierKids/Activities-forKids/The-AHAs-Recommendations-for-Physical-Activity-in-Children_UCM_304053_Article.jsp) recommended that kids get about an hour of physical activity a day. Increasing children's physical activity has been shown to decrease obesity. An 850-article literature review on the topic (Strong, W.B., Malina, R.M., Blimkie, C.J., Daniels, S.R., Dishman, R.K., Guti, B., Hergenroeder, A.C., Must, A., Nixon, P.A., Pivarnik, J.M., Rowland, T., Trost, S., & Trudeau F., 2005) concluded that 60 minutes or more of moderate to vigorous physical activity was developmentally appropriate for school age youth. Most U.S. children did not meet the recommended one hour minimum of daily moderate-to-vigorous activity (Troiano, R.P., Berrigan, D., Dodd, K.W., Masse, L. C., Tilert, T., & McDowell, M. 2008).

Recent research has shown that Active Com-
Community to School and Safe Routes to School can provide a frequent opportunity for children to regularly obtain their moderate to vigorous activity (Mendoza, J. A., Watson, K., Nguyen, N., Cerin, E., Baranowski, T., & Nicklas, T.A. 2011). As a result of these research recommendations, there are national and state level initiatives to address environmental barriers to school age kids being able to walk or bike to school. Most of these efforts, including those in Minnesota, include infrastructure improvement; filling in sidewalk cracks; installing traffic control devices such as stop signs; and education campaigns. In 2014, when this project was being implemented, the Minnesota legislature was looking at whether to continue funding Safe Routes to School and at what level.

The Community Partners

Our partnership focused specifically on engaging communities that are often not part of the conversation on health policy change due to how, when and where these conversations are conducted. The community partners that were part of this project have roots with these communities. Along with the academic partner, PHDR, the other partners were: Women’s Environmental Institute (WEI), Positive Images, Health Equity Working Group (HEWG), and Brian Coyle Community Center. The communities engaged and represented by these partners are Native American, Somali, Hmong, African American, and LGBTQ communities of color. These are communities (among others) that suffer from poorer health and are less connected than others due to a lack of access to information and resources. Together, we aimed to bridge the information gap that exists and enforce the health inequalities for these communities. Our engagement processes included staff with the same cultural backgrounds and speak the native language of the impacted community members, dialogue events located in the community, and information presented in a way that is understood by all. Lastly, the community’s voice is combined with the research to meet the project objective of bridging the information gaps that exist between underserved communities, research, and health policy-making.

Methods

Phase 1

The community and academic partnership submitted a grant application to the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota Center for Prevention and proposed to bridge persistent information gaps between researchers, communities, and policy-making bodies. After receiving the grant, partners convened for a kick-off meeting that was focused on communicating mutual understanding of the objectives of the grant mechanism and on the deliverables outlined in the grant application. Follow-up meetings were then scheduled with each partner to finalize a project work plan, establish a mutually agreed upon MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) that highlighted how each of the partners and academic team would work together for a co-learning and co-empowering process, and to address anticipated logistical and technical needs.

Phase 2

All four community partners agreed to host in their respective communities with a goal of reaching 50 people each. It was also during this planning phase that community partners worked closely with the academic coordinator to augment their understanding of evidence based research focused on increasing physical activity. The academic partner, PHDR, agreed to provide a condensed summary of research that highlighted the benefits of SRTS (materials available upon request from authors). The summary was co-developed with the community coordinators so that it was in a format that was useful and understandable to respective communities.

Phase 3

Three out of the four partners were able to organize and facilitate convenings in their communities that reached their recruitment goals. The PHDR team made up of the project coordinator, the project manager and academic faculty whom were present at all convenings to transcribe the conversations that were taking place, to contextualize the objectives of the grant and to answer any questions community members had of the research. While all the community partners were able to adapt the questions for the dialogue as they saw fit for their communities, there was a set of general frame work questions that all the partners agreed upon:

1. What is happening in your community now (Safe Routes to School, Active Transportation)?
2. What are the main challenges to addressing these in your community? What do you want to tell policymakers/implementers about Safe Routes/Active Trans-
portation and how it relates to your community?

3. What needs to be improved/addressed/acknowledged before these can be reality/improved in your community? What would you like to see happen?

The partners were free to frame these questions as they saw fit. One out of the three partners chose to focus on Active Transportation and not Safe Routes.

**Phase 4**

Partners then reviewed transcripts generated from the convenings and worked closely with a graphic designer to transform the data into engaging one page handouts geared for decision makers that articulated the distinct needs (challenges, recommendations) of their communities as it related to active living and Safe Routes active issues.

The partnership then reconvened community members for another dialogue to present the one page hand outs and ask, Here is what you said as far as challenges and solutions, is that correct? What should we do next?

**Project Measures**

Measures of success were determined by the following guidelines

1. **REACH:** Convenings within each community that reached 50 people respectively.
2. **REPRESENTATION:** Convenings that reflected the identities of the intended audiences.
3. **EXPECTATIONS:** Meeting the objectives of communication to policy makers and timelines of the collaboratively developed work plans.

**Reach:** Three community organizations met and exceeded their recruitment goals for their convenings. Collectively, they exceeded their goals by approximately 22%. (On a goal of 150 people, we collectively reached approximately 184 people).

**Representation:** All three communities reached their intended demographics. Detailed breakdowns are listed below by community.

**WEI/Little-Earth/Phillips Neighborhood:** These convenings were held for the residents Little Earth and the Phillips neighborhoods. Approximately 34 community members from the neighborhood gathered for the first convening. The average participant age was 38–40 years of age. Participants in this convening comprised mainly of women (~75%) who identified as American Indian/Native American (~92%). Approximately 40% of the participants were parents with 38% of the parent participants having more than one child. Parent participants overwhelmingly had children who were between 7 months and 20 years of age. The second convening at Native American Community Development Institute (NACDI) also reflected the surrounding communities’ racial and ethnic makeup. Thirty community members diverse in age and gender were part of the participant pool during this second convening.

**Brian Coyle/Cedar Riverside Community.** These convenings were held for residents of the Cedar Riverside Plaza. Two convenings were conducted one with youth (n~10) and one with parents and grandparents (n~55). Residents mainly comprised of Somalis who lived in the Cedar Riverside Plaza apartments.

**Health Equity Working Committee/Two Spirit.** This convening was held for LGB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual), Transgender/Gender non-conforming/Two-spirit Native Americans/people of color. The convening attracted more than 55 participants who represented a wide variety of age groups, sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions. This convening was not restricted to individuals residing in a specific geographic location and attracted individuals from as far as Shakopee.

**Expectations:** Three of the four partners and the PHDR team met the expectations outlined in our respective work plans. Major timelines and due dates were observed and the PHDR team ensured the compilation of relevant policy research and the transcription of data from the convenings was completed in a timely manner and sent back to the community partners. Currently, all three community organizations that were able to mobilize a convening have been able to work with a communications consultant to translate their findings into engaging one page handouts for policy makers. Two of the three organizations have presented their findings to policy makers.

**Project Findings**

While there were some uniqueness to each of the communities’ needs and assets, there were similarities in their recommendations for what SRTS and Active Transportation should look like in their communities. Generally, these needs showed that in addition to the built environment infrastructure challenges that SRTS and Active Transportation address, there were other needs that needed to be taken into account before these community members would send their kids walking or biking.
or to school or the LGBTQ communities of color would ride the bus or walk. These concerns focused largely on crime safety concerns.

**Concerns**

**Collective Recommendations to Decision Makers**

1. **Infrastructure Safety Recommendations:**
   - Mend cracked sidewalks and other hazards.
   - Install proper crossing signs.
   - Enforce existing no-smoking codes on community properties.
   - Improve lighting.
   - Conduct audits to identify bus routes and stops with the most use/need.

2. **Crime Safety Recommendations:**
   - Increasing positive police presence and interactions.
   - Train police officers and bus drivers on cultural competency; work to eliminate homophobia and transphobia.
   - Create structured opportunities for groups to walk to school together.
   - Allow adult parents or elders, hired and trained in appropriate intervention techniques as bus monitors, to ride and participate in school bus transport.

3. **Education, and Socioeconomic Recommendations**
   - Educate community members on how to read/use crossing signs and identify safe routes.
   - Engage the community in designing solutions at the planning levels.
   - Campaign to normalize presence of LGBTQ Two Spirit residents (e.g., bus stop posters).

**Impact and Success**

Each of the communities participating in this project has a story that shows success:

1. Brian Coyle was able to secure a pilot grant to address the tobacco issue in their neighborhood that was identified through this project.
2. Health Equity Working Group and its partners were reached out to by the office of a city council member to present their finding from this project at the council members’ Trans Equity Summit in 2014.
3. Phillips/Little Earth has already started a process with the Minneapolis School Board to change a rule that does not allow parents/elders to ride the school bus with students to help address the lack of safety on school buses. This was a big issue that kept coming up in the dialogues.

Partners were also asked to present project findings at the National Conference of State Legislatures – National Caucus of Native American State Legislators held in Minneapolis, Minnesota (2014).

**Conclusion**

Our community-academic partnership model successfully engaged communities, incorporated research and stories, and resulted in ongoing discussions with various decision makers to inform current policy discussions. This community engagement project highlighted the fact that a one size fits all approach for health policies and programs likely only deepens existing health inequities. This is especially important as substantial funds are being dedicated to Safe Routes to School and Active Transportation initiatives both federally and at the state level. As public health researchers and professionals, it is imperative to keep the macro view in perspective, engage in ethical non-hierarchical collaborations with communities and that we understand there is no one solution;

### Table 1. Concerns by Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Concerns</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cedar-Riverside</td>
<td>Cracked sidewalks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of lighting and lack of signage for proper crossing.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General lack of understanding on how to read and follow signage.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inconsistent de-icing and plowing months.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of green spaces in the neighborhood.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kids have to walk through cigarette smoke, triggering Asthma and other health issue.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Overcrowded school buses leading to fighting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little Earth/East Phillips</td>
<td>Sexual trafficking solicitation and threats of sexual violence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical and verbal fighting on the school bus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No effective adult intervention controls enroute or at bus stops in the neighborhood.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lack of effective support from police and others in dealing with these safety issues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBTQ Two Spirit</td>
<td>Gender- and sexuality-based hate crimes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poorly lit roads, bike routes (such as Chicago Avenue), and enclosed bus shelters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lack of confidence in the ability of police officers and bus drivers to address these barriers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A lack of cultural competence noting incidents of homophobia and transphobia perpetrated by those in authority.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
rather there are many solutions that have to be implemented simultaneously so that all communities can be healthy and benefit from public health initiatives equally.

References


About the Authors

Huda Ahmed is associate director of Policy & Community Programs Manager of the University of Minnesota Department of Family Medicine and Community Health Program in Health Disparities Research. Khalid Adam is community programs assistant in the University of Minnesota Department of Family Medicine and Community Health Program in Health Disparities Research. Karen Clark is the executive director of the Women’s Environmental Institute. Felicia Wesaw is community organizer of the University of Minnesota Division of Health Policy and Management in the School of Public Health Women’s Environmental Institute. Sarah Gollust is an assistant professor and McKnight Land-Grant Professor in the Division of Health Policy and Management in the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota. Marilyn S. Nanney is an associate professor in the Department of Family Medicine and Community Health at the University of Minnesota.
The Use of Complementary and Alternative Medicine by Adults and Children in the South

Maria Hernandez-Reif, Charlotte Horton, Julia Israel Vaughn, Amanda Pollard, Elicia Juarez, April Kendrick, and Sherwood Burns-Nader

Abstract

A community of students, at different ranks, and two faculty members engaged in the development of a research project aimed at studying the consumption of complementary and/or alternative medicine (CAM) in the South. A well-established store in the community was identified for the study because of its focus on natural products and well-being. The students and faculty developed a CAM survey and the store owners provided feedback and gave approval to conduct the study on their patrons. The survey explored CAM use among adults and children in comparison to CAM uses in other regions of the country. Challenges and lessons learned from the engaged project are discussed, along with the findings that included family remedies and folklore recipes used in the South for varying ailments and symptoms.

Introduction

The use of complementary and or alternative medicine (CAM) is on the rise and becoming prevalent in the United States (Horrigan, 2009; Tindle, Davis, Phillips, & Eisenberg, 2005). CAM refers to various nontraditional medicine and healthcare systems, methods, or products that differ from those established by Western or allopathic medicine or allied providers (NCCAM, 2010). In the United States, approximately 4 out of 10 adults (or 38%) and 1 out of 9 children (or 12%) use CAM (NCCAM, 2010). However, between 33% and 75% of patients fail to disclose the use of such products and practices to their physicians (Blendon, DesRoches, & Benson, 2001; Chao, Wade, & Kronenberg, 2008; Eisenberg, Kessler, & Van Rompay, 2001; Robinson & McGrail, 2004). Reporting CAM use to physicians is important as in some cases CAM products, especially those ingested like herbs and supplements, may interact or interfere with standard care medicine.

Many CAM users cite dissatisfaction with conventional medical treatment and their unpleasant side effects as reasons for using CAM (Astin, 1998; Unutzer, Klap, & Sturn, 2000). Studies reveal that higher education is associated with increased CAM use (Eisenberg, Davis, & Etner, 1998). CAM use on children has been reported for conditions like cancer (Bishop Prescott, Chan, Saville, von Elm, & Lewith, 2010), asthma and epilepsy (Post-White, Fitzgerald, Hageness, & Sencer, 2008; Sawin, 2008), ADHD and autism spectrum disorder (Levy & Hyman, 2008). Most of the CAM studies have been conducted in the North Eastern and Western parts of the United States, in Asia and in Europe. A review of the literature revealed few details about CAM use by adults and children living in southern parts of the United States. Research on CAM use in the South is of interest because of the region's economic and historic heritage, including greater poverty and rurality than the rest of the United States. These factors may be associated with a greater use of home remedies and/or CAM.

Community Engagement

As part of a year-long independent research experience, a faculty member with CAM research experience and an adjunct faculty who had CAM interest invited two undergraduate students and three graduate students (one at the master's level and two at the doctoral level) to participate in developing a survey study to exam CAM use in West Alabama, a region rich in Southern history and tradition. The group of seven members met weekly for one hour lab meetings. All of the members were affiliated with the Department of Human Development and Family Studies and had interest in conducting research on children and families. The desired student learning outcomes included to learn to 1) evaluate critically the research on CAM, 2) formulate research questions related to CAM consumption by the local community, 3) develop a survey to study the local community's consumption of CAM, 4) engage a local business in research, and 5) collect, analyze and interpret data from the CAM survey for dissemination.

The faculty members led the community of students through the research process in the weekly two-semester long meetings. For learning outcome
four, a natural foods grocery business/store was identified as a potential business for the research project. The store was an established fixture of the local community for over 30 years. Moreover, it was an ideal site for a CAM study because it had an excellent reputation for having quality products for promoting well-being and health, nutritional supplements, and a very large selection of herbs. The owners of the store were informed of the research concept and asked if they would be interested in having their store serve as the site for the study. The owners agreed and provided a letter of approval to conduct the study at their store. The survey was also shared with them and they provided feedback on the terminology and approved the survey that would be given to their patrons. The collaboration between the faculty members, the undergraduate and graduate students, and the owners of the store facilitated the development and conduct of a project aimed at examining CAM use among a subsample of residents living in a Southern town within a rural/urban county in the State of Alabama.

During the design phase of the study, under the supervision of the faculty members, the undergraduate students took the lead in conducting a literature review on CAM use in the South and writing and revising the questionnaire. The students also 1) developed sections of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol, 2) created packets for the participants to complete, and 3) made sure that there were ample packets at the natural foods grocery store every week. The graduate students assisted with the development of the scoring and coding systems for the survey and mentored the undergraduate students in establishing the database and data entry system.

While the students and faculty preferred to approach potential participants visiting the store about participating in the study, the store owners felt that it was best to leave the surveys by the cashier so as not to bother the patrons. Given that this was our first attempt at developing a community study, we felt that it would be important to abide by, and be respectful of, the store owners’ wishes not to disturb the patrons. The store owners purported that the store was patronized by residents from varying socioeconomic, ethnic and racial backgrounds living in West Alabama (Frances Self Drennen and Earle Drennen, personal communication, September 2009), which was very exciting for the students and faculty. Adults who elected to pick up the survey were asked to respond to questions on using CAM products on themselves or their children, their disclosure to their doctors about CAM use, their use of CAM along with doctors’ prescriptions, and the history of CAM use in their families. The survey was anonymous and the study received exempt status by the Institutional Review Board at the University.

After the completion of the data collection phase, the data were analyzed by the faculty and students. Data analyses were discussed at lab meetings with all seven members and the results were presented by the undergraduate students at the University’s annual undergraduate research and creative activity conference. The findings were also shared with the owners of the natural foods grocery store.

The Community Being Studied

At the time of the study, the town where the study was conducted had a population of approximately 78,000 residents widely distributed, and a racial composition of approximately 54% Caucasian, 43% African American and 3% Other (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). In that over 40% of the population is under 24 years of age, and two diverse racial groups (i.e., Caucasians and African Americans) prevail in the city, analyses were also planned to examine CAM use by age group (<24 and > 24) and race (Whites and Blacks). The U.S. Census Bureau, Census reveals that 28.5% of the families in the county live below poverty. Of single-heads of households headed by women, 44.3% live below the poverty level. The median income for full-time males is $31,614 and $24,507 for full-time females.

Methods

Participants

Three-hundred packets, each containing a consent form, a background questionnaire and the CAM survey, were made available in the checkout area of the CAM store. Of the 300 packets that were taken by patrons at the store, 77 (or 26%) were completed and returned via mail. Adults who completed the packet ranged in age between 20 and 78 years of age (M age = 46; SD= 14.9). Ninety percent of participants were female, and 28% had either a high school degree or had not completed high school; 23% were college graduates; and 49% of the sample had professional degrees (i.e., had higher than a 4-year college degree). The majority of the participants were Caucasian (89.6%), 6.5% were African American, and less than 4% of the sample was comprised of Hispanics, Asians and others.
The CAM Survey included in the packet was comprised of 13 questions, consisting mostly of checklist items and requests for brief responses. The survey questions asked if participants used CAM on self and on children, and whether they used CAM along with doctors’ prescriptions. The survey also briefly asked about the family history of CAM use. Additionally, participants were asked to list non-prescribed CAM products they commonly used and to describe a remedy used by their family over the years.

### Results

The results of the participants’ responses to the CAM Survey are presented in Table 1 as frequencies. Table 2 includes an exhaustive list of the family remedies reported by the participants.

The data were also analyzed for racial differences (Caucasians versus African Americans). The analyses revealed the following:

1) a trend for African Americans (60%) to report greater CAM use by their parents than Caucasians (23%), \(X^2(1,69) = 3.22, p = .07\);

2) more African Americans (60%) than Caucasians (15%) reported that CAM products were used on them when they were children, \(X^2 = \) 10.8

### Measures

The packets included three IRB approved documents: A consent form, a demographic checklist, and the CAM survey. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was provided inside the packet for the participants to return to the investigative team. The Demographic Checklist asked participants to list their age and ages of their children. In addition, participants were asked to check off boxes that inquired about their gender (and their children’s gender), their ethnicity, race, years in school completed (under 7 years; 7-9 years; 10-11 years; high school graduate; 1-3 years of college; 4-year college graduate; professional degree), their occupation and the occupation of the head of their household, if they were not the head. The years of school and occupation were used to compute the participants’ socioeconomic status (SES) using the Hollingshead Two-Factor Index (Hollingshead, 1975).

The CAM Survey included in the packet was comprised of 13 questions, consisting mostly of checklist items and requests for brief responses.

### Table 1. Responses to CAM Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>CAM Use</th>
<th>Medical Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Buys CAM products for health maintenance or prevention of illness:</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products are purchased for self:</td>
<td>92.7%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products are purchased for child:</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Buys CAM products for an illness or condition:</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products are purchased for self:</td>
<td>90.2%</td>
<td>50.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products are purchased for child:</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Most common kinds of CAM products purchased</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamins</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Probiotics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplements</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural medications</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Common conditions or illnesses treated with CAM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acid reflux</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Allergies or sinus infections</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anemia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Autoimmune disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blood pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bouts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bone density</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cold or flu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dental conditions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Digestion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>High cholesterol</td>
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<td>Hypothyroidism</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inflammation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insomnia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liver</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Low sex drive</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lymphoma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Using CAM for:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nutritional support = 76.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Because product was recommended by a trusted person = 36.6%</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Because tried before and product works = 61%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because prefers product to a medical prescription = 61%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because the doctor is too costly = 8.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For other reasons = 20.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. % who said last CAM product purchased worked for a condition = 74.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How well?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0% = not well at all</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4% = somewhat well</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15.9% = moderately well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.3% = well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.8% = very well</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. % who tell doctor they are using CAM product on</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self = 55%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Child = 20.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. % who told doctor about CAM product use and doctor approved use for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self = 53.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child = 15.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. % who responded true to following questions:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If my child is sick, I first take him/her to the doctor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= 8.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If my child is somewhat sick, I try an alternative product first = 70.7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If my child is very sick, I first take him/her to the doctor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>= 87.9%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If my child is very sick, I try an alternative product first = 12.1%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data were also analyzed for racial differences (Caucasians versus African Americans). The analyses revealed the following:

1) a trend for African Americans (60%) to report greater CAM use by their parents than Caucasians (23%), \(X^2(1,69) = 3.22, p = .07\);

2) more African Americans (60%) than Caucasians (15%) reported that CAM products were used on them when they were children, \(X^2 = 10.8\).
(1,65) = 6.21, \ p = .01;

3) a trend for more Caucasians (58%) than African Americans (20%) reporting currently combining medicine prescribed by their physicians with CAM, \( \chi^2 (1,69) = 2.72, \ p < .10 \); and

4) a trend for more African Americans (100%) than Caucasians (64%) to purchase CAM products for self-use, \( \chi^2 (1,71) = 2.75, \ p < .10 \).

Analyses were also conducted to examine age differences. However, no significant age differences were found for any of the survey questions.

Discussion

The current study was a first attempt by our group to conduct a community project focused on the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) by residents of a Southern town in the United States. The paucity of CAM research on people living in the Southern United States and the high poverty and rurality of the South provided the impetus for the study. The community included faculty at a university, undergraduate and graduate students, the owners of a natural grocery store in town and their patrons. The process of engaging in a community project was interesting as were the research findings. Below we discuss the research findings, the successes and challenges of the engaged scholarship activity, and thoughts on how to improve the process of community engagement to study CAM practices in the South.

Surprisingly, only 25% of the 300 individuals who picked up the survey packets returned the forms

| Acidophilus for immunity or yeast infections | Hot tea with lemon or mint and honey for minor throat irritation or cough |
| Active yogurt for vaginal infection | Hot washcloths for headaches |
| After shave lotion for insect bites | Ice pain from swelling |
| Aloe vera gel for sunburns/kitchen burns | Ice for sprained ankles |
| Aloe vera juice for acid stomach | Immune boosters (zinc and eucalyptus tea) for cold |
| Any acid for body wellness | Kerosene on cuts |
| Apple cider vinegar | Kumbucha for headaches |
| Apple cinnamon tea | Lavender for calming or headache |
| Aromatherapy | Lavender oil on body for colds |
| Aspirin for wart removal | Lavender oil to sleep |
| Baking soda on wasp sting | Lemon honey tea for sore throat |
| Bee pollen for increased capillary function | Listerine and baby oil with water for cat's hot spots |
| Biotin for split nails | Listerine on scalp for dandruff |
| Black tea (cooled) for relief of conjunctivitis | Lysine for canker sores |
| Blend of strawberries, avocado and cold pressed olive oil for skin facial | Malic acid for fibromyalgia muscle spasms |
| Blueberries for inflammation | Milk thistle for liver support |
| Calm thoughts for anxiety and depression | Mineral make-up for acne |
| Candeling for ear wax maintenance | Mint tea for upset stomach |
| Castor oil | Nail polish for chigger bites |
| Catnip tea | Netti pot and sea salt added to vaporizer for sinus infections |
| Cell food | Peppermint oil for headaches |
| Chicken broth for colds | Probiotics for immunity |
| Cinnamon and garlic for cholesterol and blood sugar | Probiotics for staying well |
| Clay for insect bites | Red grapefruit juice with castor oil and salt and pepper |
| Coconut oil for immune system boosting and weight loss | Rosemary in hair for healthy hair |
| Coconut water for post exercise rehydration | Saline rinse for nasal passages/congestion |
| Cod liver oil | Salt water for sore throat |
| Co-Q10 for guns and heart | Scalding hot compress for itchy insect bite |
| Cranberry for urinary tract infection | Shots of fresh squeezed wheat grass for immune system |
| | Snorting salt water for runny or stuffy nose |
| | Soak feet in Epsom salt for colds |
| | Soda for insect bites |
| | Spoonful of honey for cough |
| | Spry Dental System for oral hygiene |
| | Steam bath for allergies |
| | Stinging nettle for allergies |
| | Swiss Kriss for facials |
| | Table salt for infections |
| | Tea for anything |
| | Tea tree oil for insect bites/stings |
| | Tea tree oil for skin irritations |
| | Tea with honey for congestion and sore throat |
| | Tobacco for insect sting |
| | Tooth paste for acne |
| | Tooth paste for bee/wasp sting |
| | Tooth paste for skin burns |
| | Umcka for respiratory symptoms |
| | Vitamin E and local honey for antibiotic on cuts |
| | Vitamin E for cuts or mouth sores |
| | Wet tobacco on stings or bug bites |
| | White vinegar for nail fungus |
| | Whole foods for a healthy body and great figure |
| | Wild impatient for poison ivy |
| | Yoga for cold |
| | Yogurt for stomach problems |

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by mail. This return rate is well below the average response rate of 50-60% that has been reported in the literature for mail surveys (Hoonakker & Carayon, 2009). The lower return rate for our study may relate to the topic being studied. That is, some individuals may have been reluctant to reveal their use of CAM products, or may not be CAM users and thereby felt no need to respond to the survey. Another possibility for the low response rate may be that people in Alabama may be suspicious of participating in research. The Tuskegee Syphilis Study, the U.S. Public National Health study which involved unethical research practices of rural African American men, was conducted in Alabama and spanned 40 years. The failure to protect and fully inform individuals participating in research of alternatives in the Tuskegee experiment resulted in the Belmont Report and the establishment of stricter guidelines to monitor the ethical conduct of research in the United States (Thomas & Quinn, 1999). Although the Tuskegee experiment was stopped in the 1970s, the unethical nature of the study is common knowledge in the State of Alabama, which may in turn make some African American residents of Alabama hesitant about participating in research. Another reason for the low response rate may have related to illiteracy rates, which average about 15% for Alabama and in the county in which the study was conducted (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

As a result of the low response rate, the student researchers discussed the need for future studies on CAM use to be conducted via in-person interviews or via oral surveys. Students also suggested that barriers to participation should also be examined. Anecdotally, one checkout clerk at the CAM grocery store reported to one of the undergraduate research students that most of the individuals who picked up the survey were Caucasian and middle class and that African Americans and other ethnicities either refused or were reluctant to take a survey packet. This supports the perception that minorities in Alabama may be less likely to participate in research. A focus group that includes African-American community members would be important to conduct in any follow-up study to ensure that their voices are heard and to understand potential barriers, if these exist, to participating in research.

While we were hoping to have more representation from African Americans, we found that the majority of the respondents (9 out of 10) were Caucasian women. Both the female gender and non-black/non-hispanic race have been reported as factors associated with the highest rates of CAM use in the United States (Tindle, Davis, Phillips, & Eisenberg, 2005). Thus, the demographics of CAM users in our survey study were similar to those reported in the United States.

Greater than 90% of the respondents in the present study reported that they purchased CAM products to prevent as well as to treat their own illnesses. In addition, about 50% of the respondents revealed that they purchased CAM products to prevent and to treat illnesses in their children. These findings suggest the prevalent use of CAM, by families in our sample, for health prevention and treatment. Although these findings will need to be replicated with a larger sample size they may indicate that CAM use in the South is greater than common practice.

Remarkably, less than 20% of the participants who completed the survey reported that their parents used CAM on them as children. If this finding is accurate and replicable with a larger sample size, it would suggest that CAM use may be increasing among younger generations of Caucasians living in the South. This finding also suggests that CAM use by the participants in our study may not be related to the passing of CAM information from the previous generation.

In contrast, among the African Americans who responded to the survey, 60% stated that their parents used CAM on them as children. Unfortunately, few African Americans responded to the survey in our study. Thus, we could not examine age and socioeconomic status effects on CAM use among African Americans in our sample. One hypothesis to be tested in future research is whether CAM use in the South is more prevalent among lower versus higher income African Americans. We suspect that in the South, CAM use among African Americans may be greater for lower income individuals who may have less access to western medicine or less desire to access western medical care. Additionally, it is unclear if the African Americans who participated in the current survey are representative of the general population of Blacks in the South. However, if the findings are upheld and African Americans living in the South pass down their CAM use across generations, this would be of interest and importance given that African Americans, especially in the South, are reported as distrusting of the medical community, and among the lower income Black, there is a resistance to seeking routine preventive
care (Thomas & Quinn, 1999). A future study is required with larger sample sizes of elderly and African Americans to study complementary and alternative medicine practices across generations. In that future study, specific efforts should be made to conduct a focus group with African Americans in the community to discuss how best to approach and invite them to participate in a CAM survey study.

According to the survey, the most commonly purchased CAM products were vitamins, probiotics, supplements and natural medications. At least one large scale study reported herbal medicine to be the most commonly used CAM modality (Tindle, Davis, Phillips, & Eisenberg, 2005). In the current study, respondents listed numerous medical conditions that they treated with the CAM products they purchased, including autoimmune disorders, blood pressure, sinus infections, bone density, high cholesterol, liver conditions, skin conditions, and glucose control, to name a few. Additionally, participants listed various psychological and psychosomatic conditions and symptoms that they treated with CAM products, including low sex drive, mood, insomnia, weight loss, nausea and pain.

Almost two-thirds (61%) of the respondents who completed the survey stated that they preferred their CAM product to a medical prescription. Approximately three-quarters (74%) of the participants stated that the last CAM product they purchased worked for a condition. Interestingly, less than 10% of the participants listed the cost related to a doctor’s visits as the reason for using CAM products. Thus, it appears that a large majority of the participants in our study were choosing to self-treat medical and psychological conditions or symptoms with other than traditional western medicine, and their decision to self-treat was not as a result of unaffordable medical care.

Although over 90% of the participants reported using CAM products, only about half of the respondents stated that they informed their physician of their CAM use. This rate is much lower than the 60-70% rate of non-disclosure to physicians of CAM use that has been revealed in national surveys (Eisenberg, Kessler, Van Rompay, et al., 2001). In our sample, only about one in five reported informing their children's pediatrician that they were using CAM products on their children. Of those who reported their CAM use to their physician, approximately half reported that their doctors approved of their CAM use.

Somewhat alarming, parents reported that only one in ten pediatricians approved of the CAM product that they were using to treat the children. There is a trend at the national level in the United States to educate physicians (and medical students) about CAM use, as well as to challenge physicians to improve the physician-patient communication as an effort to improve their patients’ CAM disclosure (Chao, Wade, & Kronenberg, 2008). It might also be important to conduct a focus group to engage the medical community, particularly African American physicians, who might be able to reveal general information about CAM conversations they have had with their patients.

Of interest were the responses to what was the first treatment that adults used on themselves and on their children in times of sickness. In the current study, 7 out of 10 adults tried a CAM product first before contacting the doctor if they were “somewhat sick.” However, if they were “very sick,” 8 out of 10 adults visited the doctor before trying a CAM product. When it came to their children, 1 out of 4 adults tried a CAM product first if the child was “somewhat sick.” However, 9 out of 10 adults stated that they took their child to the doctor if the child was “very sick.” About half of the participants stated that they regularly combined CAM products with medicine prescribed by a doctor. Approximately, over half of the sample stated that they were satisfied with the results of medicine prescribed by their doctor. The high rate of CAM use, even for treating children’s illness, may relate to the increasing dissatisfaction with allopathic medicine (e.g., traditional medicine practiced in the United States) as opposed to integrative health care systems. Because the study was completely anonymous, we have confidence that the data reported by the adults and parents are fairly reliable.

Finally, the CAM recipes or favorite products listed by participants revealed an interesting array of natural products, herbs, and common household ingredients used to treat a myriad of conditions, symptoms, common ailments and afflictions. Unfortunately, some of the respondents failed to elaborate on the products that they listed. A future interview or in-person study would likely yield a more comprehensive list of remedies and offer an opportunity to collect a richer database of folklore treatments.

Limitations

The current survey study of CAM use in a
Southern town in the United States is limited, as discussed above, because of the small sample size, the possibility of a biased or self-selected sample and the lack of participation by an African American majority. Additionally, the CAM survey made no inquiry of use of other CAM forms, such as alternate health care systems and practices. A future study might specifically ask respondents about their access to and use of such CAM as whole medicine systems (e.g., Ayurvedic medicine, traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy and naturopathy), mind-body medicine (e.g., yoga, meditation, acupuncture, tai chi, etc), manipulatives and body practices (e.g., massage therapy, chiropractics), as well as light therapy, energy healing, magnet therapy, and movement therapy. This would help to reveal a more comprehensive view of CAM use in the South. In this study, participants were not asked to indicate where they were born and raised. Collecting this information in a future study might indicate CAM use trends among true Southerners. Finally, the findings revealed the need to better engage African Americans in all aspects of research, including at the idea and design phases of research.

Conclusions and Lessons Learned

In sum, the current pilot study, although limited by sample size and selection bias, provides a preview of possible community-based research that can be conducted on CAM use. Alabama, like its sister states of Mississippi and Louisiana to the West and Tennessee to the North, is steeped in culture and tradition. One reason for conducting CAM research in the South is to further examine the potential finding from the current study that CAM use may be increasing among younger generations of Caucasians. Another reason is to gain knowledge about CAM use by African Americans who may be more likely to purchase and consume CAM than traditional western medicine (aka as allopathic medicine or mainstream medicine). Knowing more about CAM use in the South and CAM disclosure may be helpful in developing educational modules on CAM for both physicians and patients. However, to learn about CAM use in the South it is imperative to engage members of the community in the design and conduct of research. In the current study, we engaged store owners of a local natural foods grocery store where CAM products were sold. In our first study with them, it was important to develop trust. Thus, we followed their suggestion of having patrons of their store pick up the packets at the cash register and complete them on their own as opposed to having the survey administered to the patrons by a student researcher. As a result of this, we had few African Americans or other minority groups participate. Although we had limitations related to sample selection, we are grateful to the owners of the natural foods grocery story to permit us to conduct the survey with their patrons as without the store owners’ permission, we would not have secured the interesting data we collected and reported in our tables. In a future study, one way to potentially engage the African American community is to involve African American students in the conduct of research and to seek alternative sites for conducting CAM research, such as through faith based programs.

Overall, with faculty mentoring, this project met the desired student learning outcomes of: developing a community project in which students evaluated the literature on CAM; formulated research questions and a survey to assess the community’s CAM use; engaged a local business in research, and; collected, analyzed and interpreted the data for dissemination. Lessons learned included that 1) students can be engaged in meaningful research experiences from the conception to the dissemination of research related to the study of CAM practices in their community, 2) owners of local establishments may be willing to participate in research and can provide feedback on research concepts; however, there are limitations that may be placed on research by local establishments that may present a barrier (e.g., not being able to speak directly to potential participants), 3) Caucasian women are likely to complete surveys, whereas African Americans and other minorities may be less likely to follow-through on completing surveys, although this needs to be verified through additional research, 4) CAM consumption exists in the South and this phenomenon has similarities and differences in how CAM consumption exists in other areas of the country, and 5) community engagement at different levels (e.g., student, business, patrons) may be critical to the conduct of research to help fill gaps in the literature related to common practices and beliefs about health treatments.

References


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“Let us Pick the Organization”: Understanding Adult Student Perceptions of Service-Learning Practice

Susan C. Reed, Howard Rosing, Helen Rosenberg, and Anne Statham

Abstract

Service learning offers a pedagogy by which adult students are guided toward understanding their potential for leadership in civic life and community development, strengthening the impact that universities have in communities. In this study, qualitative data is analyzed to determine how adult students perceive their service-learning experiences and what the university could do to involve them more in the future. Respondents provide some evidence that they value opportunities to give back to communities where they have a connection; appreciate hands-on learning that is integrated with classroom learning; benefit from placement experiences that build upon prior knowledge and skills; and prefer greater choice in the selection of their service-learning placement. As the number of adult students entering higher education continues to rise and their retention remains a challenge, understanding how these students are engaged by service learning becomes an important area of exploration for post-secondary institutions.

This study provides insight into adult students’ experiences with service learning as well as their perceptions of how the pedagogy could be revised to better meet their needs. Literature on service learning strongly suggests that students’ development is enhanced by participation in courses that include community engagement (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Finlay, 2012) and that communities benefit as well from this pedagogy (Sandy & Holland, 2006). Age is seldom a variable in surveys on service learning, and consequently empirical evidence that adult students are participating and benefiting in the same ways as younger students is limited (Reed & Marienau, 2008). As the number of adult students entering higher education continues to rise (U.S. Department of Education, 2012), understanding how service learning affects these students becomes an important area of exploration for post-secondary institutions (Reed, Rosenberg, Statham, & Rosing, 2015).

Equally important is how enhancement of civic engagement skills among adult students can aid communities, providing them with reflective, active, experienced individuals committed to the development of programs and policies that serve the common good. Service learning offers a pedagogy by which adult students are guided toward understanding their potential for leadership in civic life and community development (Reed & Marienau, 2008). By strategically engaging adult students in the community through curriculum, universities can strengthen university partnerships and, in turn, make connections with adults who become leaders within local institutions. Community partner organizations understand this and welcome involvement of adult students because they have experience in the workplace and with multicultural organizations (Stoecker & Tyron, 2009). Adult service learners hold promise not only for their development as community activists but also for their potential to improve the impact that service learning has in communities served.

This study focuses on adult students (defined as 24 years and older), the subject of a rather large adult learner literature. There is also some literature on nontraditional students, and age is one characteristic used to classify students in this way, along with working longer hours, being enrolled part time, or being the first generation in their family to attend college, compared to the traditional population of college students. We will refer to some previous research with nontraditional students and draw insights from related studies of volunteerism and service learning. However, because our criteria for interview subjects in this study was adulthood, we draw mainly upon the literature of adult development and learning and we use the term “adult” consistently rather than “non-traditional” to refer to students throughout the manuscript. When we do use the term “non-traditional,” we are referring to the broader category of students of which adults are a subgroup.

Literature Review

There is some reason to believe that adult students are interested and participate in service
learning as much as younger students, especially if programs are designed with their knowledge and skills in mind (Reed & Marienau, 2008). Our recent analysis of students’ perceptions at three Midwestern universities, however, found that nontraditional students, especially those with more work experience, were less likely to report that service learning enhanced their classroom experience and contributed to their skills development (Rosenberg, Reed, Statham & Rosing, 2012). These findings suggest the importance of further research on the impact of service learning on adult student learning.

Literature on adult development and learning suggests that the growing numbers of adults entering or reentering colleges and universities bring a wealth of prior knowledge and skills developed through work and relationships. They are inclined to take initiative, prefer to learn in the process of application of knowledge, and are motivated by a sense that their efforts have a purpose outside of the classroom (MacKeracher, 2004). We believe these insights are also pertinent to younger students, as these are qualities of the learning process itself (Brookfield, 2013).

In addition to these adults’ distinctive approaches to learning, they have a unique experience of higher education. They tend to identify as workers or parents primarily and derive confidence in their abilities from these roles. Becoming a student requires them to find ways to apply their skills to academic tasks and to develop relationships with faculty and staff that incorporate their multiple identities (Buglione, 2012). Kasworm (2010) found that adult students are aware of the differences between themselves and younger students and tend to believe that they take their education more seriously because of their maturity and responsibilities but also appreciate what they learn from younger people. Adult (and other nontraditional) students are less likely than traditional-age students to participate in campus activities outside of their classes and as such their engagement depends largely on the classroom experience (CCSSE, 2006).

The adult development literature suggests that students may be drawn to community-based learning during a stage of middle adulthood called “generative,” defined as an inclination of people in midlife to nurture future generations (Erikson, 1959). Several researchers (e.g., De St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004) explored the role of generativity in the motivations of adults to volunteer. Stukas, Daly, and Clary (2006) found that adults are more likely to commit to volunteer activity after conversations about the likely benefit to themselves and others, and recommend that organization staff directly address the challenging as well as rewarding experiences that volunteers are likely to have in order to promote their longevity. Snyder and Clary (2004) argue that some form of reflection is needed because “long term commitment to community involvement is more likely when service is grounded in a broader, more abstract and value-based framework and this framework can be created through active reflection” (p. 587).

Given adults’ predisposition toward nurturing and the important role of reflection in service learning, community-based learning has the potential to offer the kinds of opportunities that Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks (1996) say ignite and nurture commitment in adults. These opportunities include encounters with someone significantly different from oneself and the possibility for structured reflection that can lead to recognizing similarities with others. Research on the success of service learning in developing these skills in students generally finds that students who participate in such courses are more likely to express a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others (Finlay, 2012).

Service learning also seems appropriate for adult students who may desire concrete projects where they apply and sharpen skills in partnership with a community organization (Reed & Marienau, 2008). For decades, scholars characterized adult learners as particularly concerned with the application of learning to their working and personal lives and preferring learning from real-life situations (MacKeracher, 2004). These scholars advised practitioners to design courses that focus on genuine problems in order to give adults the opportunity to test their ideas and presuppositions in action (Zull, 2011).

Advances in neuroscience were culled by a group of scholars of adult learning (Johnson & Taylor, 2006) to explain why context is so important for learners and why hands-on learning enhances the development of knowledge and analysis. In this special issue, Zull (2006) argues that learning experiences should be designed to use the four major areas of the brain, specifically the neocortex which promotes more change in the brain when more regions of the cortex are used during a learning experience. For example, the assembly of
images of communities and residents in the back association of the cortex enhances students' ability to comprehend new information (Zull, 2006). Indeed, recent studies of student success find that methodologies that give students the opportunity to apply concepts through community projects and collaboration enhance learning and retention (Brownell & Swaner, 2010).

Another precept of adult education is that adults bring a wealth of knowledge and skills to the classroom that must be reflected upon to enhance the integration of new learning. When individuals integrate new learning with previous experiences and perspectives, strong interactions that involve emotions, images and action have the potential for lasting change in the brain that can result in comprehension, even wisdom (Zull, 2011). Constantly bombarded with sensory information, the brain is designed to organize new information by storing it on neurons that already host similar knowledge. According to Zull (2006), “comprehension depends on the associations between new events and past events. The more past events available to be drawn upon, the more powerful the meaning” (p. 6). While all learners build on prior experiences when processing new learning in the brain, this integration is more complicated for older learners with a wealth of life events to draw upon.

Therefore, adult learning scholars have taken the lead in recommending that classroom activities include exercises that encourage learners to reflect upon those past experiences that relate to the topic at hand (Kolb, 1984). The integration of new learning with tacit knowledge is the focus of emerging research on the use of eportfolio software, particularly the generative knowledge methodology developed at the University of Michigan (Peet, Lonn, Gurin, Boyer, Matney, Marra, Taylor, & Daley, 2011), which includes exercises designed to surface students’ stories toward identifying core capacities. Studies showing that service learning develops students’ problem solving skills and cultural awareness (Finlay, 2012) suggests that employing this methodology in the service-learning classroom would help adults to build upon their knowledge derived from previous experiences addressing community issues.

One of the other distinctive characteristics of adult learners is that they prefer to be involved in decisions regarding learning (MacKeracher, 2004). The assumption that adults are self-directed learners is prominent in the scholarship of “androgogy.” Early in the development of this literature, Knowles (1970) noted that adults learn effectively outside of a classroom every day and are most comfortable with learning projects that they initiate and direct themselves. Since then, adult learning scholars have emphasized the importance of context, showing that adults are more self-directed at work where they have expertise than in a classroom or situation that is new for them (Candy, 1991). MacKeracher (2004) cautions educators not to assume that adults do not need their direction and support but to provide learning opportunities where the skill of self-direction can be developed.

Service learning is considered a method of teaching and learning that can enhance students’ autonomy. This outcome has been demonstrated in classrooms where students are offered the opportunity to make decisions while working with a community partner; and when allowing students more choice in the selection of a service-learning project (Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005). Autonomy is a characteristic that adults are likely to have developed before coming back to college, to some extent, and thus they are likely to prefer a degree of independence in their service-learning classroom.

In summary, the scholarship on adult development, adult learning, service learning and volunteerism direct our research about adult students’ experiences with community-based learning. In the following sections, we examine these ideas more fully by analyzing what adults think about service learning when it is integrated into the curriculum at a large private university in Chicago. Are older students as satisfied with their service-learning experiences as younger students? What do they value about their experiences, what frustrates them and how do they feel adult students’ experiences could be improved? Based on the above literature, our findings seek to more deeply explore four research questions: 1) Do adult students value opportunities to give back to their communities?; 2) Do adult students appreciate learning through hands-on projects?; 3) Do adult students’ build upon their knowledge and skills in the classroom and community?; 4) Do adults prefer learning that is flexible and self-directed?.

Methods

In 2012, we published the results of a survey of service learners at three Midwestern universities analyzed by measures of nontraditionality (See Rosenberg, Reed, Statham and Rosing, 2012 for
details about the larger survey). Here, we report the results of two qualitative sources of data gathered at the time of the survey for students at only one of the three universities. DePaul University in Chicago is the largest Catholic university in the U.S. with an enrollment of more than 25,000, approximately 15,000 of whom are undergraduates. Service learning is not a mandate for all students at DePaul, but is found in 60–70 courses per academic quarter with an average of 1,000 students placed in the community each academic quarter; about 13% of students in these undergraduate programs are 24 or more years of age. This study drew on courses supported by the Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning to administer a survey and recruit interviewees during the 2008–2009 academic year.

The two sources of qualitative data are 1) an open-ended question from the survey that was coded and analyzed by age; and 2) nine in-depth interviews with undergraduate students who were 24 years of age or older whose comments were coded for relevance to our four research questions.

The open-ended question in the survey is “How can DePaul help you to become more involved now and the in the future?” One hundred and forty-five students answered this question, 26 of whom (18%) reported being 24 years of age or older. Answers were coded into seven categories that related to three of our research questions. One hundred and forty-five students answered this question, 26 of whom (18%) reported being 24 years of age or older. Answers were coded into seven categories that related to three of our research questions:

- **Giving back.** Continue with service learning or add more; provide more information about opportunities and benefits; I don’t want service learning.
- **Learning hands on.** Better partnerships and work with them; better balance between community work and other assignments.
- **Self-directed learning.** More flexibility in locations and hours; credit for independent work or stipends.

Students’ answers to this open-ended question were not related to our third research question, Do adult students build upon their knowledge and skills in the classroom and community?

Two raters independently applied the codes. Inter-rater reliability was calculated using a standard formula of the number of agreements divided by the number of agreements plus the number of disagreements, multiplied by 100. The inter-rater reliability rate was 80%.

In order to further explore the experiences of adult service-learners in more depth, we sent an email at the end of the winter and spring terms to recruit service-learning students aged 24 and older to take part in one-on-one interviews for which they were offered a $10 gift card. Nine in-depth interviews were conducted with adult students about their service-learning experience. These students were queried about when and why they returned to college, their experience in a service-learning course, and what suggestions they had for making service learning courses more amenable to adult students. Coding began with a graduate student developing categories based on common responses. The data were then reviewed using categories from our four research questions and recoded.

### Results

**How can Depaul Help You Be More Involved Now and in the Future?**

Despite the small number of respondents for each answer, there are some observable trends by age that relate to our research questions. Younger students were even more likely than older students to advise, “Continue with SL or add more,” which contradicted our expectation that adults will be particularly compelled to engage in service through coursework. However, none of the older students indicated that they “don’t want service learning” in their courses. Older students tended to suggest a “better balance between community work and other assignments.” Students whose comments were assigned this code either suggested more time spent in the community or they

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desired Support</th>
<th>&lt;24 years</th>
<th>24+ years</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Giving Back</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue with Service Learning or Add</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide More Information</td>
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<td>No Service Learning</td>
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<td>0.0 (0)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Learning Hands On</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Partnerships</td>
<td>9.2 (11)</td>
<td>19.2 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better Balance Between Community Work and Other Assignments</td>
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<td><strong>Self-Directed Learning</strong></td>
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<td>More Flexibility</td>
<td>10.1 (12)</td>
<td>3.8 (1)</td>
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<td>Credit for Independent Work or Stipends</td>
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<td>11.5 (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
asked for better integration of the subject matter of the course with the community project. For example, one student suggested that DePaul “have community involvement actually take the place of some of the classes or have classes with community involvement.” Another noted, “The community project that I was involved in was not made to directly relate to the course material. In order to have a more beneficial learning experience, I would like to have the two correlate” (see Table 1).

Older students made comments suggesting a need for better partnerships. For example, one student said:

The [community site] was unorganized. They did not give schedules or tasks that we could relate back to the class. The representatives were not responsive to calls or emails. Also, from class discussions, other students seemed to be having similar problems. If the service centers could be more organized with students, it could be a worthwhile experience.

In this study, several older students were articulate about changes to service experiences that would enhance learning.

There was a difference by age in the percentage of students who answered “more flexibility in hours and locations” with younger students more likely to make this request. This finding is interesting as many faculty expect adult students to resist service-learning opportunities because of their busy schedules. A few students suggest “credit for independent learning or stipends.” For example, one student said, “Offer more paid student worker/internships with community organizations”; another said, “Give more credit to students who participate in off-campus community activities.”

In summary, respondents to the open-ended survey question indicate that they appreciate opportunities to contribute to community through coursework, but adults were more likely to critique their hands-on experience, either its role in the overall class experience or implementation of the community partnership. Older participants in this study were more likely to suggest that DePaul faculty alter their practice to have a better balance between the time that students are asked to spend in the community and their other class assignments, and to want improvement in the practices of the organizations that they work with. Students indicated some desire for more self-direction in wanting the university to recognize with credit or compensation the work that they have chosen to do in the community.

**Interviews With Undergraduate Service Learners 24+ years old**

Interviews with a small number of adult students identified trends that relate to our research questions. Participants in the oral interview welcomed opportunities to work with community organizations and sometimes recognized that regular engagement with an organization would enhance their lives; this experience was especially meaningful for students reconnecting with a community of which they or their family is, or was, once a member.

Several students were aware of their differences from other students and believe that their experience and maturity are an asset to the classroom and the community; at the same time, others appreciated what they learn from younger students and felt that younger students appreciated them in turn.

**Giving Back**

Some participants in the interviews preferred to have choices in their service-learning placement with some suggesting that they be allowed to find their own.

As predicted by the literature on adults’ inclination to give back to their communities, adult students who were interviewed expressed strong appreciation for the experience of working in a community with others and contributing to their well-being as well as a commitment to finding ways to continue to do so. Their comments suggest that the experience caused them to consider community engagement as an important practice in adulthood. For example, one student commented:

I liked it; I felt like I actually got to talk to these people...like I was doing something by helping someone create a resume and telling them that they will get better at their computer skills and that it's difficult for all of us...I didn't feel like I was going just to fill time.... I went pretty consistently...throughout the quarter, which was kind of tough to get out there.

This same student went on to explain why she felt that the experience of working in the community was healthy for her and might be a
beneficial life practice to be more involved in her community:

I think it made me not feel so bad when things were going wrong in my life. It was like small potatoes compared to what other people were dealing with…. It also made me realize that I could volunteer more, or I should…. I think that’s a healthy thing to do…because not only does it feel good to do things for other people, but it helps other people. And you might not be getting paid but maybe a couple hours every weekend doesn’t really take time out of your life, maybe… a couple hours… that’s not a big deal.

A student who had strong connections with the community where students were working found the experience to be especially rewarding. Like those students interviewed by Buglione (2012), she felt that she had “come home” through her service placement:

My connection with the community… in Humboldt Park, all my life I’ve been going to events, everything that’s related to my Puerto Rican culture is based in Humboldt Park, so I feel I’m more connected to my people, my culture when I’m in the area. It sounds silly but you just feel like you’re at home…. A lot of friends and family either work or have businesses in the area, either attend school. … So for me to be able to do service work in that area, it was a great experience.

Because of her connection to the community, this student saw herself as a role model for community members who might not see a college education as an option. She revealed that, to her, it’s really the importance of bringing knowledge and skills back to the community that she most wants to model, the value of “giving back” rather than just seeking personal success:

So I really felt…kind of at an advantage to be able to do this and provide them with a service that not only would help them in their everyday lives in regards to the money that they were getting back, but… to let them see that there are people out there of their own culture, of their own ethnicity, too, that are doing better things, and bringing it back to the community, that’s what’s important. It’s not only showing that you’re out there trying to do something better for yourself and for your family, it was bringing it back to the community. Anybody can be a great business person or be this top CEO of a company, but you have to think about how are you going to help your community benefit from what you have accomplished. I think that’s very important and I always will keep that with me as I pursue my business.

As a result of their experience in the community, several students realized that it would be possible to fit community work into their already busy schedules and began to think about ways to integrate community work into their future lives:

… one of the things that I learned: Life gets in the way. So you tend, in general, to forget about community service. Because I had to do it, I found the time to integrate that into my life. And… because of that I am more involved again with [says service site acronym] which I’m very happy…. I… went in again and am volunteering in the classroom a little more often than I was. If I did it once a month now I try to do it every… Wednesday morning. And before I was like well, I have to study. Now I’m like well yes, I have to study but then I can study at night. It’s kind of a choice.

These comments reveal these adult students’ civic engagement values and their assessment of the contribution of service learning to their lives as well as their strong desire to give back.

**Building on prior knowledge.** As interviewees compared themselves to others in the class, they were pleased with the contributions they made because of their maturity and past experiences. In her study of identity among adult students, Kasworm (2010) found that they are looking for mechanisms to navigate an environment that is oriented toward younger students. Similarly, we find here that in the process of evaluating their own strengths and weaknesses in such an environment, some respondents note ways in which they feel better prepared by their maturity and prior experiences than the younger students
to succeed academically and in the community, supporting our expectation from the literature that respondents may be motivated to build upon prior experiences and existing skills. Sharing relevant experiences in classroom discussion not only helps students learn but boosts their confidence as indicated by the comments below. This student compares her contributions to those of younger students who might be more comfortable with theoretical knowledge:

At times… I had an easier time because of my experiences. Like when we talk about social justice and racism and issues like this because I lived in a different part of the world and because I travel so extensively and… I am more experienced…. maybe I had an easier time on the conversation…. I would bring in more of the personal experience where other students were bringing in more of the theoretic and academic…. I was able to bring in lots of experience.

Several students reported trying to bring to classroom discussion knowledge gained from previous involvement in their own communities through churches, schools, nonprofits or business:

…in the business ethics class… I definitely feel like somebody that's older there's space for them to share what experience they've been through, but I guess that depends on each person. In terms of business ethics… I owned a couple bars and owned an audio visual business in California, so I have an understanding of what it takes dealing with just people and contractors and organizations. So… there's definitely room for older people to share.

Also consistent with Kasworm's (2010) findings, these adult students expressed the view that younger students are not as focused on their studies as older students with more than one student using the phrase, “education is wasted on the young.” In reflecting on the differences between themselves and younger students in the class, several adult students seemed to be aware that the mistakes they made going to college the first time taught them the value of the opportunity.

Adult students reported that the differences between themselves and younger students were also evident at the community-based learning site. This student felt that as an older student, she took the work more seriously:

I always went [to the community site]. So many kids were asking for extensions on time, and… they'd complain about getting out there and they'd say that they wrote hours down for travel, which I never did… But people were just really upset about having to travel so they would write those down in their volunteer hours. And just not wanting to do anything, or just sitting there and reading and not asking for something extra. Not wanting to stay busy.

These students are aware of their maturity and the contribution they make in the service-learning classroom and community.

Self-directed learning. Additional information surfaced in the interviews about what changes might help adult students to participate in service learning. Related to our fourth research question, several students requested more choices in their service hours and locations and suggested the option of picking their own site, perhaps drawing upon existing relationships with organizations. While we expected adult students to complain about the burden of community-based learning on their already busy schedules, not all did. This student, however, commented on the difficulty of arranging to be at the community site when there are children to be cared for. She felt that adult students could participate in community-based learning in greater numbers if DePaul offered child care:

…the only thing I think DePaul should have, for the professors and the staff and everybody, is children service. Because… we like to do this service study; my youngest goes to school only three times a week, so if I was able to go when he was in school then I wouldn't have to pay extra to my babysitter. But otherwise I had times that I went on the weekend and if my husband wasn't available I still had to pay my babysitter… if there was some sort of childcare facility… you still pay to a certain degree, but you know they are well taken care of… it's the place where you work and you go to school. If that was something ever to be offered, it would be a great help for any others coming back to study.
Another student wished that she could make a contribution to the organization without having to be present on site, such as having a project that she could complete on her own because of the conflict with the responsibilities inherent in her other roles:

The only way I can do it as an individual, if you give me a duty of making phone calls maybe, I can be the phone call girl, or the customer service or receiving calls and answering questions about the volunteer services or whatever you have me do. So I can still do that as long as it doesn't collide with the hours of me being a mom, a student, and a worker…. Because if it gets into the involvement where I have to physically be somewhere, it runs into a problem.

The logistical difficulties that adult students reported led several to appreciate the flexibility they were given by their placement sites to choose their hours and location of service, but recognized that this wasn't the case for all students:

So that opportunity to choose how you're going to integrate that into your already busy schedule…was the best part of it. For me, having that advantage of just having that time available was a plus, but for those who don't have that available time … they really do have to move things around to figure out a way to fit that in their schedule.

Such concerns led a number of respondents to recommend that they be given the option of organizing their own placement:

…maybe let us pick the organization that would still be geared towards the class where we can take our learning towards the class and apply it there but still we're getting something….there’s a lot of organizations out here and …I felt like I was stuck; I can't go out and go anywhere else or on my own and hope it would still qualify for the class.

In summary, adult students who participated in the interview seemed to appreciate their community-based learning experiences and several were looking for ways that they could continue to fit such engagement into their schedules. Compared to younger students, most concluded that as adults they were more engaged and that their prior experiences accounted for that difference. Some students reported the challenge of community-based learning given their schedules and multiple roles. Several offered the suggestion that greater flexibility and more choice in the placement selection process would likely allow adult students to participate at a greater level.

Discussion
Do Adult Students Value Opportunities to Give Back to Communities Where They Have a Connection?

The finding that students of all ages valued opportunities to contribute to the welfare of communities, confirms the results of a three university study that there was no difference by age in students’ desire to give back (Rosenberg, Reed, Statham, & Rosing, 2012). Service-learning activities contribute to students’ belief that they can make such contributions and adopt ongoing practices of civic engagement after graduation (Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, & Atkins, 2007). Older students in this study recognize the value of a lifelong habit of civic engagement and are reminded by service-learning experiences that finding time for active citizenship would enrich their lives, busy though their lives already are. Buglione (2012) also found that adult students feel that the benefit of civic engagement in their lives was “revealed” to them by the experience of working in a community required for a service-learning course.

Students with a prior attachment to a neighborhood within the institution’s city were particularly anxious to serve and felt rewarded by service-learning opportunities that “pay back” residents of communities that contributed to their development and that of their family. Such inclination reflects generative developmental needs that enrich the lives of both younger and older students. Adult students in Buglione’s (2012) in-depth interviews also reported a feeling of “being home” when working in a community like their own. These findings suggest the value of allowing students to choose their own site to provide for this sort of meaningfully generative experience, a consideration that is discussed below.

Do Adult Students Appreciate Hands-on Learning That Is Integrated with Classroom Learning?

In our previous research (Rosenberg,
Reed, Statham, & Rosing, 2012) we found that younger students were more likely to appreciate the experience of connecting learning to the community through the service-learning project. This qualitative data provides insight into how this connection could be more effective for older students. Like Buglione (2012), we found that adult students were particularly interested in class discussions that helped to connect the ideas surfaced by readings and assignments with the mission and practical efforts of their organization as well as their own activities in the placement. These findings are consistent with Snyder and Clary's (2003) insight, noted earlier, that adult commitment to civic engagement is fostered by reflection that grounds community-based activity in an abstract and value-based framework. Perhaps adults are particularly concerned with this sort of knowledge integration because of the prior experiences that they bring to the classroom. Discussion may help them to make connections between learning from both newer and older events and to find meaning by linking experiential learning to concepts. Another factor may be the importance that adult students place on classroom encounters in their overall campus engagement.

As Rosing, Reed, Ferrari, and Bothne (2010) found in their analysis of students' complaints about service learning, not all courses are designed with placements that relate directly back to the concepts of the course. One factor in achieving such congruence in service-learning courses is the complicated process by which partnerships are built and maintained with organizations, whose own activities may change over time. As educators balance the competing demands of course objectives, it is important to note that for all students, perhaps older students especially, knowledge integration is enhanced by a clearer connection between what students are learning hands on, the images, relationships and obstacles that they encounter, and classroom discussion that helps to draw relationships between the learning occurring in multiple areas of the brain (Zull, 2011). Buglione (2012) suggests intentional dialogue between older and younger students that acknowledges differences and allows for a learning exchange between those with more experience and those reportedly more comfortable in the conceptual realm of academia.

**Do Adult Students Benefit from Placement Experiences That Build upon Prior Knowledge and Skills?**

Our earlier study (Rosenberg, Reed, Statham, & Rosing, 2012) found that those with fewer occasions to build skills within organizations or to work in diverse settings would be particularly appreciative of the rich opportunities that service-learning courses can offer. On the other hand, more experienced students bring with them knowledge about "how systems and organizations are run" (Buglione, 2012, p. 85). It may be that students with professional expertise have higher expectations of their placement and the opportunities for skill development that are offered.

In this study, older students asked the university to develop stronger partnerships with community organizations and to work more carefully to ensure such rewarding experiences for them. Rosing et al.'s (2010) study of student complaints that did not disaggregate responses by age found that criticism of the community partner's level of organization and suggestions for better training and orientation were the most common. Students wanted more guidance and responsiveness from their site supervisors; and they wanted to do more meaningful work. Our findings suggest that adults may be especially aware of this challenge and be looking for placement activities that utilize their existing knowledge and skills. University placement processes, designed primarily for inexperienced students, may not currently be equipped to provide individualized assessments that would allow for matching students' skills to organizations prepared to benefit from them. But growing numbers of nontraditional students in service-learning courses may require this.

We've seen that service-learning partners recognize the value of older students with organizational skills and experience working with diverse populations (Stoecker & Tyron, 2009). University staff could help community agencies to take advantage of adults' leadership ability to guide less experienced students in the work of the agency, a process that would enhance community based learning for both generations. For the adult student, integrating established roles of worker, parent, and active citizen with the developing role of student builds confidence that can lead to heightened academic success (Kasworm, 2010; Reed, et al., 2015).
Do Adult Students Prefer Greater Choice in the Selection of their Service-Learning Placement?

Some adult students in this study articulated their preference for choosing from a selection of community-based projects, indicating that personal and professional connections as well as competing responsibilities such as child care would guide their choice. Similarly, Rosing, Reed, Ferrari and Bothne (2010) found that students expressed the desire to choose their own sites, including placements that drew upon their expertise. Buglione’s (2012) respondents felt that if they could arrange their placement they could have a greater impact in their local community; on the other hand, these students wanted assistance from faculty because of the stress of finding a placement within a short period of time that met the requirements of the class.

Such practical considerations as the time needed to place students and the importance of maintaining ongoing partnerships with community organizations have deterred many institutions from providing students such autonomy in the placement process (Reed & Marienau, 2008). Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005) analyzed the benefit of their student-directed approach with high school students who help set the goals for service learning and choose their own service-learning activity. Those students who chose their own activity made greater gains in civic knowledge than those students who engaged in an activity chosen by the teacher; and self-directed students reported a strong attachment to the community. Growing numbers of online service-learning courses (Strait & Sauer, 2004) with students located all over the country (and world) develop mechanisms for guiding students through the process of identifying opportunities for civic engagement in their communities.

Some students in this study wanted credit for independent work in the community. Adult educators have developed standards and processes, referred to as prior learning assessment (PLA) that universities could employ to document and assess students’ activism in the community (Fiddler Marienau, & Whitaker, 2006). A survey of 48 institutions by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning found that students who receive credit through PLA are more likely to complete their degree (CAEL, 2010). In addition, adult students who are allowed to use their ongoing community work for a service-learning placement may find that work they were already doing in the community is enhanced by new ideas, information, networks, and structured reflection gained from their role as students.

We also note here that some students believe that a stipend or scholarship would allow them to be more engaged in community-based learning. Such students may be struggling financially and feel that it’s a challenge to give up paid working hours to spend time with a community partner. Offering scholarships that consider students’ involvement in service has been advocated as a way to promote student development (Zlotkowski, Longo, & Williams, 2006). Campus Compact (2007) reports that 67% of institutions are following this practice.

Conclusion

While this study contributes to educators’ understanding of adult students’ experiences and points to appropriate adjustments in classroom and community practice, the generalizability of its findings is limited. Institutions of higher education vary in the degree to which the culture supports service learning with nontraditional students, depending on student population and resources available to support faculty engaged in service learning. Therefore, this study at one private university with a strong service-learning center will be of greater value when its results are compared with those from other institutions. In addition, our small sample size limits the reliability of the findings, suggesting that further research is needed to confirm results.
Nevertheless, this study provides encouragement to those working with adult students whose busy lives suggest that service-learning courses are unmanageable. Ongoing research at the American Association of Community Colleges (Prentice & Robinson, 2007) and the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2012) provides evidence of both the success that such institutions have providing service-learning courses to an older, working population and the need for more such opportunities for adult and other nontraditional students. Students’ comments herein serve to remind university staff and faculty that many of their students are from the very neighborhoods and organizations with which they partner. Drawing upon the connections that a student brings to higher education may not only enhance that student’s engagement in the experience, restoring commitment to community, but it could also help achieve the call of the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement to “Expand the number of robust, generative civic partnerships and alliances locally...to address common problems, empower people to act, strengthen communities...” (National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, 2012).

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Helping Diminish the College Knowledge and Access Divide: Development of a College Outreach Camp to Serve Community Needs

Melissa A. Martinez, Michelle Hamilton, Elizabeth Castañeda, Lee Francis, IV, and Ariane Corcoran

Abstract

This descriptive case study examined the development of a college outreach summer camp at a university in Texas. The camp aims to diminish the college knowledge and access divide that exists between first generation college-going, lower-income, and underrepresented students and their counterparts in the region in which the university is located. Drawing on one year of survey data, interviews with program personnel, program documents, and newspaper articles about the camp, this study highlights some of the camp’s early successes, as well as growing pains of starting such an effort to serve community needs.

Programs that aim to increase college knowledge and readiness, as well as enrollment and completion among underrepresented groups of students abound across the country (Swail & Perna, 2002). These programs are known as pre-college outreach, “early intervention, early outreach, or college access” programs (Loza, 2003, p. 44). They “provide a safety net for thousands of [K–12] students who do not get the level of support—academic and social—within their current educational environment to become college ready” (Swail & Perna, 2002, p. 16). Despite their shared focus, these programs vary greatly based on funding, students served, duration and frequency, and types of academic and/or social activities provided (Loza, 2003; Swail & Perna, 2002). Some programs also emerge more organically from purposeful and collaborative school, community, and university partnerships (Burbank & Hunter, 2008).

Among the most widely known college outreach programs in the nation are federally funded TRIO programs like Upward Bound, GEAR Up (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness through Undergraduate preparation), and other non-federally funded programs such as AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) and the Puente Project (Swail & Perna, 2002). While such programs are nationally recognized, outcome data to support their effectiveness is sparse (Swail & Perna, 2002; Tierney, 2002). Yet less is known for thousands of other pre-college outreach programs across the country (Swail, Quinn, Landis, & Fung, 2012). This descriptive case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2013) examined one program: a college access summer (CAS) camp at a university in Texas that emerged organically from community partnerships and collaborations to serve the college access and readiness needs of the university’s surrounding community, known here as Central City.

Context of the Study

The CAS camp is one of several initiatives carried out by a P-16 Center for Education that was officially formed in 2010 at a university in Texas. Developing the center was a priority for the university’s president who appointed a presidential fellow, a tenured faculty member in the College of Education, to lead this charge. The formation of the center and the CAS camp were spurred after leaders from the university, the city of Central City, and the Central City school district engaged in purposeful conversations on ways to address college access and readiness issues among Central City youth. In particular, stakeholders recognized the need to increase awareness and knowledge of viable postsecondary options for Central City youth given the low college-going rates in the area.

The university itself is a comprehensive, doctoral granting institution serving approximately 36,000 students. It recently gained the status of a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) when it reached the milestone of enrolling at least 25 per cent Hispanics in its undergraduate student population (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Aside from the center’s establishment, the university has a history of serving and working with Central City and the surrounding region. The university’s office of community relations in particular was established “to connect university
resources with community needs and serve as a liaison among the university’s constituents in the region.” Other student organizations, academic and student affairs departments, and individual faculty members also engage in pre-college outreach programming with Central City youth in varying capacities. However, the CAS camp is one of the first pre-college outreach programs specifically established through the center as a direct result of the collaboration between the university and community stakeholders.

Only one public school district serves Central City with six elementary schools, two middle schools, one traditional comprehensive high school and one alternative high school. Central City has a population of about 50,000, with 53.7% of residents identifying as White, 37.8% Latino, 5.5% Black, 0.9% Native American, and 1.6% Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). The majority of residents have at least a high school diploma (89.3%), but only 31.3% have a bachelor’s degree or higher form of education. These statistics likely reflect the historic struggle that the district has faced in adequately preparing students for postsecondary education. As a result, the district has gained somewhat of a negative reputation among new residents with school-aged children. New faculty for instance, are often discouraged from enrolling their children in public schools in Central City (Central City school district administrator, personal communication, September 19, 2012). Data from the traditional high school conveys some of the district’s challenges, particularly in relation to high school completion, advanced course enrollment, and college ready graduate rates.

As of the 2013–2014 school year, the high school was comprised of approximately 2,073 students of which 5.1% were African American, 69.3% Hispanic, 23.4% White, 1.0% Asian, 0.9% were of two or more races, and 0.2% were American Indian (Texas Education Agency, 2014). School data (Texas Education Agency, 2012, 2013, 2014) indicates the high school’s four-year graduation completion rate has increased over the years (from 79.4% in 2011 to 83% in 2013), but remains below the state average (88% in 2013). More concerning discrepancies can be seen among graduates based on racial and ethnic background, particularly between Hispanic students and their White peers (Table 1).

A similar gap is evident when it comes to advanced placement (AP) or dual enrollment course completion (Table 2). About twice as many White and Asian students completed AP or dual enrollment courses compared to African American and Hispanic students over the last three years, with the exception of 2012-13 when the gap decreased to a greater degree.

Although the percentage of Central City High School graduates deemed college ready in English/Language Arts and mathematics generally needs to increase, it is students of color that once again have the greatest gains to make to be on par with their White and Asian peers. In addition, the college-going rates for all students in the district have remained well below the national average. Overall, the college-going rates in the district from 2008-2011 have ranged from 36% to 43% (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, n.d.) (Table 3).

These statistics substantiate the concern for Central City’s youth among city officials and district and university leaders. The CAS camp is one attempt to address some of these challenges by promoting college readiness and access among Central City youth, particularly for those from historically underrepresented backgrounds in higher education. This includes students of color and first generation college students. This descriptive case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2013) attempts to document the camp’s development and uncover insights that can help the CAS camp, as well as other similar programs, learn from the growing pains it has faced in trying to meet the community’s needs for additional college knowledge and awareness among its youth.

### The Nature of College Outreach Programs

As previously noted, there is a dearth of

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**Table 1. Four-year Graduation Rates for Central City High School from 2010–2013**

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<tr>
<th>Class of 2011</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Asian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class of 2012</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of 2013</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>92.0</td>
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**Table 2. Advanced Placement and Dual Enrollment Completion Rates for Central City High School**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>African American</th>
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**Table 3. College Ready Graduates in English/Language Arts and Mathematics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class of 2011</th>
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research on the many college outreach programs that exist nationwide. However, in 1999-2000 a National Survey of Outreach Programs was created and disseminated by the College Board, in association with The Education Resources Institute (TERI) and the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) in an effort to gauge the number and types of programs in existence. The survey yielded information from 1,110 programs, and a series of focus groups with program administrators followed the survey. Swail and Perna (2002) examined this data and summarized the common attributes of existing programs. They found that about 50% of programs received federal funds and were housed and provided their services on a college campus. A majority (67%) provided services year round, 18% during the academic year, and only 15% were offered in the summer. Programs also varied in capacity and duration, with some lasting days and others years. Programs tended to focus on generally promoting college, awareness, and exposure, while fewer promoted rigorous course taking or focused on a particular academic area. Most programs also provided cultural activities or activities that developed students’ social and leadership skills, as well as the opportunity to develop academic skills related to critical thinking, studying, reading and writing, and mathematics and science instruction. A majority of programs (75%) also utilized workshops or classroom instruction and some form of role modeling, tutoring, and mentoring. Almost all programs (94%) utilized program evaluations, but as Tierney (2002) notes, such evaluations tend to be weak as most individuals running these programs have little expertise and limited resources to conduct their own data collection and analysis (Swail & Perna, 2002).

Many programs also attempted to involve parents, with about 69% offering a parental component. Many universities recognize that the inclusion of families is critical in these programs, particularly for students who come from families where they are the first to attend college or who have families with limited knowledge of how to access a higher education. Albeit, involving parents and families in such programs can be a challenge because of issues related to “cost, family privacy, logistical concerns or even negotiating difficult pre-existing contacts between universities and urban K–12 communities” (Smith, 2012, p. 21).

Swail, et al. (2012) were able to conduct a follow-up to the study conducted in 2000 to assess changes in the landscape of college outreach programs nationwide. Fewer surveys were completed in the follow-up (374), with a majority completed by programs in California (10%), Texas (7%), and New York (6%). It was found that almost half of all programs still received some federal funding. However, program services were not overwhelmingly delivered on college campuses. While postsecondary institutions primarily sponsored 50% of programs, program services were equally offered on university campuses (39%) and at K-12 schools (39%). The primary goals, services, and instruction provided by programs also had not changed. The focus of most programs (93%) was still on increasing college attendance among participants, followed by increasing college awareness (92%) and college exposure (91%).

At least half of all programs also focused on improving students’ study, critical thinking, and test-taking skills through math, science, reading, and writing instruction, academic enrichment and college preparatory courses, as well as grade and attendance monitoring. A majority of programs (87%) included college awareness activities and specifically helped students develop social skills and provided career counseling information and academic advising. The percentage of programs that had a parental component was still about the same (67%) when compared to 2000, as was the manner in which services were provided (85% through workshops). When and how long programs operated still varied, but a majority of programs (70%) were year round and provided services after school (71%). However, more than half of programs surveyed (61%) required students to apply for admission to a college and 46% required a contract with a parent. Only 28% of programs were open enrollment. Almost all of the programs (93%) surveyed also required some pre-service training for staff. Therefore, this compilation of characteristics of pre-college outreach programs was considered when examining the development and characteristics of the CAS camp.

**Methods and Research Questions**

A descriptive case study design (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2013) was used for this analysis given the purpose of the study and the research questions posed. The intent of a descriptive case study is to describe a contemporary, real-life phenomenon, intervention, or case within the context in which it occurs (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013). This type of inquiry is optimal when attempting to answer
“how” and “why” questions to understand the case. Case study design also draws on detailed data collected through various means and from multiple sources, so that evidence is triangulated as a means of contributing to the study’s validity (Yin, 2013).

In this study, the unit of analysis was the development of the CAS camp, and the research questions included: 1. How was the CAS camp developed to meet the specific needs of the community it serves? 2. How has the CAS camp been successful, in terms of positive impact and usefulness, from the perspective of its developers and students? 3. How can the CAS camp be improved given challenges it has faced and lessons learned? Given the limitations associated with a case study approach, we did not attempt to identify any causal relationships in this case or seek to provide any statistical generalizations (Yin, 2013). Instead, we focused on lessons learned in the development of the CAS camp to inform future camp programming as well as future scholarship and practitioners seeking to understand the intricacies of developing similar outreach programs based on community needs.

Data Sources and Analysis

Data for the case study was drawn from multiple sources including: 1) one audio-recorded and transcribed group interview with the center director and the CAS camp coordinator, 2) a follow-up written interview questionnaire with the coordinator, 3) informal conversations with the director and the coordinator, 4) one year’s worth of program evaluation survey data collected for the CAS camp in 2012, 5) curricular and CAS camp related documents, and 6) university press releases and Central City news articles.

In the spring of 2013 the director and the coordinator were interviewed and asked the following questions: how and when the CAS camp first got started, how many students and staff were involved in the first and subsequent camps, how the first camp was designed and what curriculum was developed, what was learned from the first camp, what challenges were faced, how the camp changed or improved from year to year, and how beneficial they perceived the camp to be for student participants and for the Central City community. The coordinator also completed a written interview questionnaire as follow-up for additional clarity.

The program evaluation survey data examined consisted of two measures: 1) daily evaluations completed by students for each session attended, and 2) a pre- and post-campus questionnaire. The coordinator, in collaboration with camp staff, developed these evaluation measures. The daily evaluations assessed the usefulness of specific activities and presentations to help guide camp staff with future program planning. The same evaluation form was used to assess each event and consisted of 12 Likert scale statements where students chose among the following responses: no way, probably not, not sure, probably, definitely. Questions included statements such as: the information covered was helpful, the presenters were knowledgeable, this event was too short, and I would recommend this event to a friend. Three open-ended, short response questions were also included but this data was not accessible for this case study.

The CAS camp did not disseminate both a pre- and post- program evaluation survey to student participants prior to 2012. The pre- and post-survey, which consisted of identical statements, was the camp’s first attempt to gauge students’ general knowledge of college related information before and after attending the camp. The survey included 32 Likert scale statements where students could choose among the following responses: 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree. Some of the statements on the survey included: I am informed about registering for the ACT/SAT, I know what my major will be in college, I know how to apply for a college scholarship, I know the purpose of FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), and I know how to explore college housing options. Among the rising juniors that participated in the 2012 camp, 11 completed the pre-survey and 13 completed the post-survey, although a total of 14 students enrolled in the junior camp. Among the 17 enrolled rising seniors for the 2012 camp, 17 completed the pre-survey and 10 completed the post-survey. The difference in the number of completed surveys reflects student absences and new student enrollment after the first day.

The development of the CAS camp was gauged after examining all curricular documents and articles, the survey responses, and the interview transcript and follow-up interview questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were derived to provide summary findings from the surveys.
Findings

Development and Evolution of the CAS Camp

As previously noted, the CAS camp was one of the first programs initiated by the center. The center director explained that as a presidential fellow at the university from 2007–2008 she was asked by the university president to develop a P-16 Council in Central City, as one did not exist. The director indicated, “The president’s interest in this was based on the push from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board that wanted each university in the state to identify someone to work on the state’s ‘Closing the Gaps’ initiative.” In 2000 the state of Texas developed a statewide higher education initiative called Closing the Gaps by 2015: The Texas Higher Education Plan to address four areas in higher education: participation, success, excellence, and research (Closing the Gaps, 2000). The initiative outlines five-year targets for each area and provides strategies to reach these goals in the state.

Given this charge, the Director leveraged her new role to convene community stakeholders in Central City to develop the P–16 council. She explained how her title as Presidential Fellow and her relation with the university’s president provided her clout in this process, which lent to her ability to bring together prominent community members. What resulted was the development of a steering committee that subsequently held community-based dialogues to garner political and grass-roots support and input on a strategic plan to improve education for community residents from pre-school through college. The plan focused on three priorities related to: 1) early childhood and kindergarten readiness, 2) college access and workforce development, and 3) community engagement. Therefore, according to the Director the CAS camp developed “very quickly” out of a need to promptly respond to the community-based conversations about how to increase the college-going culture in the community and specifically increase college-going rates among economically disadvantaged students in Central City.

The director described how they first embarked on delivering the camp “without having very little pre-planning in terms of the specific goals and objectives and any type of strategic planning prior to its implementation” or without fully established evaluation procedures for its programming. Because the CAS camp initially had no allotted budget, programming was initiated with monies from the operational funds for the center. Since then, the center has remained limited in financial resources and is primarily funded through external grants. Therefore, the primary focus of the camp staff in its first two years of existence was on its organization and delivery.

The center is also limited in terms of human resources, which impacts the design and implementation of the camp. The center staff includes the Director, who is also a faculty member, an administrative assistant, and two grant coordinators, one of which is also the CAS camp coordinator. The center also employs part-time students from the university who serve as mentors and help coordinate, lead, and provide instruction for the camp. Mentors are employed in part through grant funding. The first cohort of mentors that assisted with the camp also helped develop the camp curriculum along with the coordinator and director. The curriculum was derived from specific college-ready related goals the staff developed for the camp participants.

The mentors are key assets to the center as many come from diverse and low-income backgrounds like many of the students who attend the camp, and many mentors are from the Central City community as well. Hiring college student mentors from diverse and low-income backgrounds was purposeful, and based on the implicit assumption that the mentors themselves would be motivating to the high school students. Additionally, since research suggests that a factor in the lower college enrollment of students of color is the lack of interactions with college students and campuses (Bergerson & Petersen, 2009), the opportunity to form relationships with the mentors is a unique experience for many camp participants. The college students also benefit from their roles as mentors in a number of ways. Employing low-income students, many of which are from the Central City community, provides them with income, work experience, a social safety net, and an opportunity to contribute to the well-being of students from similar backgrounds. The bidirectional nature of the relationship between mentors and student participants provides both parties with positive social experiences in a higher education setting, emotional support, enhanced perceptions of identity, increased self-worth and competence as learners, and encourages the importance of continued education (Bergerson & Petersen, 2009).

The first camp began in the summer of 2010, serving rising 9th–12th graders in the surround-
ing community. To attend, students completed an application that consisted of basic contact and demographic questions, as well as a document listing the camp’s rules and expectations, which parents and students were asked to sign. Several other permission forms are included in the application related to travel, medical treatment, and a media release. According to the director, recruiting for the first camp through the district initially posed some challenges, and required that the center staff build trust and rapport with school counselors. “They saw us as a competitor initially, as opposed to an asset or collaborator,” intimated the Director. Moreover, the school personnel were used to focusing their college outreach efforts on the top 10-25% of students at the high school, which was contrary to what the CAS camp aimed to do. Nevertheless, fliers were distributed at the high school, posted in the public library, and sent to community organizations to market the camp. The camp was also advertised in the Central City newspaper. The forms of marketing remain the same even today.

Each camp session has a capacity for about 20 to 40 students, although enrollment does not always reach capacity. Funding also impacts the capacity from year to year. The camp takes place on the university campus, but is not residential and instead is offered between the hours of 8 am to 5 pm. The district provided bus transportation for camp participants for the first two years, but ceased due to budget limitations. Students must now provide their own transportation to attend. The director and coordinator realize the increased benefits of a residential camp, but the center’s limited budget inhibits use of this design. The director and coordinator also recognize that the non-residential nature of the camp likely keeps some students from attending and limits the degree to which the camp can involve parents during camp hours, as most parents are working during the day.

Nonetheless, the center designed and implemented five camps in 2010: 4 one-week long camps for 9th-11th graders, and one camp serving 12th graders lasting for two weeks. Based on student enrollment and general observations of and feedback from students and staff, subsequent camps were limited to juniors and seniors. In 2011, the camp was redesigned to serve 11th and 12th graders during separate one-week sessions. However, in 2012 and 2013 the center reverted to a two-week camp for seniors and maintained a one-week camp for juniors.

**Measuring “Success”**

The curriculum for both the junior and senior camps covers similar content as other college outreach programs. Programming focuses on improving students’ college awareness and readiness (e.g., knowledge of college entrance exams, admissions, financial aid, taking advanced courses, time management, and note taking), leadership skills, and provides students with opportunities to apply these skills, such as working on their resumes and college essays. This information is provided through workshop style sessions and interactive activities provided by the camp mentors as well as invited speakers, including the university’s Financial Aid Office and Division of Food and Housing. While students tour the university and engage in activities on campus, students also visit an additional four-year university in the region during the camp.

**Daily evaluation results.** The daily evaluations from the 2012 camps revealed pertinent information that helped guide the coordinator and mentors for future camps. The juniors completed evaluation forms for the following types of sessions: being money savvy, time management, services provided by various university centers (writing, career services, health center), writing a college essay, signing up and preparing for the ACT/SAT, a college student panel, a professional development session, and the college tour of another four-year university. The seniors completed evaluation forms for all of these same events, plus presentations related to: college admissions, AP/dual credit courses, completing the state’s application for college admissions, financial aid, and a community service project. All participants were also asked to indicate how helpful the mentors were during sessions.

Among the sessions provided to both juniors and seniors, there were two where at least 75% or more of all students indicated they “definitely” learned a lot and “definitely” found the information provided in the session helpful. These two sessions included the college student panel and the university writing center session where students were provided assistance with writing a college essay. There were also three sessions where at least 50% of both juniors and seniors “definitely” learned a lot and “definitely” found the information provided useful. These sessions included the money savvy presentation, the workshop on time management, and the college tour of another four-year university.
Conversely, there were four sessions where an overwhelming majority of juniors (83% or more) indicated they either “definitely” learned a lot or found the information in the session helpful, while only about 50% or fewer seniors found these same sessions to be equally beneficial. Three of the sessions included the university career services and university health center presentations, as well as the professional development workshop where students worked on their resumes. The fourth session was the ACT/SAT presentation, although it is important to note that this topic was covered in only one session for the juniors while the seniors received this information in two KAPLAN-led presentations. It is unclear why the seniors did not find these sessions as beneficial as the juniors. Perhaps seniors were already familiar with the information provided in these sessions or it had more to do with the presenter and their delivery.

There were also some sessions that were solely offered to seniors that were considered very useful by at least 73% of students. These sessions included the financial aid presentation and the workshop on the state’s common application for college admissions. Only about 50% of seniors “definitely” found the sessions on college admissions, AP/dual credit courses, and the community service project useful.

Finally, one of the last questions on the daily evaluation form asked student participants to consider whether the mentors were helpful in each session. Overwhelmingly, juniors (80%-100%) and seniors (73%-100%) agreed that the mentors at each event were “definitely” helpful. This positive feedback reiterates the key role that the mentors play in the CAS camp.

Pre- and post-survey results. According to the results from the pre-surveys for the CAS camps of 2012, juniors and seniors often began the camp lacking the same type of college knowledge related to completing a college application, completing the FAFSA, completing a college housing application, and seeking fee waivers for college applications. Fortunately, the post-survey results indicated that students became more knowledgeable in these areas after the camp. Table 4 lists the pre- and post-survey averages for questions on which both juniors and seniors made the most gains accompanied by the difference between these pre- and post-survey averages.

Perspectives of camp staff and student participants. The director and coordinator do believe the camp has been beneficial to student participants. The coordinator stressed how there always seemed to be a strong sense of community and shared experience that developed over the course of the camps: “[the students] enjoyed being on a college campus and feeling a part of something much greater—it gave them a sense of belonging and a feeling of ‘I can do this.’” In a news release published on the university’s website to advertise the 2013 camp, the perspectives of mentors and camp alumni were captured and indicated the camp’s value (Blaschke, 2013). For instance, one of the mentors who had worked for the center several years prior and was key in helping coordinate the camp shared how the intent of the camp was “to build motivation in the students so they can develop a plan for their post-secondary education” and “to show them [student participants] that the college-going process can be done in clear, specific steps, and that anybody can go to college.” A female student participant who had attended the 2012 camp and was a high school student in Central City said, “I really enjoyed it. It opened by eyes about college life...and about the opportunities I have with FAFSA.” Another male student participant who attended a charter school in the community explained how he had already attended the 2012 camp but intended to participate again in 2013. “I love it. There are too many words to describe it...Everyone is from different backgrounds, but here to learn the same stuff.”

Another indication of the general success of the camp has been the reception by families in the community. The coordinator mentioned how the enthusiasm of the early camp participants was shared with other students and their families. As a result, parents are regularly requesting information about the camp before the calendar information for the next camp is even available. This suggests an increase in community knowledge regarding the CAS camp and an increase in discussions regarding college options and resources among families in the community.

Challenges and Areas for Improvement

While the survey data from 2012 indicates that the CAS camp is helping increase students’ college knowledge and readiness, the camp stands to improve in a number of ways. For example, indicators of programmatic success and organizational effectiveness for the camp have not been fully determined. It was not until 2012 that the pre- and post-survey to measure the effectiveness of the camp in general was created.
and disseminated, in part because the staff for the camp lacked experience and knowledge creating and utilizing such a measure. The staff is eager to establish indicators for programmatic success and organizational effectiveness in order to improve the camp. The coordinator noted, "students learn about college entrance exams, the college application process, and college life, and the camps demystify the process for them. We take their comments every year and try to give them an experience they will come back to if given the chance."

Another important limitation is that tracking of students attending the camp has been nonexistent. The director and coordinator acknowledge that although most of the students attending the camp are juniors and seniors, there has not been any effort to follow students through the educational system. For instance, campers are not tracked on application or financial aid status following the camp period. The director and coordinator admit it would be beneficial to identify the information that was most helpful for campers in the long-run, but currently there is no system in place that actually tracks the application process of the students attending the camp. Plus, tracking camp alumni would result in an increased workload for the center’s limited staff. Somewhat related to this is the camp’s inability to communicate with alumni for the purpose of providing continued support to students. Although the camp staff intend to add a social media component to the program to afford camp participants the opportunity to maintain their relationships with each other and the camp staff even after their camp session ends.

Staff also highlighted the need for additional resources from the university in order to create a fully established CAS camp that can perhaps become residential in nature, or at least provide students with needed transportation to the camp. Making the camp residential would particularly allow more students with limited transportation to attend. With secured financial resources, the schedule for the camp could also be set well in advance. This would eliminate some of the difficulties associated with securing space at the university while competing with other camps and events that take place on the campus during the summer. The center has had to deal with such challenges for the last three years because funding for the camp is often not secured until the spring or even early summer. Despite this need, the coordinator noted that the current support from the university administration has been remarkable. Her belief is that there would be no program if not for current levels of assistance.

Lessons Learned: Discussion and Implications

Findings from this study have several implications for research and practice. For instance, while similar college outreach programs may also develop quickly, and/or out of community response, it is essential that those involved at the onset take the time to consider underlying assumptions and goals for the program. Ideally, identifying these assumptions and goals should happen prior to the implementation of the program. However, this is not always feasible as was the case with the CAS camp. This initially caused tension for camp staff, as they were simultaneously planning and implementing the first camp. Moreover, if limited by funds and staff, like the CAS camp, seeking additional partnerships with other university faculty and/or staff can be useful in order to increase the human resources needed to carry out

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Survey Question</th>
<th>Juniors Pre-</th>
<th>Juniors Post-</th>
<th>Difference</th>
<th>Seniors Pre-</th>
<th>Seniors Post-</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know about college application fees</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>4.80</td>
<td>1.93</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>4.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know how to apply for a college scholarship</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>4.80</td>
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<td>2.90</td>
<td>4.80</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know the purpose of FAFSA</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to complete a FAFSA</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>4.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know what job an advisor has on a college campus</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>4.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know how to complete a college housing application</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know how to get a college application fee eliminated</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know about college housing deadlines</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>3.08</td>
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and evaluate such programming. Strategic use of faculty is critical to the long-term survival and success of outreach programs (Laninga, Austin, & McClure, 2011).

Allowing students to play a central role in community-university partnerships contributes to the longevity of the programs (Laninga, Austin, & McClure, 2011). The CAS camp drew upon the assets of current college students from low-income backgrounds at the university by employing them as mentors that could assist with the camp. This staffing choice was based on the assumption that the college students could serve as role models and more easily connect to the high school students at the camp who come from similar backgrounds. Additionally, the use of work-study student staffers allowed the camp to be offered at no cost to the community. This model appears to have proven useful thus far, but stands to be examined further in future research to evaluate the implications of the bi-directional relationships that are formed between mentors and student participants. College outreach programs might consider employing or recruiting current college students to volunteer their time in these efforts. Partnering with student groups such as fraternities or sororities could be ideal, as many require community service hours.

The logistical planning for such programming is always important to consider as well. While held on the university campus, due to limited funds, the CAS camp is not residential in nature. This impacts the number and types of students that are able to attend. It is likely that transportation is a barrier for some economically disadvantaged students that the camp intends to serve. These types of logistical issues must be considered when a college outreach program is organizing their available resources and developing their goals.

As a “key to the development of inclusive outreach practice is considering parental or even family involvement as a fundamental and common practice” (Smith, 2012, p. 21), the CAS camp coordinator and director expressed regret that they did not prioritize parental involvement during the creation of the camp. Not only would the increased involvement of parents and family help incorporate the cultural strengths and experiences of students but could also prepare parents as community advocates (Burbank & Hunter, 2008). This would enhance the community benefit of the CAS camp as parents could “share the information with other parents, neighbors, family members, and friends—[creating] a knowledge ripple effect within the community” (Burbank & Hunter, 2008, p. 50). Examining ways to involve parents and families in the CAS camp is a necessary step to further develop the camp to serve community needs.

One of the biggest ways in which the CAS camp stands to improve is in its evaluation measures and in the clarification of specific outcomes for the camp. Both the director and the coordinator are aware of this. They have contributed to this case study, and are working towards addressing this need. Thus, the CAS camp staff could stand to benefit from adopting a number of the steps that Tierney (2002) suggests for reflective evaluation of outreach programs such as using “multiple measures of effectiveness” (p. 226), conducting “one discrete evaluation project per year” (p. 227), and creating “an ongoing schema for evaluating cost and communicating effectiveness” (p. 228).

Overall, this case study contributes to the literature base surrounding the development and effectiveness of college access programs that arise based on community needs. As outreach programs like this one emerge across the country, they must consider how their practice can inform research. There is a great deal of planning, organizing, and informal evaluation that often takes place with similar programs yet all of these efforts are not always documented or considered as data for research. In this way, this study, while limited in scope and data, is informing the continued development of the CAS camp itself. Future studies that compare different types of university-based college access programs that are similarly limited in financial and human resources but vary in longevity and design would be useful to help further understand the complexities in developing and implementing such initiatives. Additional investigations should also focus on evaluating the bi-directional benefits and costs of college access programs to participants, mentors, faculty, and staff working in such programs, as well as the community.

Conclusion

Universities “not only create and transmit knowledge, they are also economic engines, applied technology centers, major employers, investors [and] real estate developers” (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.). In this sense, they are in a unique position to improve their surrounding communities through purposeful collaborations. College outreach activities like the CAS camp that emerge out of community and university partnerships are therefore vital as they
not only serve the institution’s own recruitment and diversity agendas, but also “embrace the goal of greater civic engagement” and “create a more equitable and just society in the institution’s ‘own backyard’” (Smith, 2012, p. 22). As a university-based college access program, the CAS camp provides a type of political and social capital in Central City. Despite its shortcomings and continued challenges, it strives to be more than a “feel-good” program and instead meet the urgent college access and readiness needs of historically underrepresented students in the community. This case study helps substantiate its efforts.

References

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Abstract

In this paper, we document our efforts, as activist scholars, to cultivate among our liberal arts students a critical environmental justice consciousness through engaging with community organizations. We detail our efforts to make the classroom a space in which to engage environmental justice beyond a narrow and short-term focus on the disproportionate impact of environmental harms in low-income and minority communities to a more expansive and consistent attention to histories of inequality and processes of marginalization. We argue that community engaged partnerships afford opportunities for educators to combine theory with practice and disrupt students' assumptions about what or who constitutes the environment. Our socially privileged students, in gaining a better understanding of structural/historic privilege and how their own positionality implicates them in environmental injustice, have been able to re-evaluate and reframe their political and theoretical commitments and carve out meaningful ways to contribute to environmental justice work.

Cultivating a Critical Environmental Justice Consciousness

Nestled among the picturesque San Gabriel foothills in Southern California lie the Claremont Colleges. As part of an elite consortium of liberal arts colleges, these institutions boast access to a variety of resources and are increasingly popular among students who wish to pursue majors in environmental analysis. While many Claremont students are drawn to environmental issues because of personal connections with the “great outdoors,” such experiences, as critics have long noted, are also inherently raced and classed. For example, when students are asked about why they are drawn to environmental studies, responses typically include reflections on personal engagements with wilderness camping, identification of figures such as John Muir as key environmental heroes, and a desire to “save the earth” more generally (Cronon, 1996; Merchant, 2003; Romm, 2002). Such inclinations, while legitimate, also reveal class- and race-specific trajectories into environmentalism and underscore privileged access to transportation, equipment, and open spaces, the reification of particular figures as the face/founders of “the” environmental movement in the United States, and a more general tendency whereby students do not interrogate or acknowledge structural and historical processes which might lead to environmental crises, or their own positionality in relation to such processes and intersections (Crenshaw, 1991; Guthman, 2008; White, 1996).

In response to such realities, which we dare-say are shared by other liberal arts institutions, this paper seeks to document our institutional and curricular efforts—as scholar activists—to cultivate among our students a critical environmental justice (EJ) consciousness through collaborative community engaged partnerships. We define critical EJ consciousness as a perspective and awareness that moves beyond a narrow and short-term focus on the disproportionate impact of environmental harms to low-income and minority communities (pedagogically, for example, EJ is often relegated to a one- or two-week module within another environmental studies course) to a more expansive and consistent attention to histories of inequality and processes of marginalization.

Cultivating a critical environmental consciousness from an environmental justice perspective will, of course, vary depending on the institutional context and make-up of the student body. As feminist scholars of color whose students are primarily upper-income, white, U.S. citizens, we find it necessary to start from a conceptual and theoretical standpoint that accounts for the structural forces that produce environmental injustice, in addition to focusing on how environmental harms impact minority communities. We do this in order to critically examine both how racialization manifests as a process and an achievement, and how power operates within and between groups.

In our classes, we thus constantly attend to this metalanguage of race and note how teaching
about environmental racism, as perpetuated by historically specific policies, practices, or directives that “differentially impact or disadvantage [whether intended or unintended] individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color,” may also encourage whites to “suspend their awareness of persistent racialized distributions of privilege and to look only for expressions of racialized disadvantage” (Murphy, 2006, p. 113). Consider this all too common student response to a question we posed at the start of the semester: what comes to mind when you think of Environmental Justice? More often than not, responses will be some variation on the theme that environmental justice is “environmental issues for people of color” (coded in various ways as “about pollution in inner-cities,” or “people’s lack of access to resources,” etc.). Such answers, while partly accurate, frame environmental justice in terms of impacted communities rather than a deeper exploration of how white privilege—as “the hegemonic structures, practices, and ideologies that reproduce whites’ privileged status”—intersects with class and gender to produce different degrees of environmental justice (or a lack thereof) for different players (Pulido, 2000, p. 15). In our classrooms, then, cultivating a critical EJ consciousness is inseparable from the exhausting and often fraught work, given our own raced and gendered position-abilities, of constantly interrogating white privilege (Strobel, 2004).

Fortunately, a growing number of higher education environmental studies programs and courses are moving in the direction of engaging a critical EJ consciousness through their curricula and pedagogy. Reflecting the growth and direction of the EJ scholarly literature over the past 15 years (Holifield, Porter, & Walker, 2009; Mohai, Pellow, & Roberts, 2009; Pulido, 2000; Sze & London, 2008; Turner & Wu, 2002; Williams, 1999)—as it has moved beyond first generation siting studies of the 1990s (Anderton, Anderson, Oakes, & Fraser, 1994; Been & Gupta, 1997; Bullard, 1994)—to become more nuanced, theoretically rigorous, and expansive in its analysis of environmental ills—there are now entire college courses devoted solely to the topic of Environmental Justice. A quick Google search for “environmental justice course syllabus,” while not comprehensive, results in well over thirty EJ syllabi from academic institutions ranging from research universities to liberal arts colleges. While these syllabi feature different scholarship and disciplinary approaches, they are significant in that they represent an opportunity for students to have a sustained focus on issues and processes of environmental and social inequality. More importantly, these EJ courses tend to incorporate community-based projects, which require students to engage directly with EJ organizing efforts on the ground. We argue that this combination of theory and practice holds the potential to disrupt fixed assumptions about what or who constitutes the environment, and might serve to partly unmask the ways in which environmental injustices are produced through “fatal couplings of power and difference” (Gilmore, 2002). In the following article, we explore and analyze one such community engaged partnership, and critically reflect on its potential and limits in fostering a critical EJ consciousness among our students.

Community Engagement in Our Own Back Yards

In order to more deeply understand processes that produce environmental injustice, and then combat these forces in partnership with community groups, we start by engaging EJ in our own backyards. To this end, we focus on the Inland region of Southern California, which is at the center of an expanding goods movement industry that originates from the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach and stretches eastwards to the inland regions. Scholars have documented numerous negative environmental injustices associated with this industry, including increased air pollution from diesel trucks and trains, and low-wage contingent work in the warehousing sector, all of which disproportionately affect low-income communities of color in the Inland region (Cho, Christman, Emsellem, Ruckelhaus, & Smith, 2012; De Lara, 2012; Matsuoka, Hricko, Gottlieb, & De Lara, 2011; Sarathy, 2013). In 2001, the South Coast Air Quality Management District found that Mira Loma Village, a low-income Latino community in Riverside County less than 15 miles from the Claremont Colleges, had the highest levels of particulate pollution in the nation. Similarly, the estimated cancer risk for communities near the San Bernardino Railyard is typically above 500 per million, one of the highest rates in the nation (O’Kelley, 2001). Yet, these stark realities are invisible to most students at the Claremont Colleges. How can this gap in knowledge and lived experience be rectified? How might students and community members work together to improve environmental well-being in an aired shed that they all share?

In the fall of 2011, three Claremont College faculty members came together to partake in a
novel experiment—to engage our students in a cross-course, cross-college community engagement project with the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCAEJ), one of the oldest and most renowned environmental justice organizations in the Inland region of Southern California. Rick Worthington, a professor of politics (Pomona College) who studies scientific expertise and participatory democracy, had a long-established relationship with CCAEJ, and had connected various students to the organization for internships in past years. Brinda Sarathy, professor of environmental analysis at Pitzer College, taught classes on environmental justice and was developing a new research agenda on toxics in Southern California. Like Worthington, Sarathy had developed a relationship with CCAEJ. Finally, Gwen D’Arcangelis in gender and women’s studies (Scripps College) focuses on the gendered and racialized politics of science, medicine, and environment, and was interested in connecting her students to community work.

Fortuitously, all three of us not only knew one another, but also just happened to be teaching courses on environmental and social justice in the same semester. At first, we informally shared our aspirations to broaden the consciousness of our respective students about issues of power and inequality, and the struggles that groups of people have enacted to address these inequalities and achieve social justice. As we continued our conversations, however, an intersecting paradigm of critical pedagogies emerged. It gradually became apparent that we could pursue a cross-course collaboration that might both benefit our students and CCAEJ. Indeed, each of us was already planning to incorporate some type of community-engaged work in our classes, and this was a chance to try and coordinate our efforts and goals.

One of our primary intents was to promote the work of social justice by leveraging students’ skills—in writing, conducting interviews, GIS, and research, and their relatively privileged access to resources such as time, computers, data, and scholarship—to facilitate community-identified agendas and efforts. This activist-pedagogical approach consciously broadens the scope of student learning beyond a discrete set of skills or content, to incorporate on the ground experience in the challenging work of social justice. Accordingly, we made clear that our project was not a traditional model of “service learning,” which typically characterizes student engagements with community organizations. Much like charity-giving in the service-learning model, students offer their services to an organization and in return acquire “real-world experience” (Boyd & Sandell, 2013, p. 5). In essence, students engage in a sort of exchange with the community organization, without the opportunity to meaningfully cultivate the self-reflexive and relational process of community-building and social change. At best, this means that students gain experience and skills, while organizations get more laborers. Moreover, what often occurs in reality is that the organization must spend precious time and resources designing projects that students can ably do in a short time period and with little to no background on the work the organization does. In such a context, one of two difficulties may arise—organizations exhaust the resources they have on the students’ projects and/or students are shunted to busy work tasks such as stuffing envelopes.

In contrast to the service-learning model, we positioned our collaboration as one of community engagement, which seeks to align student learning with the needs of a community organization. A community engagement project may be envisioned as a social justice endeavor wherein students, following the lead of the community organization, work to facilitate (in the short- or long-term) community-identified goals and/or needs (Costa & Leong, 2012; Maguire, 1987; Parisi & Thornton, 2012). When community engagement projects are carefully planned, they can result in broadened student learning beyond basic content and skill knowledge to a longer-term understanding of and commitment to social justice. For us, therefore, student learning was contingent on directly engaging with CCAEJ’s needs, demanding both flexibility and adapting to a non-traditional classroom structure and expectations.

**Building a Foundation: Toxics Tour and the Organizing Academy**

Prior to identifying project areas for student engagement, it was paramount to orient all of our students to some of the EJ issues in the Inland region, and to also familiarize them with CCAEJ’s process of working with communities. To this end, students in our classes went on a CCAEJ led “toxics tour,” to visit with and learn directly from impacted communities in Mira Loma (Riverside County) and the City of San Bernardino. The student reflection below highlights how this full-day toxics tour not only connected students with individual community members and their lived experiences, but also linked to theoretical concepts covered in class readings and provoked questions about barriers to justice. One student said:
I found our toxic tour field trip to provide a necessary context for this week’s readings in the way that we could apply the theoretical parts of the articles to the reality of the Inland Empire…. [The tour] also led me to wonder how much of an obstacle the language barrier is for members of CCAEJ, given that they are a grass-roots organization and rely heavily on communicating with not only other community members, but also with the policy makers they are pushing for change.

In addition to the toxics tour, CCAEJ’s Executive Director Penny Newman and staff member Sylvia Betancourt engaged our three classes in an Organizing Academy teaching module over the period of two separate weeks. Each of these sessions lasted 3 hours, and represented a significant time commitment on the part of CCAEJ to impart to students a baseline understanding of their core values and organizing strategies. At these sessions, our students learned about CCAEJ’s first struggle against toxics in the 1970s (the case of the Stringfellow Acid Pits near Glen Avon), and the start of their work to organize the Inland Empire around environmental justice issues. Students were also introduced to community organizing; for example, CCAEJ described its key organizing principles of power map analysis, wherein key actors and decision-makers are identified, plotted along an axis of decision-making power and leanings on the various issues affecting CCAEJ’s communities. Finally, CCAEJ explained their primary philosophy of “building relationships”—that building people power within and across communities was the underlying means and goal to achieve “environmental justice,” and regain the power/control from outside decision-makers to make the decisions that better their own communities.

Importantly, the in-class sessions with Newman gave students an invaluable opportunity to directly engage with a veteran environmental justice organizer, and be inspired by her stories of activism. In hindsight, these sessions quite brilliantly made students accountable for their upcoming projects, in ways that a simple grade at the end of class would never have. Community members and environmental justice activists had taken time out of their busy and burdened days to share experiences with undergraduate students, and almost everyone understood that their project work needed to “give back” in a meaningful and responsible way. Even more than the preparatory work each instructor did in their respective classrooms, the Organizing Academy training sessions with CCAEJ prepared students for the dual learning tasks of environmental justice and community engagement. Again, the student reflections on these in-class modules stress the lengths to which CCAEJ went to cultivate a relationship with students before assigning them to particular projects:

“Overall, I really admire the passion that both of the women from CCAEJ have, but most importantly I admire how they refuse to step back and continue to pressure despite all the ridicule and disrespect they have encountered in efforts of providing a better environment for their community. I am looking forward to organizing and learning from them in hopes of implementing what I learn there in justice issues within my own community.”

“Another aspect of the academy that stood out to me was the model we analyzed; specifically, I was interested in the way organizers help develop policies from the ground up. Although in the grander scale it may seem as if some groups or organizations are not in support of affected communities, organizers such as CCAEJ have found ways to influence policy making by working with individuals within these agencies. Because these agencies may not be in tune with the actual needs of communities, it is important that members have a voice in the decision making process. Thus, building these relationships can also be a useful tool for organizers and supporters alike in helping shape policy that directly affect community members. Overall, I was really excited to learn so much from these women and about organizing in general.”
Project Areas

Subsequent to the toxics tour and Organizing Academy modules, we developed three kinds of projects (oral histories, policy research, and community engagement), in collaboration with CCAEJ, through which to channel team-based student engagement, and which are outlined below. In talking with our respective classes, we once again emphasized that this effort was not a traditional model of service learning but rather one of community engagement and community-based research. CCAEJ also made it known that they were organizationally over extended, with a limited amount of time and staff to devote to supervising students. We thus asked that each student team delegate one “point person/leader” who was charged with communicating between their teams and course professors and CCAEJ.

The first project area entailed conducting oral histories (in-depth interviews) with community members. Students interviewed members about their experiences with environmental problems and their work with CCAEJ. Oral histories served in large part as an assessment, one that CCAEJ sorely needed, but had limited capacity to implement on their own. Oral histories were modeled after a CCAEJ authored report on health and human rights in San Bernardino. The goal of gathering oral histories was to develop a similar report to highlight communities from throughout the Inland Valley. D’Arcangelis’ class, whose course focused on social justice based community research, added feminist interview methods to CCAEJ’s existing interview protocol (Matsuomoto, 1996); these methods are meant to empower interviewees by making transparent and diminishing the power held by interviewers. For example, interview questions were modified in ways that encouraged interviewees to answer prompts on their own terms; interviewers carefully introduced themselves, their backgrounds, the purpose of the interviews, and let interviewees know that they could opt out of any portion of the interview; finally, all interviews would be checked with the interviewees to ensure accuracy of representation. This set of projects included the following activities:

- Assisting in developing a Community Action Team in Jurupa Valley
- Helping coordinate and outreach for a

In teams of two, students interviewed two community members from their assigned area: Jurupa Valley, Moreno Valley, San Jacinto, Fontana, Perris, Norco, and Bloomington. Students profiled their assigned community, highlighting history; demographic information (age, income, ethnicity, education); issues confronted by the community; impacts on the community; efforts to challenge those targeting the community; community’s proposed solutions; and community’s vision for environmental justice.

The second project area involved policy research wherein student teams analyzed city general plans, air quality standards, and transportation policies and focused on one of the three following topics: (1) Southern California Association of Governments—Regional Transportation Plan, East-West Corridor Route Project, Routing Truck Traffic; (2) California Air Resources Board—State Implementation Plan, including rail locomotive idling rules; truck idling rules; and freight transport; and (3) land use in the Inland Valley—map to include overlay of age, income, ethnicity, education, and current zoning, areas designated for warehousing/industrial use, and environmental justice element in a city’s general plan.

The third project area focused on community organizing. Here student teams were paired with individual CCAEJ organizers and given the opportunity to engage in first-hand organizing and community outreach about the growth of warehousing complexes and related traffic congestion. This assignment took the most work for CCAEJ, but was also part of its long-term goal of cultivating community organizers. Students in this project worked on the following set of activities:

- Assisting in developing a Community Action Team in Jurupa Valley
- Helping coordinate and outreach for a
community workshop on land use decision making
- Mobilizing residents to local planning commission / city council meeting
- Engaging in community mapping—identified pollution sources near sensitive receptors (primarily warehouses)
- Gathering demographic information (age, income, ethnicity, education)
- Obtaining health care access data
- Evaluating access to education, green spaces, parks, and libraries

Students kept weekly journals documenting reflections on community experiences; observations; and activities undertaken to meet the project’s objectives.

In total, the Organizing Academy resulted in 41 students completing 12 oral histories of community members, 3 group-researched policy briefs, and a community organizing effort in Jurupa Valley. In addition, 3 students from the Claremont Colleges went on to present their work on a panel at the Inland Valley Clean Air Summit in Riverside in May 2012, and student research was selectively incorporated into CCAEJ documents.

The Disruptive and Transformational Potential of Community Engagement

We now turn to the outcomes of our collaboration, with a focus on the possibilities and limits of community engaged work in fostering a critical EJ consciousness among students. The following analysis examines student reflections on community-engaged work and argues that such collaborations hold potential to both fundamentally challenge and transform student thinking and acting on environmental justice.

Disrupting and Decentering Norms

A key step to cultivating a critical EJ consciousness entailed student reflection on their own positionality. “Positionality,” as we use it, refers to the concept articulated by Nira Yuval-Davis (2006) and others that marks the way in which an individual’s social position, and the lived practices that stem from this position, are bounded by gender, race, class, and other the intersecting hierarchies of difference and identity. Community engagement required students to, often reluctantly, confront their social privilege and learn to adjust their norms and expectations. Yet, despite encouraging our students to approach collaborative work flexibly, and emphasizing to them that part of the learning process would entail shifting norms to that of community-based work, many of our students (with some exceptions) clung to expectations privileging their own priorities and norms. Student expectations centered on two main issues: coordination and scheduling; and preparation and guidance.

First, students did not expect coordination and scheduling to be so difficult. For instance, with regard to scheduling intricacies, one student expressed this common sentiment: “The schedules of people living in Jurupa Valley were so different from the schedules of college students in Claremont. Once we were able to find a time that was convenient for everyone, we had an ABSURD amount of trouble getting transportation. In the end, a friend from another class lent me her car for a couple of hours (…which was yet just another layer of schedule-coordinating).”

This surprise and frustration at having to adjust to the scheduling needs of others indicates student inexperience working outside of their privileged academic bubble. Many of these students operate on the notion of fixed, controllable schedules. The biggest challenge, then, was that collaboration and coordination take up significant time.

A second, related challenge for students was working with uncertainty. Rather than the predictable routine of campus academic life, community-based work tends to emerge and evolve through a process of on-the-ground implementation. Despite our frequent attempts at expectation management—highlighting to our students that this project would require immense flexibility—most students nevertheless persisted in focusing on how project assignments did not meet their norms of structure and clarity. For example, one student expressed the stress of not knowing precisely what the parameters of their work would be: “When we first started working with CCAEJ I was very confused about what my group was actually supposed to be doing for them. I would say that one of the most stressful aspects of this project was the uncertainty.”

Several students went even further, suggesting future improvements that would, in essence, re-norm the project in ways that fit with their assumptions that learning consists of pre-packaged units of information that they might peruse beforehand: “I think it would be helpful to know a little bit more about what each project entails before students choose which project they want to be working with.” Another student echoed this sentiment: “my suggestions for the future would be to outline each job/position before presenting choices.”
Community Engagement as Transformational

We argue that the unsettling and disruption of norms and expectations, as evinced through student frustrations around uncertainty, ambiguity, and lack of structure constitute a key stage of (un)learning social privilege and cultivating critical EJ consciousness. By making visible the structured (and sometimes rigid) arena of academic work, the “messy” process of community engagement enables students to confront their own assumptions that EJ work would or could fit easily into familiar academic and student paradigms. Realizing that doing EJ work meant shifting their norms and expectations eventually led to students become more self-reflexive and open to self-transformation as allies in struggles for justice.

While not all students were aware of this internal process occurring, some were able to clearly articulate a shift in outlook. One student expressed a new understanding of the time and flexibility entailed in community engagement: “Which brings me to one of the biggest lessons I learned in this whole process: the lesson of time. It takes time to do community work. And in that time, there’s a surprisingly large amount of things that can (and do) stray far from plans.” Another student highlighted the challenge to rigid expectations: “I also learned that while doing community organizing, your expectations are always shifting and changing, and you have to learn to be flexible and creative.”

Some students shifted their norms completely, centering community needs and focusing on ways to best serve the community. For example, one student, reflecting on the utility of their Spanish language ability and Latino insider status to community organizing, described the importance of being culturally sensitive—knowing the language, cultural values and norms, and other cultural pressures. It is important to maintain cultural sensitivity and a cultural conscious because you can better engage with the residents of the community, and perhaps have a greater turnout if you culturally tailor your meetings and advertisement.

As important as it was for “insider” students to recognize these strategies of connection, equally so was the journey of “outsider” students (the majority of our student body) in learning to acknowledge their own privilege and engage with communities less privileged than themselves. Our project provided an opportunity for these students to get outside of their comfort zones, struggle with, and become aware of their privilege. Although we had intellectually explored with students the intricacies of social privilege and outsider status, the actual on-the-ground opportunity to grapple with the challenges of crossing lines of privilege via social justice work proved invaluable. Throughout this process, we encouraged students to critically reflect on the following questions: How did their status as mostly elite white students affect their interactions with community members? How did this impact the way interviewees responded to the students’ questions or the way community members responded to student organizers? How did students attempt to bridge these gaps? How successful were students in using their privilege effectively rather than oppressively in their interactions with community members?

Student journals demonstrated that many students successfully engaged these questions. For example, one student expressed the difficulties of working across such sharp lines of privilege:

Forming relationships with the women at CCAEJ brought up personal issues and thoughts about class, race, privilege, and positionality. It became clear that the dominant power structures’ means of oppression, which can seem very much intangible to me, were a significant part of the individual and social histories of the people in Jurupa Valley. My experience of showing up as an outsider to a community that has been marginalized by the same forces that have privileged me, was at times awkward, unsettling, and uncomfortable. Understanding and addressing positionality was something I confronted while doing research for my independent study project abroad. However, I felt a slightly different experience in Jurupa Valley. After giving this some thought, it may have been the fact that we both live in the United States and that we live so close to each other, only thirty minutes apart, but have had drastically different life experiences. It forced me to begin to confront those issues in a personal way. But the women we grew to know were more than welcoming. They showed us how each of us had different tools to offer to the group and how we could learn from one another.
In addition to very honest engagement with their privilege, this student clearly honed in on a key aspect of doing community work with differently positioned members of society—personal connection. Building relationships is key to community work. To become an ally, students had to truly connect with the community and simultaneously reflect on the structures of resource distribution (or a lack thereof) that produced such differently privileged lives.

Another student echoed this notion that engagement with community is a necessary requirement of doing justice work. They pointed out that it is not enough to work only in an academic, removed setting:

Sometimes, when you are in the college, academic setting, you get into a bubble where everything you study is a distant issue you only read about and will figure out what to do with in the future. You learn how to analyze and deconstruct topics but rarely is the chance given to go beyond writing a paper. In engaging directly, I gained some investment in our interviewees, their community, and the issues they face, even though my position as a privileged student is so far from that. I also gained a level of confidence in my ability to engage with issues like this in the future.

It was this direct engagement with CCAEJ staff and community members and the subsequent self-interrogation process that ultimately paved the way for students to gain a critical EJ consciousness. One particularly insightful student explained how the community engagement project highlighted environmental justice as primarily an issue of community empowerment to fight against an unjust system:

Upon first coming to this class, I had been expecting issues of environmental justice to focus mostly upon environmental toxins in marginalized communities. As I’ve learned through my fieldwork, however, environmental justice goes beyond toxins and siting controversies; rather, it provides another way of framing issues of disempowerment in a community. In real-world situations, what we as students might identify as being a hazard to surrounding environmental and human health might be seen by community activists as an opportunity to organize around a central threat to a community’s ambient, economic and physical well-being.

Finally, students also honed new research skills that facilitated the work of environmental justice: “I was able to sharpen my research skills, to use mapping for the first time, and to engage in activism-oriented feminist research practices. I was thus able to put into practice the things that we have been discussing in class, and, as I was the group member who developed the template for the final policy brief, to determine how best to disseminate our group findings to a non-academic audience.” The pride in their new skills and ability to apply them effectively reflects an important underlying lesson of our project; that students learned to wield their resources responsibly and to best effect in both dismantling their own privilege and forward agendas oriented towards social justice.

Concluding Thoughts

Our collaborative community engagement project enabled undergraduate students to gain a wholesale structural view of how social hierarchy shapes environment—in other words—what we see as the cultivation of a critical EJ consciousness. As one student summed up:

What struck me the most...was X saying “we’re invisible.” That seems to be the main issue tying all the community’s EJ problems together. Concentrated housing developments, warehouses, overcrowding in schools, and air pollution are common issues in a whole host of other places. The specific environmental justice factor joining these issues is how differently a community’s needs are treated when minorities, non-English speakers, and poorer households dominate the community. The government can ignore them and slip these problems under the rug or shove other, richer communities’ problems onto Mira Loma and Glen Avon. Overall I think our project was a success—because of the interactions we were able to have with community members.

As evinced in such reflections, many students were able to push past their initial discomfort and resistance to the disruption of their norms and expectations through the realization that they could
have an important role to play in environmental justice and develop useful skills in the process. Focusing on what they had to contribute, individuals moved beyond the student-centered expectation of “what can I get out of this experience” to “what can I offer to this justice movement?” Overall, student testimony indicates the degree to which they took seriously the project of environmental justice. In questioning the utility of their work for community, they learned perhaps the greatest lesson—that their labor was geared first towards empowering communities and not solely for academic inquiry. In conclusion, the model we used to cultivate a critical EJ consciousness was three-fold: disrupting and unsettling student norms and expectations; encouraging student awareness of unequally distributed social privilege coupled with self-reflection on positionality; and guiding students towards centering community empowerment and fostering relationship-building opportunities.

Community engagement collaborations involving the pairing of lesser-resourced community groups with more well-resourced academic institutions (particularly the case with the Claremont Colleges) require key attention to building trust amongst the participants. In setting up the collaboration, professors should follow the lead of and center the needs of their partner community organization. In this regard, we as faculty on the one hand did extensive planning to coordinate the schedules between our three classes, various projects, and CCAEJ and, on the other hand, maintained flexibility in responding to the shifting needs of CCAEJ. In our classes, we also prepared students by assigning relevant readings and leading lectures/discussion around how community engagement is a process that entails more than the application of academic skills to “real world situations” or the acquisition of “experience in the community.” Rather, it also requires direct engagement in order to foster commitment to a community, and self-reflexivity in order to be an effective and accountable ally in social justice work. Our community-engaged collaborative project, in short, might hopefully serve as an example of how to put into practice—however briefly—a vision of social and environmental justice in the context of the undergraduate classroom.

Finally, new configurations for collaboration with CCAEJ have opened up as the result of one of the three faculty, Dr. D’Arcangelis, taking a faculty position at a neighboring state school, Cal Poly Pomona. In contrast to the largely elite student body of the Claremont Colleges, Cal Poly Pomona is comprised of a large number of working-class students of color from the communities that CCAEJ serves. This new academic context opens up opportunities for pursuing future comparative research that explores the process of collaboration between students and community members of similar social standing (Cal Poly students engaging with CCAEJ), as well as between differently positioned students (Cal Poly Pomona students and Claremont College students), and the challenges and opportunities for student growth, dialogue, and meaningful community engagement therein.

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Can Our Service Change Us? Bringing the Classroom to Service Learning in the Southern African Kingdom of Lesotho

Scott Rosenberg

Abstract

Based on a decade’s worth of service-learning trips to Lesotho, this paper focuses on the role of nightly discussion sessions in achieving our learning goals. It also examines how we carried out our community-service projects in conjunction with class material to help students move past negative stereotypes and objectification of the Basotho (an ethnic group whose ancestors have lived in southern Africa since around the fifth century) toward a greater understanding of the Basotho as people. During our community service, students often expressed feelings of pity for the Basotho as well as a sense of frustration at why they do not do more to help themselves. This paper will also address how the trip helps students move from feelings of pity to that of empathy, as well as creating an environment that helps break down the barriers between those performing community service and the communities they are working with.

Introduction

Whether domestic or abroad, service-learning trips are designed to benefit underserved communities, contribute to the education of our students, create understanding, and, ideally, produce a lifelong commitment to service as a result of the experience. As these kinds of trips often expose students to different communities and cultures, as well as extreme poverty, they have a significant potential to fail to achieve their goals and instead end up reinforcing negative stereotypes about impoverished communities. Given the many preconceived notions that students have about Africa upon entering college, one might expect these challenges to be especially daunting. However, with that risk also comes a significant potential to have a profound and life changing impact on the intellect and emotions of students. Although our trip is to one of the poorest countries in the world, this paper will seek to discuss how we navigate the potential pitfalls and maximize student growth in a manner that will benefit those leading trips both in the United States and abroad.

The impetus behind the program was born out of my experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Lesotho from 1989–1991, my Fulbright experience there from 1995–1996, and my continued professional and academic work in Lesotho. My particular interest in service started as an undergraduate at Kenyon College and continued through my work with Habitat for Humanity over a period of 20 years. During a visit to Lesotho in 2001, I participated in discussions with executives from Habitat for Humanity about their starting work in Lesotho. It was out of this conversation that I first conceived of a service trip to Lesotho. Returning to Wittenberg University the following fall, I broached the idea of a service trip to Lesotho with several members of the student Habitat for Humanity club. In many regards, it was their enthusiastic response that led to the very first trip in 2003. Since then, as part of 10 different trips, we have taken over 330 students from Wittenberg University on a month long service-learning trip to the southern African Kingdom of Lesotho. In 2003, we took all 22 students that applied to participate in the program. However, as the demand for the program grew, eventually reaching 130 in 2011, we began to require that students submit both a
faculty recommendation letter as well as a personal statement. In deciding which students to select, we give the personal statement tremendous weight, while little attention is paid to GPA. In reflecting on applications over the years, we have come to feel that GPA is not the best indicator of which students will benefit most from this experience, whereas the authors can point to numerous weaker students who became much more engaged after participating in this program. We further look for students who express a willingness to come out of their comfort zones, while shying away from those who want “to save those poor starving Africans,” because they tend to be more resistant to the core values of the program.

In an effort to better facilitate and expand student learning, the nature of our projects have evolved over time. Initially we spent much of our time assisting Habitat for Humanity in building homes for female-headed households and community service at an orphanage in the capital city, Maseru. However, over time as different non-governmental organizations in Lesotho approached us and we began to develop new contacts, the nature of our service gradually changed during the third and fourth trips, in 2006 and 2008, as we began to focus on projects such as building houses, community centers, greenhouses, and chicken coops as well as planting fruit trees and digging gardens, designing classrooms, and building playgrounds. All of these projects are with local partners and are designed to help vulnerable children, especially orphans and HIV positive children. Focusing on our nightly discussion sessions, this paper will explore the way we manage each project in relation to student learning and will discuss student responses to their participation in different projects. Furthermore, this paper will seek to elucidate the questions and emotions generated by different types of projects and how students measure the perceived impact of our projects.

Our experience in developing a service-learning program may be of more benefit to faculty from fields not traditionally associated with service learning, as well as for faculty who are not well versed in the literature. The alterations made to our program were often based upon observation and discussion among the authors. The leaders of the program evaluate its successes and problems on a yearly basis in response to observations about an ever-changing student body as well as the changing dynamics of service in Lesotho. In many aspects, the changes are similar to ones that are made in the classroom when evaluating the success of failure of certain assignments. Furthermore, our nightly discussion sessions provide daily student feedback, which helps shape the ever-changing nature of this program. Lastly, the rationale behind the nightly discussion sessions stems from the author’s own teaching style.

**Historical Background**

The current borders of Lesotho were established in 1868 when the British Empire extended protection to the Basotho and prevented them from becoming part of South Africa. Since then, Lesotho remains only one of two countries in the world entirely surrounded by another (the other is Vatican City). Although Lesotho was a separate nation, under colonial rule it was managed in such a way that the Basotho people became dependent on migrant labor in the South African gold fields for their survival. By 1977, nearly 130,000 Basotho men worked in South African mines, and their remittances constituted nearly half of the nations GNP (Rosenberg & Weisfelder, 2014). For young Basotho men, working in the mines became a right of passage, and part of the transition into manhood. While at the mines, Basotho men often engaged in likota, an unbecoming type of behavior toward women (Maloka, 2004), which included having multiple girlfriends and frequenting prostitutes. By the 1980s it had become a common and accepted part of mining culture that men cheated on their wives and girlfriends with women living near the mines. In 1984 the first case of HIV/AIDS was reported in the South African gold mines, and it would not be long before Basotho miners brought the disease home. By 1990 there were already 5,500 people living with HIV/AIDS in Lesotho. By the end of the decade, it would be estimated that 25% of adults (15–49) were positive, and that over 20,000 children had contracted the disease from their mother. During the first decade of the 21st century, Lesotho would suffer from the third highest per capita death rate from HIV/AIDS of any nation in the world. As it was mostly young adults dying from the disease, Lesotho, a nation of 2 million people, would have over 160,000 orphans by 2011 (Rosenberg & Weisfelder, 2014).

Lesotho’s economic situation became significantly worse after the ending of apartheid in 1991. During the last decade of the 20th century the South African Government made a concerted
Reflection and Confronting Stereotypes

One of the challenges of a service trip designed to help those who are economically disadvantaged in a given region or African nation, is that students often make judgments about the larger group of racial or regionally related people, thus reinforcing stereotypes. These beliefs can also be a product of students trying to help manage their own guilt or frustration at the situation and consequently they end up dehumanizing the individuals they are trying to help. Being exposed to some of the poorest people on earth in Lesotho can reinforce preconceived notions about Africans. As students struggle to come to terms with the poverty before them, some find it easier at first to blame Africans for not working hard enough while others conclude that Africans are content with their current living standards. The purpose for our nightly discussion sessions is to help students process their thoughts, feelings, and emotions on a daily basis as part of a larger group.

One of the most effective mediums we have found to facilitate student learning is our nightly reflection sessions. Usually held between 5-6pm, these sessions provide students an opportunity to ask questions, seek clarification on things they saw or witnessed, but more important is that it provides students with a forum to reflect and process their experiences in the moment. Our philosophy throughout the entire trip, but especially during reflections sessions is to try and not force students to come to any specific conclusion or set of beliefs. During these meetings we see our role as that of facilitator and mediator, as well as providing factual information and or contextualizing certain experiences. The idea of playing the role of mediator and facilitator is partially based on the Sesotho concept of the Morena, which the British translated as chief, but whose main functions for the community more closely resembled that of a negotiator and facilitator during public forums known as pitsos (Rosenberg, 2008). However, although we provide guidance, we try avoid directing the conversation, and refrain from telling the students how they should interpret or feel about a certain situation. Our approach to the reflection sessions is based on the Socratic method of teaching that I employ in the classroom. However, instead of providing a forum for students to discuss a reading or lecture, we will usually start the session by bringing up one or two instances that occurred during the day, after which we allow students the opportunity to provide the topics for discussion. We create an experience, and allow students to engage with it at their own level and reach their own conclusions.

Staying on top of students’ emotions is important so that the experience does not become so overwhelming that they shut down or withdraw. Furthermore, the projects and lectures are laid out in a fashion that should keep the conversation always moving forward. Although there is often repetition, in general the nightly discussions tend to build on each other more then hash over the same ideas. We usually start by having all of the students meet together as one large group (this is often 35-38 students and 2 facilitators) so that they can hear more perspectives as well as bond together as a group. We think that it is important that students hear as many other voices as possible during the first half of the trip to help them process their experiences. During most trips we notice that there is often a group of students who do not speak during meetings, this is often the result of their being intimidated by the large group. Thus usually near the start of the third week we will break out into 3 or 4 smaller groups, each led by a trip leader. This allows quieter students to participate, but it also allows for deeper and more personal discussions. It is our belief that these smaller discussion groups might not be as effective early in the trip because the students who come from all aspects of campus
life might not yet be comfortable enough with each other to share some of their more personal feelings.

By discussing their experiences with their peers students are able to release many of the anxieties they are experiencing as well as many of the negative responses they may be harboring internally, and are gradually able to put their experiences within a larger framework as well as to begin to understand the lives of other people without judging them. Our students learn to become critical thinkers, gaining a deeper understanding of the realities that the people in Lesotho face, all the while, gaining a greater understanding of our common bonds.

We have noticed over the years that most groups struggle with similar sets of issues (guilt, pity, frustration, and resentment) and often tend to objectify the Basotho during our discussions. Thus, service has the potential to reinforce many negative stereotypes about Africans and poor people. One of the ways we help students see the Basotho as human beings and help them move past preconceived notions is by helping them navigate the difference between pity and empathy, by moving away from the initial feelings of being sorry for ‘those’ poor people, towards a sense of empathy and understanding of the daily obstacles that many Basotho face. It has been our experience that in the early stages of the program students tend to objectify the Basotho and verbalize feelings of pity. However, as the trip progresses we hear the dehumanizing objectification gradually replaced with a sense of shared humanity and empathy towards the Basotho (not all students reach this at the same time, but we have observed that as a group they reach certain intellectual markers at the same time). Students’ frustration and resentment often manifests itself in phrases like “why don’t they (the people of Lesotho) do more to help themselves? In response to this we challenge students to think about who ‘they’ are (and that referring to the Basotho as ‘they’ objectifies them as all being the same) and to take into account larger socio-economic factors that have shaped southern Africa.

Students often note that the Basotho seem happy, and thus conclude that the Basotho are either happy being poor or are unaware that they are poor. We try to confront this objectification of the Basotho by explaining that the Basotho are aware that they are poor, and try to gently lead our students towards the idea of how we are projecting our own perceptions as well as discussing the correlation between poverty and happiness. It is our hope that students will come to understand that poor people can be happy, with the understanding that happiness does not derive from their being unaware or from being unencumbered by material goods. We try to help the students appreciate the value of their service while simultaneously guiding them to move beyond the “I helped save poor orphans,” or “I am so thankful for what I have,” interpretations of their experience, and to become more understanding, compassionate, and empathetic people with a greater appreciation of the realities faced by people living in another country. It is our belief that these discussions help students learn, and help create “a life-changing” experience through community service.

Learning from Service

During our service-learning trip to Lesotho we try to avoid creating an experience that resembles academic or service tourism by removing the barriers between the Basotho and us. Although we are in Lesotho for a month, there is a potential to build artificial barriers between our students and the people of Lesotho, barriers that would make us tourists who happen to be doing community service. Driving in our private buses to and from a worksite, working by ourselves on given projects could put up walls between us and the Basotho, and turn the Basotho people into objects on display for us to view. To avoid such outcomes, we have developed a number of mechanisms in the trip from working with local communities, partnering with local youth groups, and organized activities designed to help students engage one on one with the local population.

Importance of Local Partners

Since the first trip in 2003 we have partnered with the Lesotho Youth Work Camp Association, which provides several local volunteers who are of similar age to our students. The initial reason behind the partnership was to add a distinct element to our cross-cultural experience. We felt that by working with people their own age, who share similar experiences as young adults, such as taste in music and clothes that American students would come to see their similarities with people living in Lesotho. The nature of our construction projects coupled with a lack of skills and written directions forces the two groups to have to communicate in order to complete the projects. There is often significant down time at the worksites and this provides further opportunities for the groups to interact. As our groups often tend to outnumber...
the Basotho volunteers 5 to 1, only a handful of our students were actually getting to know the Basotho volunteers. Furthermore, I am sure that our large group presented a challenge for our Basotho hosts. However, over the years, as the same Work Camp volunteers showed up, they began to be more comfortable with our students, and the leader of the group became an excellent mediator and facilitator of group interactions. Our students benefited greatly when the Work Camp volunteers joined us on all the projects because it allowed students to develop genuine friendships with the Basotho.

As the students and Work Camp volunteers begin to discover shared tastes in music and clothing, as well as issues of ‘dating’ they began to see their counterparts as peers and not as “Africans.” In one particular case, the walls were broken when one of my students introduced feminine hygiene products and instructed her new Basotho friend on their proper use. As they began to see them as friends, it began to change the way they viewed the Basotho. The participation of the Work Camp was one of the more successful approaches to helping students see the Basotho as people.

**Service Time and Learning**

Since the inception of the Lesotho Field Experience in 2003 it has always been a service-learning trip, however, over time both the projects have changed as have the connection between the community service and more traditional academic components. During the 2003 and 2005 programs nearly half our time was spent digging pit latrines for Habitat for Humanity, which allowed the skilled builders to focus on building the houses. Over time, we gradually transitioned to building greenhouses, chicken-coops, piggeries, gardens, and orchards, as well as painting classrooms and building playgrounds for organizations that work with orphans and HIV positive children. The changing emphasis of our projects in Lesotho was done because of the desperate need in Lesotho, but also to create a more powerful experience for the Wittenberg students. These new projects also confronted us with new learning challenges, especially in regards to how to maximize the learning potential. Over the next few years, we learned to be more deliberate in the order of the projects that we undertook while in Lesotho. We discovered that certain projects answered more questions early in the trip, while other projects drew greater meaning if done later. We also noticed that the amount of time spent at a given site had consequences for student learning. As many of our projects involved difficult physical labor, we noticed that working on one project for several days led to not only physical exhaustion, but could also start to generate negative feelings towards the project and the Basotho. In response to this, we tried spending less time on any given project, working at a site for only 2-3 days and then moving on. However, these short stays left students feeling disconnected from the project and without a sense of accomplishment or any real connection to the Basotho at that location. The limited time frame did not allow students to develop personal connections with the Basotho they were working with or helping, producing a more superficial experience, which further contributed to the objectification of the Basotho. The model that seems to work best for us, and keep students invested in the project is one week at a given site with a day off in the middle (this is usually used for lectures or some cross-cultural activity). We have found that this balance provides enough time for students to feel invested in the project as well as being able to develop personal connections with our local hosts while avoiding burnout and the subsequent resentment that its seems to generate.

In 2008 we had the problem of students not feeling connected to the projects due to our shorter stays at any given project and thus in response in 2009 developed a model of 5 days at a project with a day off for cross-cultural and academic activities in the middle, in order to not burn out students and to give them time to feel more connected to their projects. However, in 2009 we ran two consecutive trips, and thus group one started many projects that would be completed by group two. Not seeing projects through to their completion led to similar feelings of being unfulfilled like those expressed by students who had spent only 2–3 days on a given project.

Back in 2008, four orphans between the ages of 17–19 approached me for help; they said they were inspired by the community center we were building and that they wanted to do something to help their community. After hearing their business plan, we gave them about $200 without high hopes for success. Our lack of confidence was driven by our belief that handouts rarely work. However, by the time we returned in 2009 the four young men had established a thriving chicken business and were selling almost 800 chickens a year. We shared this story with our students on the 2009 trip and had them meet the young men. It was at
this time that we came up with the idea that with our community service “we are planting seeds,” and that although you may not see them grow to maturity that is the reality of doing community service in Lesotho. The concept seemed to help many students process their frustration and move towards a more accepting place.

The idea of planting a seed allowed students the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their work in a new way and helped remove the American need to see instant results. Also, as they began to understand the difficulties that many projects face after we leave, the planting a seed concept also helped remove resentment and possible frustration that their work may not succeed. Framing our work in terms of seeds, some of which have failed as well as those that have blossomed, helps students conceptualize the diversity of the Basotho and the realities they face. Seeing that some projects survive while others fail teaches us not to lump all of the Basotho together, but rather to consider every project as distinct and separate as are the people who we are working with on any given site. Inside one of the community centers we built, the students decided to paint the phrase “planting seeds,” and then made drawings on the wall illustrating their growth over time. The painting serves multiple purposes as it generates an element of hope for both our students as well as for the Basotho. The illustration shows that change is constant, and like the growth of seeds, it is often a slow process that must be given time to come to fruition. Although the failure rate may be much higher in Lesotho, this dichotomy allows students to identify more with Lesotho and its people.

**Selecting the Right Projects to Facilitate Learning Goals**

During our 2006 trip, which was the first to involve more direct projects designed to help orphans, and HIV positive children, and also led to greater interaction with the Basotho, we noticed that many of the students were vocalizing their frustration with the Basotho and why they did not do more things to help themselves. This resentment continued to fester during our 2008 program when students saw that one of the projects undertaken in 2006 had not been well maintained. We tried to explain the economic and technical problems that confront Lesotho, and the challenges faced by the Basotho, which cause so many projects to fail. We still felt that our explanations were not achieving our goals as many students continued to harbor frustration and resentment. As a result we sought to find a more effective approach to alleviate this problem in future trips. Since 2009, our first project has involved building one or two houses for orphan head households. Often the first task we have to undertake is to carry thousands of cinderblocks that have been left by the side of the road to the location where the house is being built. Now when asked during the early days of our trip “why don’t the Basotho do more to help themselves,” or those who think that it should be easy to fix Lesotho’s problems, we ask them to talk about what they did today. Students often start with something like “we carried blocks up a hill,” to which we reply, “why did we do that?” Students begin to realize what they know would be done by machines in minutes in the United States is done by hand in Lesotho and often takes days. As they carry those blocks up hill the following day (and it is always uphill), it is my hope that they develop a greater sense of the challenges faced by the Basotho in getting things done. Other students have commented on the arduous process of flattening the floor prior to the pouring of concrete, and what took several students days could have been done by a machine in minutes at home. Working under local conditions helps students understand that the Basotho are not lazy, and that getting things accomplished in Africa is not the same as completing them in the United States. Hopefully, by walking up the hill, the students begin to experience the challenges faced from the perspective of the Basotho, and gain a greater empathy for their circumstances.

During our second week we tend to undertake projects at orphanages that are designed to generate self-sufficiency through food production (greenhouses, chicken-coops, fruit trees). By moving from houses for two families to orphanages that house anywhere from 30–50 children, students are gradually exposed to the scope of the problem in Lesotho. Even though many of the children living in orphanages are better fed and clothed than those in the village, the experience of working in an orphanage is a very powerful one for many students. One of the more challenging emotions that we are confronted with is feeling pity for the Basotho. One of the points made in our pre-trip meetings is that students are not allowed to bring candy to give to the children. However, once we arrive in Lesotho and they see the children, many of whom are asking for candy, students feel a strong impulse to hand out candy the children. Beyond explaining that candy will not solve malnutrition, nor make a significant impact, it is the emotion behind the
action that is most important. Students are often driven by pity for what they see as thin, poorly clothed children. In most cases the desire to hand out candy is done in an attempt to assuage their own guilt at seeing the children as well as providing a momentary relief from that feeling through the smile on a child’s face after receiving candy. The act of handing out candy helps remove guilt in the moment, but does virtually no long term good for the student or the child. It helps neither achieve their long-term goals, nor does it actually bring the two parties closer together. If anything, the act of handing out candy builds up even greater walls, as the relationship is now defined by the act of giving out of remorse, undermining any chance to develop a relationship as equals. Under apartheid, white South Africans would occasionally drive thru the Lesotho countryside on holiday and throw candy out the window to the children. Witnessing this myself during my time in the Peace Corps, I remember feeling anger at the tourists’ actions because it resembled throwing peanuts at the zoo. When I explain that the tourists often saw the children as faceless animals that came running for candy, students began to reflect on their own desire to hand out candy. We begin to discuss how pity does not help the Basotho, but also how it also objectifies them.

Breaking Down Barriers

One of the challenges doing service in Africa, and perhaps in other communities is that students tend to lump together all of the people from that area. In our case, students often assume that all Basotho are poor and in need of help. One of the ways that this tends to manifest itself during our nightly discussions is that students tend to say “they” when talking about the people of Lesotho, or about a given issue in the country. This is both a product of our pre-trip lectures, which generalize the problem in Lesotho and are compounded by the fact that most of the people we are working with are in need. Usually after this has happened a few times we will ask who are we talking about when we say “they” or “them”? We try and challenge students not to lump all Basotho together, because that fails to acknowledge the diversity of people living in Lesotho (they are all not poor, orphans, or HIV positive) and removing the individual element, in turn, is an act of dehumanization. We try and frame the issues confronting the country as a whole, yet not each and every individual will suffer from the same afflictions, as each person is an individual with their own history and worth. Helping students see that not all Basotho can be lumped together, (there are different classes and groups of people, and that while most Basotho are poor, and many are HIV positive, not all Basotho suffer from these afflictions) opens the door allowing us to see the Basotho as human beings. And once they see them as human beings, it also allows for deeper and more meaningful connections to be made, because we move beyond the poor starving African stereotype seen in infomercials.

What Do People in Need Look Like?

The dichotomy of personal situations in Lesotho allows students to see that the problems that exist in Lesotho tend to be the same problems that we have back home. At some point during our meetings the conversation will turn towards the city of Springfield, Ohio where Wittenberg is located. Students will begin to discuss some the challenges faced by Springfield, such as childhood hunger and poverty, which are similar to what they are encountering in Lesotho. They often acknowledge that they tend to distance themselves from seeing the poverty at home, and often view poor people in their community in “us” and “them” terms. They are more open and driven to help those impoverished in Africa, because it is seen as more exotic and fits our cultural norms. Furthermore, because African poverty is so removed it does not threaten them or their notions of the United States. Yet, being confronted with African poverty in many cases allows students to see the poverty around them at home and motivates many of them into volunteer work once they return.

Almost every group we have taken has commented on how happy the Basotho are, in part as a result of the reception that we receive every time we are in the village. In recent years, a significant number of students have sought to try and figure out how and why the Basotho are happy. As mentioned above, the Basotho are often seen as poor (and in most cases those in the villages tend to be, and the living conditions make this evident), and thus the students have a more difficult time understanding how they can be happy living in what they view as impoverished conditions. This view of the Basotho as all being impoverished is reinforced by the very nature of our program as well as the rural community in which we stay. As many Basotho are seen smiling or laughing, or are just very welcoming to our students, a conclusion that has recently been voiced in our discussions is
that they are happy because they are poor. When asked to elaborate, we tend to receive responses such as “they are not burdened with the same material desires as us,” “or they have simpler lives not complicated by modernity and are thus happy,” or that the Basotho are simply “unaware that they are poor.” What we seemed to notice is that often poverty or ignorance of the outside world was being equated as the reason for happiness. The notion that the Basotho are happy because they are poor is an example of the dehumanization that can take place on a trip such as ours. To help students revisit this, we tend to help them understand that many Basotho are keenly aware that they are poor, and regardless of their poverty they are well aware of all of the material and consumer goods available in this world. We also feel compelled to make clear that virtually nobody is happy because they are poor. Thus, once the ignorance argument is removed, students are force to grapple with the idea that some people know they are poor, know they don't have things, and yet still manage to be happy. Moving the discussion to the next level, students are once again placed in a position in which they can stop objectifying the Basotho and begin see them as human beings, and that a human being does not entirely define themselves and all their actions by wealth. Furthermore, just because we are greeted by smiling Basotho where ever we go does not mean that all Basotho are happy all the time. We hope that through discussion and cross-cultural interactions they can begin to see the Basotho as people, people who can be both happy and sad depending on their given situation and individual feelings. This allows us to reach a point in our discussion where we can discuss the notion that the Basotho can be happy even if they are poor as one's economic status does not define them as human beings.

Why Don’t They Help Themselves?
During our time in Lesotho we visited a textile factory owned by Chinese companies. As a result of the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA), passed in 1998 (and renewed twice since), which allows African-made textiles to enter the United States duty free in an attempt to jump start industrial development, Lesotho has become one of the larger exporters of denim to the United States, exporting nearly $500 million worth in 2007. However, rather than advancing African industry, all of the textile factories in Lesotho are foreign owned, mostly by Chinese and Taiwanese companies. What the Basotho get are low paying jobs on the factory floor, which pay less than $1,000 dollars a year, require 60 hours a week, as well as forced overtime. In addition to seeing the environmental pollution, students tour a sweatshop first hand. After seeing the women standing in front of huge piles of jeans, on cardboard boxes to keep their bare feet warm on the concrete floor, many students gain a profound new insight into the nature and causes of poverty. Additionally, many of the stereotypes and assumptions about poor people are removed through the humanization of Poverty argument put forth by American academics in the 1960s in an effort to explain urban poverty. (Lewis, 1968) In many respects, the nature of Lesotho being surrounded by South Africa resembles that of the inner city in the United States. Furthermore, the economic relationship between Lesotho serving as a labor reserve for South Africa and the chronic unemployment of the inner cities creates similar conditions. In general, the Basotho are not authors of their own poverty because they are lazy; rather they have adjusted their expectations to meet the economic realities of Lesotho, which can be perceived as being lazy. However, as Massey and Denton (1993) note in their discussion of the “culture of segregation,” it is the larger economic and social context that shapes behavior. Since the loss of access to jobs in South Africa, the reality in Lesotho is that the overwhelming majority of people will never find stable wage employment because there are simply no jobs available, which creates the perception that they are not trying to find work. Furthermore when students see empty fields as we drive to and from the worksites they cannot fathom why the Basotho simply do not farm. It is not until they become aware of the full range of obstacles that impede agriculture in Lesotho can they grasp the futility of trying to support oneself off the land and thus begin to have a deeper understanding of the economic behavior of many Basotho.

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of workers in the factories. By seeing the women working in the factories, students are exposed to the fact that the Basotho are not lazy, but that the larger economic structure is designed to keep them that way. Usually the trip to the factory leads to a significant amount of anger and frustration with the situation. Generally, the conversation will drift towards what can be done. Some students raise the idea of boycotting jeans, which then raises the catch 22 of whether it is better to be exploited or starving. This allows students to imagine themselves in the position that many Basotho women find themselves in, which leads to empathy and understanding. We feel that this discussion brings the reality of Lesotho and its people home. Furthermore, the experience in the textile factory then helps students with the larger picture within which our service is conducted.

From Feelings of Resentment and Pity to Developing Empathy

A challenging situation that we encounter occurs at the compound where we stay as children from the village often gather at the gate waiting for the students. During our last few visits the children from the village will often be waiting at the gate the day we arrive, and almost immediately begin to engage the students. They play games, hold hands, braid hair, and just sit sometimes. In recent years, the children from the village have often begun to produce notes, asking a certain student to be their friend. In some cases, the children have fought over various students, claiming the student as their friend. Usually by the second or third week many of the children, begin to ask for gifts, either: money, school fees, or material possessions. For some students these requests can reinforce the desire to help a child by giving into the request, while others feel that they are being used. Both of these responses can create walls between our students and the community as well as reinforcing many of the perspectives that contribute to the objectification of the Basotho. When asked what they should do, we do not have a blanket answer or dictate, but rather we engage in a broader discussion regarding the complexity of personal relationships and expectations. Many students initially feel compelled to give something because they are driven by a sense of guilt and feel obligated to give something. Feelings of guilt and obligation often stem from students feeling sorry for the children at the gate. One of the questions we ask is whether they want to give a gift to feel better about themselves or is the desire coming from a place of empathy, and based on a genuine relationship between the two. However, during the course of our discussions students began to move past feelings of pity and as they get to know different children personally, and their decision to leave a gift tends to be driven by empathy. We try to help students realize that they do not have to experience the depth of poverty or loss that a Basotho child may have faced in order to empathize with their position and to understand what that child may be facing. Removing the emotional walls allows students to start viewing children in Lesotho not as African children, but just as children.

A similar challenge was faced in 2009 when one of the community organizations we were working with asked us to help hand out food parcels and blankets in addition to planting fruit trees in the yards of fifty orphan headed households. Although I was uncomfortable with this request, we participated in handing out the items. Although our local partner had a representative from each family tell their story, I think in an effort to humanize them, the brevity of the stories coupled with the act of handing out items made students feel guilt and pity towards the families they came into contact with. As this was during the last week of the trip, most students had already begun to develop a sense of empathy and friendship with many Basotho at the time of this service, however without fully understanding the situation of each family, and not having developed any kind of relationship with those families, students felt very detached and frustrated by this experience. This suggests that most of our students were no longer driven by pity or guilt, but that rather they had come to see themselves as assisting out fellow people.

Prior to the trip many students expect to “save Africans,” and during our discussion sessions after completing a project or event students sometimes phrase their accomplishment in terms of having “saved” those we were working with. Without minimizing the accomplishments or the positive impact of our project, it is important that students discuss and realize that we are not “saviors,” and that a mural or playground, or even a greenhouse will not save the country, nor will it completely alter the lives of specific children. To think that our actions have the ability to “save” a country or a group is naïve, but it is also ignorant and condescending. We need to discuss the real impacts of our projects in terms of the realities in which real people live in order to have a greater understanding of how
things came to be and why they are the way they are today. The idea that our small contributions can truly “save” others makes ourselves more important then we are and minimize the hardships that the people we are working with face. The feeling of being a savior not only places us above those who we are working with, but it also reinforces the idea that they are somehow at fault for their present situation. If we seek to gain an understanding of others, and empathy for their situation then we need to place our actions within the proper context.

The initial feelings of pity and guilt often make students feel uncomfortable, and it is this discomfort that helps stimulate change that evolves into empathy. Change tends not to happen when people are comfortable, rather discomfort often acts as a catalyst or desire for things to be different. Being uncomfortable helps students reflect on their own motivations during the trip, and as they begin to develop personal relationships, the discomfort removes many of the walls that were in place when they arrived in Lesotho. As they seek to come to terms with powerful and difficult emotions as well as trying to reconcile the lives of the Basotho who they meet on a daily basis, many students will open up to the Basotho and make an effort to better understand them as people as well as the hardships they face.

One of the few activities that we undertake that does not involve construction or labor is a carnival that we hold at the Baylor Pediatric AIDS clinic in Maseru. Opened in 2005, by 2008 the clinic was treating over 3,000 HIV positive children free of charge. Although the long-term impact of the carnival is not as tangible as our other projects, we have felt that it is important to provide the children at the clinic, many of whom are very sick, and most are under 8 years old, with a fun day, hopefully one that they will remember the next time they visit the clinic. After a few failed carnivals that included food and gifts, which created chaos and a dynamic that we hoped to avoid, in recent years the carnival has not given away things but rather has focused on stations where children can use crayons and coloring books, get rub-on tattoos, play with bubbles, make bracelets, play with parachute and ball, as well as jump ropes and play soccer. Perhaps more than any particular activity, what many of the children seem to enjoy the most is being held or playing with the students. Despite the language barrier, the play and the smiles generated by the carnival are universal. One of the most amazing things to witness is the transformation from a somber and quiet waiting room, to 80–100 children running around outside laughing and screaming. Almost all the students tend to get caught up in the moment and forget that these are sick children, but rather they become children wanting to play. Prior to our visit, we have a long conversation with students about the day, and the limitations of some of the children (as well as safety). As we start talking about the clinic, and HIV positive children, many of the students will begin to tear up, yet we encourage them not to cry while we are there, but rather to enjoy the moment and have as much fun as possible with the children. Despite the tears that are shed, the carnival helps remove many of the labels placed on HIV positive children and allows students to interact with them as they would any other child.

Prior to our visit, the students learn about the problem of HIV/AIDS from our pre-trip classes as well as from the guest lecturers and they have probably already helped build a house for an orphan family. Despite this, the reality of HIV/AIDS in Lesotho still seems a bit abstract or difficult to fully grasp until one is confronted with nearly 100 HIV positive children. Usually, the discussion session the night after we visit Baylor is one of the most emotional and powerful sessions we have. When students hear that there are 160,000 orphans in Lesotho, or that nearly 25% of the population is HIV positive or that over 8,000 children are born every year with the disease, they are often overwhelmed and tend to view them more as statistics then people. However, after spending a morning at Baylor, they are no longer faceless numbers, but students feel the humanity of the crisis for perhaps the first time. Beyond the tears and anger that many of them express, for the first time we have a meaningful discussion about the human reality of HIV in Lesotho. Having played with an HIV positive child often changes students’ perspectives, because when they are playing, they could be playing with any child, they laugh and run just like children at home. The carnival atmosphere helps students stop defining them as “HIV positive” or “HIV positive children.” The carnival humanizes the children at the clinic, and in doing so, we can move beyond viewing them as objects to be pitied, but rather as humans who we can empathize with. In turn, the experience at the carnival impacts our future projects working with orphans because we have learned to identify with those we are helping.
The Importance of Class Room Learning in Support of Service

After taking eight service-learning trips, in 2012 we tried a trip that was exclusively service, without guest lectures, or some of the cross-cultural activities that we implement as part of the more traditional academic component of the trip. During the first 8 trips we had 8–10 lectures from the local university (National University of Lesotho) and representatives from local NGOs come and speak on a variety of topics such as: gender, health, development, history, political science, education, HIV/AIDS, economics, religion, and culture. Often these lectures were timed to coincide with a certain work project that allowed students to view the reality of the topics being discussed. Some of our most engaging discussions came on the nights after lectures, as students were often able to make the connection between what they heard in the classroom and what they were seeing in the field. Sometimes they agreed with the speakers, and on other occasions they felt as though their experience and interpretation was different than that of the guest speaker. These were stimulating discussions, which allowed students to develop their own opinions. In addition to no lectures, the scavenger hunt that we usually have students participate in during or fifth day in Lesotho was also dropped. The scavenger hunt is designed to force students to engage with the Basotho without an instructor in order to help students become more confident in approaching the Basotho. Additionally, due to unforeseen circumstances the Work Camp was unable to join us. Without these cross-cultural and more traditional academic components, we believe that students had a more difficult time getting to know the Basotho as individuals. In 2012 there were no guest lectures as part of the service trip, but during the course of our three-week trip, we did retain the nightly reflection sessions. However, it became evident by the second week that the discussions during this trip were not reaching the intellectual depth that previous trips had reached. Every trip is different and some reach greater intellectual depth than others, and almost every one of the previous trips had tended to focus more on one prominent issue. Yet, this group of discussions fell well short of any of the previous trips, and often left the leaders frustrated. In hindsight, we do not believe that it had anything to do with the given group of students, but rather without the academic and structured cross-cultural components, they did not learn as much from the service, and the overall experience was not as powerful as previous programs. Previously, I had assumed that even without the traditional academic features, the service and discussions alone would be enough to generate a service-learning experience that generated deep thought and reflection on the part of students. Thus we learned that the traditional academic component including: readings, lectures, and cross-cultural activities are vital to transforming a service experience into a true service learning experience.

For many years we have encouraged students to read Jim Wooten’s (2004) book We Are All the Same about Nkosi Johnson, a boy in South Africa who was born with HIV. Based upon that book title, and a comment made by one of the Basotho we worked with, near the end of the trip in 2008 some of the students took that as their motto and painted it onto the back of the community center we had built. More than a painting, for many students that phrase had come to symbolize the trip for them and what they had learned. Since then, future trips have seen the words on the back of the wall at the community center and have chosen to adorn many of their projects with those words. In many ways We Are All the Same, has become the motto of trip, and for many students it is one of the most powerful and lasting memories that they take away from the experience. During one of our pre-trip meetings I teach the students that in the Sesotho language there is no word for stranger. Afterword we usually try and discuss the cultural significance of this and what it tells us about the Basotho. Hopefully, by the end of the trip, through the personal relationships they have made with individual Basotho they are fully able to grasp the true meaning of the phrase. Through the fulfillment of personal relationships made with the Basotho the goal of empathy and understanding emerges through the eyes and experiences of a personal connection. It is our hope, that through service we are not only able to help the Basotho, but that we can help our students come to the conclusion that regardless of skin color, socio-economic situation, or being HIV positive, that at some level as humans we are all the same, with the same basic feelings, wants, and humanity.

Conclusion

Trying to make sure that students do not finish the experience with resentment, preconceived stereotypes, or objectifying all the Basotho as poor and helpless is one of the greater challenges of this service experience. By working with the
Basotho, they come to understand the lives of individual people, people whom they can see as individuals, and whom they can feel empathy for. If we can help students move beyond those superficial interpretations we hope that the meaning of the experience will be more profound and longer lasting. Those that grasp these concepts often go on to do volunteer work in their local communities or go on to join programs such as AmeriCorps, Teach for America, and the Peace Corps. However, in our final reflections it is not uncommon for students to state that what they are taking away from the experience is that they are thankful for what they have. While such sentiments may be noble, they are often superficial, and suggest that the individual is still stuck in the “other” and “us” paradigm that objectifies the Basotho. Because, the goal is not to be more than thankful for what you have, but rather it is to understand what others have without seeing them as lesser or wanting, which is how we develop a genuine empathy and understanding. Lindsay Pepper as student on the 2009 program reflected that this trip taught her “how to feel.” This is an example of the kind of empathy we hope to generate during the program.

Over the last decade we have worked to develop a service-learning experience based on the belief that by taking students out of their comfort zone they are more receptive to overcoming prejudice and negative stereotypes and develop a greater sense of empathy on their own terms. During our nightly meetings we do not try and force students to come to certain conclusions or beliefs, and we do not preach to them, but rather we create an environment that allows each student to engage the experience on their own level and to reach their own conclusions. In order to accomplish our goals, we have carefully arranged our projects in conjunction with lectures and cross-cultural activities to help students see the humanity in the people they are working with and to develop a better understanding of the conditions and realities of those living in poverty. Although not all students reach these goals, our model has proven to be extremely successful.

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About the Author

Scott Rosenberg is professor of history at Wittenberg University.
Reducing HIV-Related Stigma Among Undergraduate Students: A Collaboration Between the University of Alabama and West Alabama AIDS Outreach

Billy D. Kirkpatrick

Issues in Stigma Reduction

Reducing stigma within the local community is an important, yet abstract, goal for an AIDS Service Organization. It is rarely clear what methods are most effective in alleviating stigma and if/when stigma has been significantly reduced. Over the last five years, the staff and Board of Directors of West Alabama AIDS Outreach (WAAO) have sought to actively address stigma and to develop stigma-reduction methods that can be practically and consistently applied.

As the executive director of WAAO, I participate in a large number of public speaking engagements related to HIV and to the services provided by the agency. Early in the eighth year of my tenure, I believed that by accurately describing our clientele (many of whom do not fit the generalized “face” of HIV) and by refuting myths about the disease, stigma in the local community could decrease.

My speeches, though seen as informative, did not appear to have the intended effect. I am not HIV positive, nor am I representative of the general demographic of the WAAO clientele. These factors served as obstacles to having community members grasp who individuals with HIV truly are. There also did not appear to be any legitimate insight into the life of someone living with the disease. Remembering that interaction breeds familiarity those of us at WAAO decided to provide opportunities for interaction between the HIV positive community (clients of WAAO) and the community at large.

As of 2010, only two clients (out of 230) were willing to speak publicly about living with HIV. These two clients appeared to have a powerful influence on community members; yet they were unable to represent the diversity of our clients. Clients identified several factors as contributing to their reluctance to publicly identify as and speak about being HIV positive. Among these were: past experiences of confidentiality breaches by staff at medical clinics, distrust of service providers, poor treatment by family members and friends after disclosing their HIV status, and varying levels of exposure to judgmental and ignorant comments. Taking these factors into consideration, we discussed the potential benefits and risks and how to prevent clients from experiencing negativity should they meet with community members through WAAO. Given a strong volunteer base, whose time and service are immeasurable, and the willingness of our clients to meet with community members, we decided to move forward with attempts to reduce stigma and improve relationships through inter-group interaction.

Inception of the Ajani Groups

Ajani is an African word which means “He who wins the struggle.” Given the cultural relevance to many of our clients and the struggles which they’ve overcome, the group of clients selected to meet with community members in WAAO-sponsored activities referred to as the Ajani Groups. Clients were selected by WAAO staff based on the following criteria: potential to be sincerely supportive of other clients, willing to commit to attending the groups on a regular basis, and the potential positive engagement with the community. We at WAAO were deeply appreciative of our clients and community members, who trusted us to provide a safe environment for the Ajani groups. The bravery of the original participants cannot be overstated.

The groups, which met between noon and 2
p.m., were held at the WAAO office on a monthly basis. The community members consisted of members of churches, civic clubs, or student groups. These groups not only provided food, but engaged in discussions and played board and card games with clients. Up to 15 clients were invited to participate in each group. Each group followed the same basic format. All attendees (students, staff, board members, and clients) would introduce themselves, and students were asked to provide one interesting fact about themselves. Lunch was then served, and roughly 25 minutes was allotted for all attendees to get their food, find seating, and begin talking. Efforts were made to strategically arrange the seating arrangement so as to encourage participants to interact with one another. Headbanz, a charades-type game, was often the popular choice, with clients and students on the same teams. They would spend the remainder of the time playing the game, with good-byes at the end.

Ajani Groups have been conducted since September 2012. The groups continue presently at the agency.

Student Involvement
With the 20–24 age group accounting for the most new cases of HIV (CDC, 2010), WAAO makes great efforts to collaborate with the college students in the area to provide prevention education, testing services, and stigma-reduction activities. In the last three years, students from Social Work, Counseling, Criminal Justice, Nursing, Public Health, and the Honors College have attended Ajani Groups.

For some students, participation in the groups has been an optional service project during the semester. For others, participation has been completely voluntary and unrelated to coursework. Although most community groups that attend Ajani Groups purchase or cook food for the clients, students were not expected to do so. Students' sponsorship of a meal is covered by WAAO. Additionally, prior to participating students are informed of the importance of confidentiality and sign confidentiality forms. The emotional safety of our clients is also discussed. Students are reminded of verbal and non-verbal communication that could be offensive to persons who are HIV positive.

Participants in the Ajani Groups are challenged in many ways. In partnership with faculty members, students are given an opportunity to interact with persons who were quite often very different from them. Data is collected and while reporting this data is beyond the scope of this piece, it appears evident that personal stigmas regarding HIV, race, homophobia, and poverty are being questioned by the students. WAAO clients, including those who attend Ajani Groups, are predominantly African Americans who live below the federal poverty level, while the majority of students are white and middle-class.

Reasons for Client Involvement
Ajani Groups are designed to decrease the effects of stigma on WAAO clients themselves. It was hoped that positive interactions with students through the Ajani Groups would allow clients to view the outside world as less threatening, which, in turn, would improve their self-esteem and social well-being.

Impact of Student Involvement
By all accounts from students, clients, and WAAO staff, Ajani Groups have been successful in breaking stigma-related barriers. Comments by students reflected that perceptions of those living with HIV/AIDS had become more positive and less stigmatizing due to their participation. Students also stated that the overall Ajani experience was enjoyable. Overwhelmingly, clients enjoyed the unique social offering that Ajani Groups provided and were willing to have students join them again. Staff members felt that students were enthusiastic participants, were actively engaged for the entirety of groups, and that they made special efforts to include all clients in conversations.

Reflections
Initially, I had concerns about working with students, especially undergraduate students. Any fears I had about student involvement in Ajani Groups were unwarranted. Overall, student groups have had higher-energy participation and more in-depth conversations with clients than the majority of non-student groups. The quality of student participation was not determined by whether participation was a mandatory facet of a service project or a volunteer activity scheduled by one's major program. Many students could have opted out of participating, citing scheduling conflicts, but the vast majority of each group attended. Some, even with legitimate scheduling conflicts still worked out time to attend. We have been very pleased to see such willingness by the younger generation to spend time with those living with HIV/AIDS. As we have had 10 distinct student groups and over 100 student participants thus far and, since
the number of participants is ever-growing, it is clear that Ajani Groups has given us a powerful and consistent tool for linking our clients with the student population, thus decreasing stigma among the students and providing them with a rare and enlightening educational opportunity.

With focus on the students, it was easy to overlook the contribution of the clients. Their bravery in disclosing their status has been noted, but, for the groups to be successful, they must be as willing as the students to engage fully. In many ways, the Ajani clients are the face of WAAO to the community. If they had kept themselves emotionally isolated from the students or had come across as cold or uninviting, they may have reinforced negative stigmas held by students and may have lessened the likelihood that future student groups would ask to participate. These clients, however, represented the agency and their fellow clients spectacularly. They made each student feel welcomed, showcased their unique personalities, and were even willing to discuss their personal struggles to students when asked. They deserve as much credit for the success of Ajani Groups as the students.

Areas for Improvement

We always hoped that student-client relationships that blossom at Ajani would continue to grow. That is, we would like students to attend multiple times in order to get to know clients more fully. Or, we encourage students to build relationships with clients outside of the Ajani setting. However, these opportunities rarely materialized as few post-Ajani meetings occurred. Busy student schedules often prohibit further Ajani participation, and, given the transiency of many students, consistent face-to-face meetings have not proven to be a practical goal.

Summary

As an AIDS Service Organization, WAAO has unique access to a stigmatized population, providing the opportunity to develop substantial stigma-reducing activities. Ajani Groups represented a major step forward in alleviating stigma for WAAO’s clientele. University students and WAAO clients have demonstrated the ability to have enjoyable and informative interactions. Students seemed to have reduced stigma after participation in Ajani, and clients seemed to benefit as they witness the compassion of those who are not typically in their social circles. WAAO recommends this type of activity for any AIDS Service Organization seeking to decrease stigma in its local community. I encourage community organizations to reach out to academic institutions in partnership. There are many ways in which such collaborations can be mutually beneficial to all groups involved. In this one example, an innovative partnership resulted with all groups involved—clients, students, and the academic institution.

About the Author

Billy D. Kirkpatrick is executive director of West Alabama AIDS Outreach in Tuscaloosa, Ala.
Some Powerful Event: Civic Engagement And Story Telling as Tools for Addressing Privilege

MacKenzie Lovell

Abstract

Scholars have argued that institutions of higher education have a responsibility to cultivate students into citizens who are engaged with the social injustices facing the populace. This idealistic view, however, does not confront the myriad ways in which White privilege affects students as they enter higher education classrooms. The central argument herein is that student involvement in civic engagement initiatives, namely social justice oriented education and service-learning experiences, are key facets to the exploration of privilege and identity. Through the use of story-telling, students will be able to recognize and begin digesting the significance of privilege in their daily lives, with the ultimate goal of conscientiously engaging with greater community by becoming engaged citizens.

College is a time of great personal growth for many students, as they encounter, perhaps for the first time, perspectives on the world which are different from their own. For some, this will be the first time that they interact with a person of color. While this statement seems out of place in 2015, it remains true, and is inextricably tied to White privilege. Understanding White privilege in the higher education classroom is important in order to tease out concepts of racism, anti-racism, multiculturalism, and engaged citizenship. The tradition of civic engagement is used to provide an entrée into racial identity construction for many of these White students, as these pedagogies put students in direct contact with racial otherness, allowing them space to recognize their own race and the privileges that accompany it.

Contact with the racial other can take many forms. Serving the consumers at community service partner sites, or community partners, is one way to allow college students to begin thinking about privilege. Civic engagement initiatives, such as service-learning experiences, or classes with a focus on social justice, trigger an awakening in students, which allows them to begin thinking about systematic oppression of identities. Specifically, students can begin to deconstruct the hegemony of Whiteness and move toward a greater understanding of society as they continue to encounter otherness through their academic and social careers.

When discussing civic engagement initiatives, it is important to understand the inherent economic gap, and often racial divide, between those serving and those served. It is paramount for students to be open to the experiences with the community while being critical of their prejudgments. Lechuga, Clerc, and Howell (2009) refer to this as an “encountered situation.” An encountered situation, has three key components: education, activity, and reflection. In a social justice oriented classroom, or service-learning experience, these components are necessary for the success of the project, and for the identity development of the students.

Social Justice and Service-Learning

Social justice education is critically conscious education focused on examining the root causes of inequality and working towards corrective solutions, as described by Freire (1970). It introduces participants to the politics of recognition, or the argument that lack of recognition is the crux of social injustice. This politic allows students to bear witness to the defense of identities, work to end cultural domination, and to win recognition for non-dominant groups (North, 2006). Service-learning is a subcategory of social justice ed-
ucation, wherein students are involved in community service and reflection as components of their graded coursework. Through service-learning initiatives, students open themselves as witness to suffering of others, physical, material, and psychological (North, 2006). The purpose of these two styles of education is to “promote knowledge, skills, and habits of mind necessary for engaged citizenship,” (Ben-Porath, Pupik-Dean, & Summers, 2010, p. 1). These pedagogies put students in direct contact with “the other,” often a racial other, and produce internal change processes, while simultaneously allowing students to reexamine their own realities. Using these types of educational policies and practices works to view social injustices on the macro-level (North, 2006).

**Telling Stories: The Narrative of a Racial Identity**

Story-telling is an important part of communication. Indeed, most communication revolves around the sharing of stories. One of the easiest ways for students to discuss their race (and racial privilege, even if they would not use those terms) is by sharing stories. People ascribe meaning to events by forming them into a narrative (Apple, 1997; Green, 2003). The ways in which the intersection of race, class, and gender can take form in students are numerous and complex, as described by Critical Race Theory (Collins, 2009; Freeman, 2012). Using narratives to navigate these social identities and hierarchies is a good way to make sense of these disparate pieces, as stories serve as social representations of each of us (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). These narratives can take several forms: the personal fable, the memoir, the victim’s story, and the color-blind narrative.

**Personal fable.** Dunlap (1997) refers to a concept he coins the personal fable, or the impression that each person has of her own unique heroic purpose. Adolescents and late-adolescents (18-22 year olds) grapple with the struggles of the people they serve while attempting to better the situation of those they are serving with and for. As students move through the process of a service-learning experience, they move from a heroic vision to one of feeling guilty about their privilege. This shift is an important first step towards identity restructuring. When students face issues such as racism, poverty, and socioeconomic oppression they react with feelings of guilt and anger. These feelings, serve as an important tool in moving forward with identity restructuring.

As students move away from the heroic personal fable from the resulting guilt and anger (Dunlap, 1997), they begin to become aware of the societal and structural oppressions occurring to keep the people they serve in a position of need. This stage of consciousness is the goal for all service-learning and social-justice-oriented work, as it is the place where students can begin to reconstruct their societal perceptions around these new ideas.

**Memoir.** Students may also participate in the creation of a service memoir. Ellsworth (1997) provides one example of how this memoir could take shape. Students work to string together important instances from their service experience in order to draw a greater meaning from it. Ellsworth creates a memoir of her racial identity through a discussion about her family’s racist past. Ellsworth concludes from her story that Whiteness is “always more than one thing” and “never the same thing twice,” (p. 260). In other words, Whiteness is a performance, one that is neither the same as the performance before nor will ever be the same again. Race is a flexible, man-made category, and therefore can be embodied differently in different locations and contexts (Freeman, 2012). This is the moral of Ellsworth’s piece, an acknowledgement that Whiteness is ever changing. In the memoir paradigm of story-telling, students work towards finding their own moral for their narrative of service, working to make the experience real and tangible for themselves and others.

By working to create meaning in this way, students are priming their stories to be shared. This type of service memoir helps students retell their encounters, and process the experience along the way. Unfortunately, this service memoir is lacking in one important way; it does not encourage students to see the structural oppression that they have worked within and against. By turning their service experiences into a story to be shared, students are, in many ways, sanitizing the story to make it universal. Universalizing their stories is useful when trying to recruit others, or sell someone on the personal value of service. However, this universalization or sanitation of the memoir is not useful when trying to explore the racial implications of service. These devices work directly against the context-specific ways in which service-learning confronts racial inequality.

**Creating a victim’s story.** Students often fall into the trap of creating a victim’s story. This narrative can take two forms. A student can write about
how they are ashamed to be White, hence they are victims of their birth (Thompson, 1999). The second form of the victim's story comes when students turn away from critical self-reflection and create a narrative of being the victim because of “reverse racism.” Reverse racism is a controversial term. It signifies the perceived discrimination or prejudice against the traditional dominant group, in this case White middle-class Americans, although it is experienced by other, non-dominant classes of White groups members as well. This term is controversial because members of the dominant group often use it to explain away feelings of being jilted. In the minds of White students, reverse racism is occurring when students of color receive opportunities that White students do not because of racial difference. One popular example that White students cite is affirmative action policies (Perry, 2002). This argument, however, does not recognize the racism that has allowed the structural oppression which created the need for policies such as Affirmative Action. Additionally, students participating in service may claim to experience reverse racism if they do not feel accepted by the population they are serving due to their racial difference. Feeling like an outsider is a normal occurrence for many people of color, but can cause strong feelings of discomfort in white students (Carter, 1997; Ellsworth, 1997; Frankenberg, 1994).

**Color-blind narratives.** Blum (2002) speculated that ceasing to use racial terms would, in turn, stop racism. If there is no race, how can we be racist? However, this idea does not take into account the ways in which a person's culture is tied to her identity, racial identity included. This is the trap that students fall into when creating a color-blind narrative.

Students telling their story from a color-blind vantage point once again eliminate critical examination of the experience (as in the victim’s story). Pollock (2006) refers to this as color muteness, implying that people do not use racial terms because they believe it makes race less important. However, this model is different from the victim’s narrative because students employ a variety of rhetorical moves in order to convey that they do not believe that racism is a contemporary issue. Color-blindness is commonly held to be a strategy for promoting social justice, because people believe that if we do not discuss race then we must be post-racial (Helms, 2008; Pollock, 2006). Color-blindness is a societal problem, however, and a social justice education should challenge this practice.

Bonilla-Silva (2010) writes extensively on the language that students use to downplay the effects of racism on their peers of color. The most common example is the “trinity formula” (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, p. 95). This method employs three segments of story telling through which the student conveys their color-blind narrative. In the first segment, students confess to knowing a racist, or to seeing prejudice performed by someone close to them. In the second segment, students give an example of the actions of the person they described in segment one (e.g. my dad told me he didn't want me hanging out with “those kind of people.”). Finally, in segment three, students use the presentation of segment one and two to suggest that they are not like the racists that they know (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). Cliché phrases such as “My best friend is black,” and “I’m not a racist but…” are frames traditionally used by White individuals to discuss matters of race in decidedly nonracial terms (Bonilla-Silva, 2010, Frankenberg, 1993; Helms, 2008). Bonilla-Silva (2010) refers to this model as laissez faire racism, intimating the way that race and racism are allowed to persist because dominant groups simply refuse to address them.

Students will each weave a unique story of service and identity through their civic engagement experiences. Much of the important work to be done comes in connecting the stories of the students with the stories of others (Hartley, 2010). Multicultural education works to bring many diverse narratives together in order to confront institutionalized racism (Hu-Deharte, 1994). However, creating a civically engaged identity means struggling for a more emancipatory, anti-racist form of education (Apple, 1997). Indeed, it means struggling for a more emancipatory, anti-racist form of ourselves.

By putting students in direct contact with racialized others, they are entering into an opportunity to develop an anti-racist identity. Through guided reflection exercises facilitated by the course professor or members of the professional civic engagement staff, students can examine social injustices, structural race-based discrimination, and possible solutions for these issues. The importance of civic engagement lies with its ability to transform popular discourse and to awaken the critical consciousness within students through interaction with otherness and storytelling. Only in creating a space where these two practices can occur can we begin to deconstruct hegemony in the classroom. This is not an easy undertaking, as it requires much work and self-reflection for all members involved, but it is an important one.
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About the Author

MacKenzie Lovell is a doctoral student in Urban Education at Temple University.
Dr. Rajesh Tandon is an internationally acclaimed leader and practitioner of participatory research and development. In 1982 he founded the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), a voluntary organization providing support to grassroots initiatives in South Asia. He has been its chief functionary since then. Under his leadership, PRIA has developed numerous methodologies of participatory learning and training, participatory bottom-up micro planning, and participatory monitoring and evaluation. His Ph.D. is from Case Western Reserve University; he has additional degrees in engineering and management. Tandon’s specialty is social and organizational change. His contributions revolve around issues of participatory research, advocating for people-centered development, policy reform, and networking in India, South Asia, and beyond. He has advocated for a self-reliant, autonomous, and competent voluntary sector in India and abroad. Another area of his work is building alliances and partnerships among diverse sectors in societal development. Tandon has served on numerous government task forces and committees and the boards of many civil society organizations. He is the founder and has been chair of the board of directors of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation; of the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research network; and of the external advisory committee of the Office of Community Based Research at the University of Victoria, Canada. In Paris in 2009, he chaired the session on University–Community Engagement for Societal Change and Development: Possibilities and Challenges at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education. He is currently chair of the board of directors of the Montreal International Forum. He was awarded an honorary doctor of laws degree by the University of Victoria in 2008.

Welcome by Dr. Hiram E. Fitzgerald, chair of the executive committee of the Board of Directors of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium and associate provost for University Outreach and Engagement at Michigan State University.
Welcome to everybody on behalf of the thirty members of the Engagement Scholarship Consortium, especially our two newest members, Virginia Tech University and Tarleton State University.

It is fitting at our first meeting outside the United States to draw attention to the strong international efforts to build connections between institutions of higher education and the diverse communities that comprise society. These efforts are increasingly focused on efforts to solve complex problems, advance social justice, and enhance the welfare of all humanity.

There are now at least twenty-two organizations that focus on various aspects of this work, and an increasing number of journals available for the dissemination of the knowledge gained about the processes that contribute to the success of partnerships and the sustainable outcomes from effective evidence-based practices. This international effort is well illustrated by the efforts of the Global University Network Innovation (GUNI) meeting in Barcelona in May 2013. Three hundred and fifty individuals from 70 countries assembled to discuss the diversity of approaches to engagement in higher education and its contribution to social change.

The editors of the volume produced in conjunction with the conference included two that are a link to our conference today. Budd Hall at the University of Victoria is frequently recognized as the founder of community-based participatory research. He is a passionate champion of social justice, and he’s also a poet. You will find one of his poems in the program. The second editor here today is Rajesh Tandon, equally committed to social justice, equity, and community-based research.

You will shortly hear more about Rajesh and then he will give us an inspirational start to our conference. In your packets you’ll find a flyer that provides information about the volume that was produced in February 2014 by that group of folks who met in May 2013; 350 individuals from 70 countries gathered in Barcelona to discuss issues related to knowledge, who’s knowledge, how to blend knowledges of community with knowledges of universities in ways that we can co-create solutions to many of the world’s most vexing problems.

I hope you will establish friendships here that will expand your network of colleagues committed to community-engaged scholarship. Welcome, and have a good conference.
great support and a great partnership and appreciate the wonderful relationship and the research capabilities they have brought to our Senate. As chancellor, one of my roles, in addition to presiding over convocation ceremonies, is to represent the public interest in the university. As a proud alumnus of the university, it is a privilege I take with great enthusiasm. It is in this spirit, and with public interest top of mind, I welcome you here to Edmonton today. The scholarship of engagement is extremely important to communities we serve. Your work is vital to the future of secondary education here in Canada, indeed, around the world. So, I wish you much success with your conference.

And, it now gives me great pleasure to introduce our distinguished keynote speaker, Dr. Rajesh Tandon. This is the first time that this annual conference ESC been held outside the United States, hosted by a member of the newly formed international region. So, it is very appropriate that our keynote speaker should be Dr. Tandon, who is based in India but whose name and accomplishments are known throughout the world. He is perhaps best known as the president of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia, a voluntary organization he founded in 1982 that supports grassroots initiatives in South Asia. He is also the founder and has been the chairperson of the board of directors of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation. He is a chairperson of the Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research network, and he was also inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 2010. He is currently the chair of the board of directors of Montreal International Forum, which is also referred to as the Forum for Democratic Global Governance. He received an honorary doctorate from the University of Victoria in British Columbia to go with his earned doctorate from Case Western Reserve University. He is also co-holder of the UNESCO chair in community-based research in higher education, which he holds with Dr. Budd Hall of the University of Victoria, who wasn’t able to attend in person. This morning we are very fortunate to be able to host the other half of that long-term friendship and collaboration, Dr. Rajesh Tandon. He is here to speak to us on a topic “Community-University Engagement and the Challenge of Change.” Please join me in welcoming Dr. Tandon.

DR. TANDON’S KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Namaskar, good morning. It is about bedtime (audience laughs), and that is why I have prepared a 75-slide PowerPoint, so that you can go to sleep along with me. Thank you very much for inviting me to be with you on this very important occasion. I have been an admirer of the work that many fellow North Americans have been doing. As Hiram ( Fitzgerald) has mentioned over the course of the last three years, we have worked very closely together to produce that wonderful unique report that Dr. Fitzgerald brought to your attention. I do have a have a PowerPoint presentation and I will take you through at least six slides of that, but let me start by sharing with you, very briefly, the history of my journey to North America, because I seem to be found more in North America these days according to some comments made last night over at the reception by fellow Americans and Canadians.

I came to Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland to do a Ph.D. in organizational science in the School of Management. Having done electronic engineering as my first degree and management education as my second degree, I began a career as an assistant professor, a lecturer of management. And—my, that was 1974—I arrive in Cleveland, realizing my dream of visiting America, the land of gold and honey. The drive from the airport to the university residence shattered that dream in half an hour. While I was in the U.S, a political emergency was declared in India. Along with some other fellow Indian students on the East Coast, we decided to go back and find out what was going on back home. The only legitimate way to go home in those days was to pretend that you would do field work for your dissertation. And I managed to find a reasonably flexible committee which allowed me to go and do field work on rural development. By a series of strange coincidences, I ended up in the Southern Rajasthan area, which was inhabited by indigenous peoples; we called them tribals. And (I) spent about a year basically figuring out how I could make myself comfortable in those rural surroundings. It was in the course of that experience that I discovered several things, which my formal, one of the best formal educations I could have had in India, did not allow me to understand. Firstly, I discovered that illiteracy did not equate itself with ignorance. Illiterate farmers and women in those villages were extremely knowledgeable about a large number of things, including what has now come to be called holistic health. In those days we used to call it voodoo science, because, you know, you would drink some water, you would pluck some leaves, and you would chew them, and all that; now they’re packaged. In the mornings some of them would go out and, you know, stretch in various strange ways. Nowadays it
is called yoga. And despite the fact that I had electronics engineering as my background, I did not appreciate all this mumbo-jumbo that was going on in the village. It took me awhile to figure out that there is a body of knowledge outside the universe in which I was schooled and trained. It also took me awhile to figure out that the research methodology which I knew so well—and I knew SPSS package at that time and the use of computers at that time—that research methodology was reasonably alienating to people, because whenever I would approach (someone) with a questionnaire they would run away or negotiate their age with me. We would start with a man with about five kids saying, "I’m a man of 20 years old," and I would say "Come on" and he would say "OK, 25." By the time we were finished he will be about 43 years old!

That was the methodology of finding out information; we use to call them data. So, I discovered that there was a body of knowledge residing in those people, and I also discovered that there was a way of narrating and sharing that knowledge which I was not very familiar with. So, I had this rather difficult task of producing a Ph.D. thesis based on this rather messy and tension-filled experience, after which I learned that all of you that have got a Ph.D. have had messy and tension-filled experiences; but those days I felt lonely. So, when I returned to Cleveland to write my thesis, the chair of my research committee and my doctoral committee rejected all the so-called data I had and said I must repeat my thesis in an American community in and around Cleveland. That was terrifying. First of all, that would have meant that I had failed in doing what I did, wasted about 15 months of my life and some other people’s money, and so I was rather shattered. At that time, I found a fan not far from Cleveland in Toronto in the International Council for Adult Education, Dr. Budd Hall.

I dialed a number that was given to me, and he said, "Oh yes I have been thinking about participatory research. So, I said this is what I was doing. On the phone we agreed that there was, potentially, a logic to what my messy experience was. And he agreed to send me a copy of his first write-up which appeared in Emergence in 1975-76. I needed a reference in order to justify what I was saying. As you all know, unless you have a reference you can’t be making sense. So my friendship with Dr. Budd Hall goes back to 1978. I stand here before you today remembering that friendship, but most importantly, being a part of one leg of a UNESCO chair rooted in the world of practice and very happy to be sharing the other leg of a UNESCO chair rooted in the world of academe. I believe that our model of the UNESCO chair—one leg rooted in Indian South Asian practitioner organization and another rooted in a university in North America is a classic example of how engaged scholarship can be pursued in the 21st century. I do want to share with you my thoughts and experiences this morning, but also do so in a spirit of humility, because I am quite aware of the vast body of expertise, practical knowledge, and critical rigor that exists in this auditorium today. I am quite aware of the work that several of you have been doing and I cherish my deep friendship with many of you in this hall and look forward to strengthening new friendships in the coming period. The poem to which both the chancellor and Hiram refer to written by Budd Hall talks about turning of the world.

Let me bring to your attention what is some of this turning of the world that we are referring to. In my view, humanity is at a crossroad. And that crossroad is perplexing in some ways, because we have enormous prosperity in the world today. The levels of prosperity, of comfort, of ease, of travel from India, Portugal in less than twenty-four hours is unparalleled in human history. But we also live in a world where a good 30 percent of our people are living on less than $1.25 a day. This contradiction is shameful, is painful, and it is unsustainable. We live in a world of plenty. We have produced food grains of a level that never were produced. We have processed food grain of a level that never was produced, but we also have malnutrition among our children, not just in sub-Saharan Africa or India or South Asia, but also in Eastern Europe, in Central Asia, in parts of the Arab world.

Why is there a scarcity in the face of plenty? Rapid economic growth. Asia has become the economic fulcrum of the last decade. But 10 percent annual GDP growth rate is a complete myth, with high level of degradation, pollution (of our) air, water, and soil, as well as destruction of ecosystems. The debate in U.N. General Assembly on the 23rd of September this year was just a symptom of the malaise we are facing in pursuit of economic growth. We have enormous military power in our hands today, but a small bunch of people can terrorize the whole world as we are witnessing in what is going on on the borders of Syria and Iraq these days. Surprisingly, or not so surprisingly, the guns and bullets they are using are actually manufactured in countries like ours. And, we are living in a period of history where many more societies have democrati-
ically elected governments than ever before. The as-
spiration for that democracy is growing (faster than) ever before, but formal institutions of democracy elected political representatives, parliaments, and judiciaries are losing faith in the eyes of our young people. Witness the demonstrations on the streets of Hong Kong these days. That upsurge of youth demanding a way of engaging with society different from formally elected representative democracy is not limited to Hong Kong; it has happened in Myanmar, in Cambodia, and many other parts of the world, not just in Asia. So the question for us really is that will humanity at this crossroad move ahead in a ways that, as Hiram said, would contribute to equitable, just, and free societies, which are providing access to the same levels of happiness and comfort to all its citizens. Today the population of the world is seven billion; by the end of this century it may well be 10 billion, but is it conceivable that we will move later in the century towards peace and justice or not? And it is at this crossroad that I feel higher education, and higher education institutions, have an enormous responsibility. What can higher education institutions, therefore, do in this context? What is their sense of responsibility that we need to stand up to, live up to? In order to position this, let us also look at the 21st century. We are living in world of growing knowledge economy. The discourse on knowledge economy is universal today. All countries have set up knowledge commissions in order to become competitive; they are investing in hardware and software knowledge. Within knowledge economy there are knowledge elites; several of them reside in the Silicon Valley with their counterparts in Bangalore, India and then there are knowledge workers, of course, those who are doing data entry jobs in BPOs or KPOs around the world. We also had an enormous competition knowledge production 20-25 years ago; 30 years ago universities and higher education research institutions were the sole sites of knowledge production. Now business has been setting up think tanks around the world. Media has become a major player in producing knowledge. If you are in today's world of television, bite-size netizens are the sources of knowledge, however so superficial it may look like. And of course, civil society, particularly through its movement around the question of justice, inclusion of women, indigenous people, and rights to a sustainable and safe ecological environment, has also been contributing to knowledge. So we are living in world of competitive knowledge production. The information society, here more than anywhere else you will know, has the power of knowledge represented through the Yahoos, the Googles, the Twitters, and the Facebooks, the SMS, the mobile. There are 900 million mobile connections in India. It's a separate matter that less than 500 million have access to toilets. There are countries like Russia and Brazil where on average 1.5 mobile connections per citizen exist today. It is estimated that by the end of 2014 there will be 7.2 billion mobile connects, a little more than the population of the world.

Therefore, this is a different era. This is an era where libraries in the form of resource books have an increasingly challenging environment to face. And finally, it is also an era where knowledge has become a commodity. The intellectual right has been aggressively pursued by WTO and others, and it is no longer a public good. Knowledge has become a private good, it can be traded as a commodity; it can be used as money, and many universities and higher education institutions around the world are being challenged by their governments and policy makers to partner with industry in order to mobilize resources from their knowledge products. So in this context, where we are living in a world of knowledge economy with all its manifestations of competition, regulation, commodification—what do citizens of the world expect from higher education and higher education institutions? Many of you have been party and partners in the promotion of higher education around the world, in your own institution but also through your network and alliances as this consortium represents. There has been, in many parts of the world greater massification of higher education; more and more people want to go to post-secondary educational institutions. Many more governments around the world are now investing in post-secondary education than was the case a decade ago. As massification of higher education happens, as larger and larger young people enter post-secondary educational institutions, as increasing larger middle career professionals return to post-secondary educational institutions for retooling, for learning new skills and competencies, there is a substantial shift in the expectations from higher institutions today.

The first in my view is a shift towards preparing a kind of citizens who are aware of the world they are a part of and behave in manners which are ethical. It is recognized that post-secondary educational institutions bring students, transforms them into learned products of some sort. But the question is how aware they are of the world they are a part of. Even if you are a civil engineer, do you know what is happening around the world? Increasingly, the question of ethical citizenship (is important), not just (in) expectations of ethical behavior from lead-
ers of companies or governments or institutions of higher education, but ethical citizenship in the global context. Are higher educational institutions also preparing global ethical citizens of tomorrow? The second expectation is: are they mobilizing knowledge for driving social change? The GUNI book that Hiram showed you, copies of the flyer available in your folder, is all about mobilizing knowledge to drive social change. Higher educational institutions, despite competition in knowledge economy, have to be at the cutting edge of producing knowledge, which is driving social change not only in our own communities and societies, but globally. There is an expectation that post-secondary education is not just a private good, irrespective of what economists may claim or theorize. Higher education is a public good, higher educational institutions are public institutions. Scholars in higher education institutions, like all of you found here, are public intellectuals. You have a role to stand up and speak on issues that confront our society. And higher education institutions can become spaces. They can reclaim spaces for public discourse. Remember the campuses we were all a part of when we were going to our educational institutions? Whatever happened to those campuses? Whatever happened to that public space? There is a growing expectation that higher education institutions can convene dialogs across various divides in our society: divides across institutions, divides across communities, divides across politics, ethnicity, religion, gender. Can higher education institution convene dialogs across divides in order to engage with each other and engage with different perspectives and knowledges? Higher education institutions can do so; they’re expected to do so; they were doing so in many parts of the world earlier; we need to reclaim that role once again. In some unique ways, higher education institutions are the only institutions in our society which provide connectivity and globality. Locality in the context, in here Edmonton, in the river valley of Edmonton and around, but also the global connection that this river valley represents, that arena of Edmonton represents, that the citizens of Edmonton represent today. This connection higher education institutions can make more organically. Whenever media makes take connection, it leaves out a lot in that connection. Most newspaper reports or television news items do not produce that connectivity in the same way that higher education institutions can do. And therefore, they can create circles of community engagement, locality and globality—cotermious—not something which is separate. Higher education institutions can also, in my view, move beyond knowledge economies to create knowledge society. In fact, higher education institutions can be at the cutting edge proclaiming that knowledge is a public good, knowledge commons is public commons. And it should be available for the benefit of addressing those challenges for all humanity so that we move forward from those crossroads which I referred to a few minutes ago. By building knowledge societies I mean higher education institutions can value diversity of knowledge. They can bring together—Hiram used a wonderful phrase, a blending of community indigenous knowledge with the knowledge of academic rigor produced in universities. They can appreciate plurality of knowledge forms beyond the written word: the story telling idea workshops here and a number of presentations focusing on narratives of storytelling as forms of expressions of knowledge. It is wonderful to see such presentations being made in an academically rigorous conference like this one because we are willing to include them as forms of expressions of knowledge.

I discovered among those tribal farmers in Southern Rajasthan 40 years ago that they had the capacity to critically think for themselves. That critical thinking was not something you acquired only when you received a Ph.D. or master’s degree. How do we respect that criticality, that critical thinking function? And many of them would start by saying, We don’t know, you are highly educated, you are the learned one, you tell us what we can do. And we many times get seduces. We start telling them what to do. I think we need to stand up to say: Yes, we have got some formal education, but you have knowledge from your experience, your experiential knowledge, practical knowledge, knowledge going through your generations. You also contribute to analyses of this problem and its solutions, because I alone cannot do so. I think we are therefore expecting higher education institutions to work towards integration of a knowledge society which is somewhat distinctive from the current race towards knowledge economy. It will be an attempt to include various forms of knowledge, various expressions of knowledge, and treat them all with respect. As one of our indigenous elders last night said, “It’s all about respect.”

Knowledge-driven social change, this conference is Engaged Scholarship Consortium. Engagement also happens in the communities, with the communities. At the moment the equation is somewhat unbalanced. The outreach from universities and higher education to the communities is far greater around the world than the other way around. Communities around the world are not making the
same degree and the same frequency of demands on higher education institution as they should be doing either. And part of the reason they are not doing is because individual engaged scholars all of you here and many you know around the world, they are committed towards engagement but our institutions sometimes are not. Our institutions sometimes are designed, created, administered, and presented in a manner to the larger public in a manner that makes it difficult for communities to make demands on our institutions for engagement. In my view, therefore, engaged scholarship is the stepping stone towards engaged institutions of higher education, and engagement is essentially the core of excellence. If we are engaged, we are excellent. So how can we change to engage? A wonderful theme for this conference: Changing to engage. What does that mean? Institution-wide engagement. Not just in departments and faculties of extension, adult lifelong learning, community outreach, social work, nursing, indigenous education, ecology, gender studies, mental health. Yes, all these disciples are important. But civil engineering, nuclear physics, literature, bio-technology, nano-technology, institution wide—all disciplines must be encouraged and supported to engage, institution deep. The core function of higher institutions is teaching and research. Can we integrate engagement with these core functions? Can we make the teaching engaged in such ways that the quality of learning for our students improves through engagement, that engagement gives them (students) credits, grades, but also sensitivity, deep appreciation, and profound knowledge. Likewise, engagement in the core function of research, what Hiram called blending, knowledge available inside academe with the knowledge available in community, and doing it, of course, with respect as our elder reminded us last night. Therefore, integrate engagement in the mission and mainstream it in the core functions of teaching and research. Institution-long engagement actually implies commitments over decades. I know we like measurement, I know we need to show results, but please results of engagements cannot be shown in 18-month-long frames.

We are talking about changing the culture of our institutions, not only the culture of higher education institutions, but the culture of community organizations, because they need to come forward an engage with higher education, as well. This shift in culture in not going to happen in 18-month or three-year time frames. I know we need to show results, we need to show progress, we need to have metrics, important as they are, but the commitment has to be over decades. It cannot be that a new president, or chancellor, or vice chancellor comes in and says, I will now design a new strategic plan for the next five years, and by the way we have dropped engagement now. Partnerships of trust, mutual benefit, partnerships outside higher education institutions must recognize that community organizations are small, weak, fragile do not have the same level of resources as higher institutions may have. But they have social capital, they have networks, they have practitioner knowledge, they have experiential knowledge, and at times they may have faith, a faith for change, which skeptical as we are as academics, we may not want to acknowledge, because how can we believe in anything unless it is empirically proven.

Finally, co-creates capacity and structures for engagement. Our studies have begun to show institutional structures are critical to incentivize engagement. This means the structures within higher education institutions on the boundaries of higher education institutions with engagement with communities, but also building capacities not just of those inside, but also those outside. I believe in situ joint capacity enhancement with community leaders and organizations and students and scholars would go a long way in strengthening this possibility that institutionalization of engagement could happen both inside higher education as well as outside, just as institutionalization inside will not yield the results we are looking for. Finally, the book that Hiram showed you, the GUNI book at the conference last May, came up with a phrase: be “knowledgiastic.” You can’t find it in an Oxford dictionary, but so what, none of us are doing what we were trained to do anyway? We are all creating the road as we walk. And therefore what does being knowledgiastic mean? Co-create transformative knowledge which drives social change which proves means for addressing some of the problems of our times, but which also brings various other actors together. I believe higher education institution have the possibility, and in fact perhaps the only set of institutions available in our societies today, the capacity to bring together divergent, conflictful actors in our societies, to arrive at a consensus that will drive a desirable future for all humanity in the 21st century. And I look forward to being with you in the next two days to explore how you doing it in your own ways in your part of the world. Thank you very much for your patience.
Engaged scholarship, is defined at Penn State as out-of-classroom academic experiences that complement classroom learning. Research has found that out-of-class academic experiences like internships, study abroad, service learning, and undergraduate research are high-impact practices, providing students with opportunities to reflect on life choices and experiences, to improve time management skills, and to apply in-class learning to real world contexts and settings. However, issues of scalability, cost, enrollment limitations, time commitment, and implementation frame these practices. To provide an alternative engaged scholarship model, while at the same time addressing some shortcomings associated with providing high-impact experiences, we embedded a three-phase time diary into a large undergraduate general education class. The three-phases of the diary consisted of 1) intensive data collection about personal time used in various activities for seven consecutive 24-hour periods, conducted at the beginning of the semester; 2) rigorous data entry and analysis in an Excel file specifically designed to calculate statistics on daily and weekly time use, conducted mid-semester; and 3) extensive self-reflection about time use and college life in the form of an 8–10 page paper, conducted at the end of the semester. Designed to provide multiple applied learning and engagement experiences for the mix of majors, genders, ages, and academic classifications, spacing the three phases over the semester, also provided students with opportunities to:

- Examine what their data collection and analysis demonstrated about daily and weekly time use.
- Reappraise personal goals in college life.
- Encourage greater self-reflection on life choices and time management.
- Deepen understanding of class concepts and apply this knowledge to daily life.
- Inspire meaningful use of time.

Using qualitative approaches to analyze the self-reflection papers (n=111), results revealed that self-reflection urged students to cognitively review personal goals, values, attitudes, behaviors, and time use. Results demonstrated that the diary project made learning more meaningful for students because they applied what they learned in the classroom to out-of-classroom contexts and settings. The diary project also helped students deepen learning, bring values and beliefs into awareness, and facilitate better understanding of the self and of others. In addition, the it led to an appreciation of how class concepts helped them understand the importance of choices, priorities, and decision-making during free time. Indeed, some students were inspired to positively engage in meaningful activities, such as volunteering and civic engagement. This study's results suggest that integrating innovative engaged scholarship models like the time diary into a general education curriculum not only provides engaged scholarship opportunities to more students, but also holds cost-effective, large-scale potential to harness out-of-class engagement opportunities that contribute to students' academic, personal, and social development.
The Impact of Homelessness and Incarceration on the Health of Women

By Louanne Keenan and Rabia Ahmed, University of Alberta

This study used participatory action and mixed methodology to explore the health-seeking experiences, perceptions of risk, and the medical, mental health, and housing needs of females during incarceration. Four focus groups were conducted during the incarceration period in groups of four to six inmates.

Additionally, 300 health surveys were completed by female inmates. Focus group and survey questions focused on the following themes: 1) access to medical and mental health care; 2) medical and mental health needs; 3) housing needs; and 4) perceptions of risk to one's health and safety during the transition from corrections to the community. Women described how they enter incarceration in poor health and how incarceration was viewed as a time to improve overall health through access to health services. However, maintaining health as they transition back into the community was dependent on housing status. If women were released into unsafe or unstable housing they described increased risk for returning to poor health and recidivism into crime. Female inmates described a number of healthcare challenges, knowledge deficits, lack of housing resources and barriers to moving forward in life. These findings support the development of gender-sensitive health and housing programs for preventing or reducing drug and alcohol use, recidivism, and poor health among this vulnerable population.

THIRD PLACE Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service—Building an Intercultural Competent Community: First Year Assessment

By Maria G. Fabregas Janeiro and Jorge H. Atilés, Oklahoma State University

To face the challenge of preparing Cooperative Extension educators to work with people from different cultures, OSU has proposed “Build an Intercultural Competent Community.” The goal is to develop a community that works effectively in multicultural environments. During the first year, assessments were conducted of intercultural competence training by Extension personnel and of intercultural competence using the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). The survey was designed by the researchers to collect data from 685 Extension personnel; 19.28% answered. The evaluation showed that OCES personnel are interested in attending intercultural training and developing their own intercultural competence. Extension personnel have problems reaching multicultural audiences and are concerned about offending people from other cultures due to the language barriers and unfamiliarity with cultural manners. The second evaluation, the IDI, was sent to the same individuals; 8.03% answered. The group studied showed a perceived orientation of 119.68, corresponding to the Acceptance Stage on the Intercultural Development Continuum (Hammer, 2012). Group perceived orientation “reflects where the group places itself along the continuum” (Hammer, 2012, p. 5). On the other hand, the Group Developmental Orientation of 90.91, corresponding to the Minimization stage of the continuum, “indicates the Group Primary Orientation toward cultural differences and commonalities” (p. 5). The group believed, at the time of the assessment that “recognizes and appreciated patterns of cultural differences and commonalities in one’s own and other cultures” (Hammer, 2015, p. 4). However, their Developmental Orientation shows that the group “highlights cultural commonality and universal values that may also mask deeper recognition and appreciation of cultural differences” (Hammer, 2015, p. 4). These assessments are helping to design intercultural competency trainings according to the Extension educators’ levels of intercultural competence and specific needs. According to the data, trainings should discuss topics related to cultural superiority or inferiority (right from wrong), and continue focusing on cultural differences and commonalities and the ways that those differences could be accepted and respected. Training included a variety of modalities such as face-to-face workshops, lectures, online via Adobe Connect or Desire to Learn (D2L) platforms.

References


Recipients of the 2014 Engagement Scholarship/W.K. Kellogg Foundation Engagement Award and Finalists for the 2014 C. Peter Magrath University/Community Engagement Award

Recipients were announced at the ESC Conference at the University of Alberta, Canada, on October 8, 2014.

WINNER: The Virginia Commonwealth University School of Pharmacy. Title: “Working Together to Transform Lives through Pharmacist Collaborative Care and Outreach in the Community” was produced through the Pharmacist Collaborative Care and Outreach in the Community (PCOC). The winning project was the work of Dr. Leticia Moczys-gemba, assistant professor in the School of Pharmacy, and Dr. Sallie Mayer, assistant professor, VCU School of Pharmacy. The VCU School of Pharmacy’s PCOC is composed of initiatives that include seven academic-community partnerships with independent senior living facilities and underserved clinics, five large-scale community outreach programs, and programs to train the next generation of health professionals. PCOC initiatives focus on underserved populations, including the uninsured, older adults, homeless individuals, and those living in rural areas. The scope includes providing students with high-quality learning experiences, advancing research and clinical practice, preparing students for careers that advance health, and creating university-community partnerships to improve healthcare access. Fourteen faculty members, 500 students, and 35 residents have provided more than 20,000 patient care encounters in the Greater Richmond area. PCOC initiatives are integrated with service learning courses, advanced pharmacy practice experiences, electives, and inter-professional education experiences.

FINALIST—Purdue University. Purdue Kenya Program (PKP) is the work of Ellen Schellhase, clinical associate professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice, and Monica Miller, clinical associate professor, Department of Pharmacy Practice. In 2003, the Purdue University College of Pharmacy (PUCOP) joined the Academic Model Providing Access to Healthcare (AMPATH) consortium in Eldoret, Kenya, and established the Purdue Kenya Program with a mission of building a sustainable infrastructure to provide patient care programs, coupled with funded research programs that investigate understudied characteristics of patients in sub-Saharan Africa. PKP has also established a unique experiential training program that builds pharmacy leaders from the U.S. and Kenya. This is the only clinical pharmacy training program in sub-Saharan Africa with more than 200 trainees, including PUCOP students, University of Nairobi pharmacy interns, and PUCOP Global Health residents. These trainees provide more than 80 clinical interventions daily while working on the inpatient wards. PKP has received approximately $50 million in product donations, grants, and program support. It has contributed 18 peer-reviewed publications and 110 poster and invited platform presentations demonstrating how clinical pharmacy services can be effectively established and sustained in a resource-constrained setting.

FINALIST—University of New Hampshire. The New Hampshire Lakes Lay Monitoring Program (NH LLMP) is the work of Jeff Schloss of the Natural Resources Program in the UNH Cooperative Extension and Patricia Tarpey, executive director of Lake Winnipesaukee Watershed Association.
The NH LLMP, a volunteer water-quality monitoring program, has been used as a model to create and improve similar programs in 35 states and 12 countries. To date, the program has trained more than 1,250 volunteers, worked on assessing 118 lakes, and monitored more than 1,670 lake and tributary sites. The program grew out of an expressed community need for understanding environmental changes noticed by lake users. By engaging volunteers to identify questions and concerns about their lakes and training them to be active participants in data collection and analysis, large quantities of reliable data can be gathered in a cost-effective way for multiple research initiatives. The findings can then be used to make sound local, state and regional management decisions. For more than 35 years, UNH Cooperative Extension, faculty, and students from UNH’s Center for Freshwater Biology have worked with lake associations and communities to collect data on NH’s lake quality. Receiving timely data on a large spatial scale allows researchers to better understand how climate and human activity on the landscape affect our water resources.

FINALIST—Oregon State University. Working Together to Transform Lives through Pharmacist Collaborative Care and Outreach in the Community (PCOC) is the work of Connie Green, president, Tillamook Bay Community College, and Paul Navarra, vice principal of Madras High School in Madras, Oregon.

In the Oregon Open Campus (OOC) initiative, Oregon State University serves as a convener of community partners who address educational needs unique to individual Oregon communities. Under the OOC banner, OSU partners with K–12 schools, community colleges, businesses, and governmental interests to provide and coordinate educational opportunities—both credit and non-credit—that specifically meet the needs identified in individual communities. When refined and proven to be successful, these innovations are made available to other communities. Oregon State, with a statewide mandate as Oregon’s land-grant university and the Carnegie Foundation’s top designation for research institutions and Community Engagement classification, is a logical choice to address these issues. In 2009–2010, after conversations with community leaders looking for greater access to the university, Oregon State launched three Oregon Open Campus pilot sites. OOC served more than 1,200 learners in each of the first two years, and 2,499 learners in FY 2012. The OOC goals match and support Oregon Legislative goals: college and career readiness, increased off-campus degree completion, and improved local economic development and business vitality. After an initial “proof of concept” investment by the university, increased investments by community and campus partners helped expand OOC to six sites, reaching nine rural counties in 2013.

EXEMPLARY PROJECT—Montana State University. Title: Community Engagement and 2,499 learners in FY 2012. The OOC goals
forming schools. All HEF programs are developed and disseminated with three main principles: (1) authentic collaboration between researchers and practitioners; (2) evidence of effectiveness; and (3) access to HEF programs and services for free or at minimal cost. The HEF and its community partners have created eight complementary programs, which are being used by more than 20,000 educators in more than 40 countries around the globe. In the past few years HEF has also offered more than $200,000 in donated materials and services, in addition to thousands of hours of direct intervention support for struggling learners. University students and faculty, as well as many community partners, have also authored more than 30 scholarly publications, more than 80 presentations, and numerous grants based on their collaborative work and research-supported programs.

EXEMPLARY PROJECT—University of Missouri. Title—MU Adult Day Connection.

In 1986, Boone County citizens saw the need for adult day health care services in Columbia, MO. The University of Missouri (MU) School of Health Professions (SHP) saw the benefits of creating a service that provided research potential for MU faculty and service-learning for students. Twenty-five years ago SHP established the MU Adult Day Connection (ADC) through a university-community partnership. Since ADC began, more than 600 participants and families have benefited from the more than 37,000 days of health care provided by staff and students. Caregivers, through the annual evaluation, report less stress when their family members attend the center. The partnership provides faculty a great location to test research, and the program reflects best practices developed or endorsed by faculty. Every year more than 100 students from MU and other health professions volunteer at the center. Many students begin college wanting to work with children, but after spending time at the center they also discover the value of working with seniors and individuals with disabilities. This is a life and career changing time for them, and MU has an obligation to ensure that competent health practitioners are available to care for increased numbers of elders and individuals with disabilities.
JCES invites submission of book reviews that speak to a wide range of issues relevant to the scholarship of engagement. Reviews of books within the social sciences, natural sciences and math, medicine and health, the environment, law, business, philosophy, religion, communication, and the arts and humanities are encouraged. Although reviews of individual books are the most common, JCES also invites submission of several reviews that speak to a common topic area, to be published as a group. All book reviews submitted to JCES should provide readers with a broad overview of the book, but should go beyond this description to discuss central issues raised, strengths and limitations of the text, and current issues of theory and practice raised by the book that are germane to the subject matter and engaged scholarship.

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Jane Newman, Ph.D.
Book Review Editor
The economic development role of higher education institutions has come into sharp focus in recent years. This was prompted in part by the recommitment of state and land-grant institutions to engagement that is responsive to the social and economic needs of surrounding communities (Kellogg Commission on the Future of the State and Land-Grant Universities, 1999). Boyer’s (1996) clarion call for institutions to participate more vigorously in partnerships that address economic and other pressing problems also provided impetus for community engagement.

In general, colleges and universities—public and private alike—may provide economic development support through employment, purchasing, and resource sharing; human capital development; and knowledge transfer (Wittman & Crews, 2012). In particular, many institutions have contributed to community economic development through service-learning, the pedagogy that integrates community service into the curriculum (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Steinberg, Kenworthy-U'Ren, Desplaces, Coleman, & Golden, 2006).

_The Road Half Traveled: University Engagement at a Crossroads_ assesses economic development initiatives and partnership programs of colleges and universities as anchor institutions in low-income, urban communities. Coauthored by Rita Axelroth Hodges (University of Pennsylvania) and Steve Dubb (University of Maryland, College Park), the book situates community economic development in the broad context of community engagement and clarifies the concept of anchor institutions. The book draws attention to effective practices among colleges and universities that convene stakeholders, facilitate programs, and lead initiatives designed to improve the economic and social welfare of the communities in which the institutions are anchored.

_The Road Half Traveled_ is divided into four parts consisting of 11 chapters complemented by three appendices. A set of case studies form the core of the book. The cases feature 10 institutions that have pursued an anchor institution mission—“the conscious and strategic application of the long-term, place-based economic power of the institution, in combination with its human and intellectual resources, to better the welfare of the community in which it resides” (p. 147, italics in original). The featured institutions reflect diversity; they include public and private, four-year and two-year, research and liberal arts, Ivy League and land-grant.

Part 1, The Past and Present of University Engagement, encompasses four chapters. In the opening chapter, Hodges and Dubb trace significant developments in university-community engagement such as the establishment of land-grant colleges, cooperative extension, the settlement house movement, and service-learning programs. In Chapter 2, the authors outline three roles of anchor institutions: facilitator, leader, and convener. Explicated in Chapter 3 are six major areas in which urban colleges and universities have worked with communities: comprehensive neighborhood revitalization; community economic development through corporate investment; local capacity building; public school and health partnerships; academic engagement; and multi-anchor, city, and regional partnerships. The authors then discuss, in Chapter 4, some of the challenges that institutions face in their engagement efforts. These include securing funding and leveraging resources, building a culture of economic inclusion, and sustaining participatory planning and robust community relationships.

Three comprehensive case studies comprise Part 2. The first, in Chapter 5, examines the facilitator strategy as exemplified at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), Portland State University, and Miami Dade College. The second, in Chapter 6, profiles the University of Pennsylvania (Penn), the University of Cincinn...
nati, and Yale University employing the leadership strategy. The final case study, in Chapter 7, illustrates the convener strategy at Syracuse University, the University of Minnesota Twin Cities, LeMoyne-Owen College, and Emory University.

The single chapter in Part 3 identifies “best practices” in relation to the major areas of engagement (described in Chapter 3), together with an outline of associated strategies and their key features. Salient practices include IUPUI’s alignment of academic resources with community development goals; Penn’s multipronged neighborhood revitalization, which draws on academic, “corporate,” and human resources; and LeMoyne-Owen’s establishment of a community development corporation. An additional example is Miami Dade College’s “Opportunity for All” strategy aimed at building a culture of economic inclusion, which involves reaching underserved populations through an open-door policy, job training, small-business development, and employment. Two of the key features of this strategy are workforce training of low-income residents for available jobs and micro-entrepreneurship training in a minority business corridor.

Part 4, Envisioning the Road to be Taken: Realizing the Anchor Institution Mission, offers readers clear-cut information on how to build internal constituencies for partnership work (Chapter 9), catalyze change through philanthropy (Chapter 10), and provide policy support for the anchor institution mission (Chapter 11). In a concluding section, the authors provide a table—the last of the book’s 32 tables, all labeled less precisely as figures—outlining specific recommendations for fulfilling the anchor institution mission.

The full title of the book gives a mixed signal. While the main title implies a half-achieved goal (on a single “road” to be traveled), the subtitle suggests that there are different directions in which to go. At the same time, it is relevant to note that for many (perhaps most) institutions, the “road” has not been taken at all. As Charles Rutheiser points out in the book’s foreword, a relatively small number of universities have adopted an anchor institution mission.

It seems that the “road” is “half traveled” because the current travelers (anchor institutions) have not fully realized their anchor mission. Colleges and universities that play the role of facilitator have exhibited a high degree of collaboration with community groups but have made only small institutional investments in community development. While the “leaders” have made large corporate investments and comprehensive community development efforts, they have mostly “consulted” with communities rather than foster true partnerships. For their part, the “conveners” have relied heavily on external sources of support to implement vital capacity-building work in the community. To get to the destination, institutions must “develop internal organizing strategies that consciously engage their comprehensive resources—human, academic, cultural, and especially economic—with their communities in collaborative and sustainable ways” (p. 144).

One could fault the authors for not designing their research intentionally to yield hard, quantitative data on the community economic impact of anchor institutions. However, Hodges and Dubb anticipated such a criticism by acknowledging this shortcoming. They have, moreover, offset the criticism by presenting in-depth, comprehensive cases that demonstrate the effectiveness of certain practices among the institutions in their study.

The Road Half Traveled makes a substantial contribution to the community engagement literature in at least three ways. First, it unpacks the anchor institution concept by identifying related roles and pertinent practices in a community development context. Second, the book features a cross-section of anchor institutions providing engagement models that can be pressed into service. Third, it shows how colleges and universities can go about adopting anchor institution strategies for pursuing economic development goals in collaboration with community partners.

In effect, The Road Half Traveled helps us to understand better what an anchor institution is, what it does, and how it works. Institutional leaders, community engagement administrators, and local development planners will find this book useful as they embrace engagement designed to build and sustain the economic vitality of communities and concomitantly improve the well-being of residents.

References


Kellogg Commission on the Future of the State and Land-Grant Universities. (1999). Returning to our roots: The engaged institution. Washington,
On Becoming Change Agents in Education through Service-Learning and Empowerment

Review by Valerie Kinloch, The Ohio State University


The authors of In the Service of Learning and Empowerment: Service-Learning, Critical Pedagogy, and the Problem-Solution Project beautifully present the results of their long-term, collaborative teaching and research project on service-learning, critical pedagogy, and democratic practice. They focus their attention on the ways teacher educators, in-service teachers, and pre-service teacher education candidates can use an empowering pedagogy, referred to as the “Problem-Solution Project,” to democratically engage in teaching and learning with students, even under some of the most challenging of situations (e.g., scripted curricula, rote forms of learning, lack of teacher and student autonomy inside classrooms, the increasing top-down focus on standardized testing, non-participatory learning environments, etc.). To address the importance of an empowering pedagogy, they explicitly discuss lessons learned from a required assignment for teacher education candidates in the Urban Accelerated Certification and Master’s Program (UACM) at Georgia State University. The lessons highlighted throughout this book reveal the value of recognizing the need to empower “teachers and their students who are often recipients of services but who are seldom encouraged to take action” (p. xix).

The book is organized into five parts. “Fostering Empowerment through Service-Learning, Critical Pedagogy, Constructivism and the Problem-Solution Project” is the title of Part I. It comprises one chapter that introduces readers to the historical and philosophical tenets of the work, beginning with a brief discussion of the distinctions between traditional and empowering pedagogy. To begin, the authors cite critical pedagogue Ira Shor (Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change, 1992) who asserts: “The difference between empowering and traditional pedagogy has to do with the positive or negative feelings students can develop for the learning process” (p. 23). Shor’s sentiments can be felt throughout the first section of the book, particularly in relation to how the authors detail and describe the overall purpose of the Problem-Solution Project (PSP). That is, they insist that PSP advocates for teachers and students to be empowered inside and outside schools and for them to become involved in service initiatives that critically and intentionally promote social change and social activism. Thus, the authors focus on an empowering pedagogy and not a traditional pedagogy in relation to service-learning, which allows them to make the case for why the intersection of service-learning, critical pedagogy, and constructivism is significant to teaching and learning. In fact, their utilization of the definition of service-learning from the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse point to their understanding of service-learning as a process that both “enhances the community through the service provided” as well makes available “powerful learning consequences for the students or others participating in providing a service” (p. 4; see also see the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse). Additionally, their uptake of critical pedagogy is grounded in the need to provide opportunities for people to collectively...
participate in action (e.g., sociopolitical and educative) that challenges the status quo and produces emancipatory results for improving the overall nature of our living conditions and learning contexts. Finally, their view of constructivism recognizes the significance of involving students in meaningful hands-on learning and collaborative problem-solving projects that their teachers help facilitate” (p. 13). In other words, a constructivist approach to service-learning values experiential learning and engagement, and acknowledges the importance of teachers and students collaborating with each other to produce new and extended forms of knowledge. Taken together, service-learning, critical pedagogy, and constructivism are foundational to how and why PSP is an empowering pedagogy that is multidisciplinary, generative, and attentive to issues of power and resistance in education.

Part II, “The Problem-Solution Project Assignment with Inservice Teachers and Their Pre-K to 5th Grade Students,” contains three chapters. In Chapter 2, the authors provide a macro view of PSP with new in-service teachers working in PK–5 classrooms. They share specific information about the pedagogy/assignment, how it was implemented inside classrooms, and examples of how PSP led to teacher and student empowerment. As teachers were introduced to PSP, they gained strategies for aligning it with curricular requirements and for introducing it to their own students. They brainstormed with students, created project webs, conducted pre-assessment surveys, supported students in making decisions about their projects, and determined ways to integrate curriculum standards with project goals/action. In Chapter 3, the authors build on the previous chapter’s framing of PSP to discuss how one of the co-authors (E. Namisi Chilungu) implemented PSP shortly after being hired into the teacher education program. Chilungu openly admits to experiencing initial resistances from teacher education candidates and to feeling disempowered since she had no prior experience working with PSP. Overtime, she began to see the impact of PSP for teachers and their students, which led her to write, “The more I saw the impact…the more I valued the project and imagined ways I would continue to adapt it for my own instruction” (p. 50). Chilungu’s discussion of the value of PSP leads nicely into Chapter 4. There, another co-author (Rhina M. Fernandes Williams) reflects on lessons learned from teaching elementary-aged students and from implementing PSP with veteran teachers. Williams describes how teachers were encouraged to try on PSB and to determine ways to align it with content area standards. In so doing, Williams and the teachers came to realize that “within the confining context of schools in today’s society, [PSP] is one way in which teachers can reclaim a piece of themselves and teach in the way they imagined they would” (p. 54).

“Voices of Inservice Teachers Engaged in Problem-Solution Projects with PreK-5 Grade Students” is the title of Part III, which contains eleven chapters. Each chapter opens with a reflective story on PSP from a participating teacher. In Chapter 5, a new pre-K teacher, Aliya Jafri, writes about her hesitation to implement PSP with much younger students who were still gaining English skills, and a new kindergarten teacher, Danny Johnson, describes his initial struggles with helping students understand definitions of “problems” and “solutions.” Overtime, Jafri and Johnson, in addition to other teachers featured throughout the book, realized that their students were not too young to become change agents in their schools and local communities. Similarly, in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, the authors share scenarios on PSB and using a language of possibility and empowerment when working with young students. From veteran teacher Brooke Eppinga’s PSP with kindergarteners on preventing excessive amounts of sun from shining into their classroom (see Chapter 6), to new teacher Melissa (Gerry) London’s project with first graders to acquire new tables for the school’s courtyard area (see Chapter 7), and new teacher Crystal Perry’s project with fifth graders on securing enough chapter books for students that met their reading interests and levels (see Chapter 8), the examples of PSP demonstrate the valuable role of listening to and working with students to identify problems and implement solutions in ways that connect service to learning. The remaining chapters in this section, Chapters 9 through 15, offer specific examples of PSP within school and community contexts, with special attention placed on working with students to better understand local and global concerns, as well as direct and indirect forms of service-learning. Collectively, these chapters emphasize the importance of establishing relationships in communities and collaborating with community groups to affect positive, small- and large-scale social change. What strengthens these chapters is the inclusion of recommendations for action for administrators, teachers’ perspectives on PSP and how to connect it to content area standards, and strategies for beginning with but moving beyond curricular requirements in order to center PSP in teaching and learning.

There are three chapters that comprise Part IV, which is titled “The Preservice Teacher Cohort Experience.” In this section, the authors shift their focus from in-service teachers to pre-service teachers enrolled in the very first year of the UACM program. Chapter 16 opens with a vignette from one of
the co-authors (Vera Stenhouse) that chronicles some of her early attempts to implement PSP as a teacher educator. She explains why it is necessary for pre-service teachers to become so inspired in their practice that they are willing “to take action or [be] given opportunities to explore the demands of being an empowered educator themselves” (p. 167). Her vignette leads into a more detailed description of the university course on culture, education, and community that pre-service teachers were required to take, and highlights examples of projects that emerged from the course across each of the cohorts. In Chapter 17, the authors explore particular outcomes that resulted from the course, and how the utilization of service-learning and critical pedagogy points to the need for an empowering pedagogy in pre-service teacher education programs. While there were some observable moments of hesitation—“the teachers observed that elementary students were more facile in engaging the process than they were themselves as a cohort” (p. 202)—there were other moments of comfort and confidence with the process, where “the teachers seem confident and willing to share power with the children” (p. 203). Finally, in Chapter 18, two of the authors (Vera Stenhouse and Olga S. Jarrett) engage in a dialogue about the challenges they faced with teaching and implementing PSP, and they reflect on how their practice transformed overtime. They consider Ira Shor’s argument for educational empowerment and its possibilities for transforming the practice of teaching and learning for students, pre- and in-service teachers, and teacher educators.

In Part V, “The Problem-Solution Project and an Empowering Education: Implications,” the authors present two closing chapters on the larger implications of PSP for practice and policy. In Chapter 19, they encourage pre- and in-service teachers, teacher educators, and staff who work in teacher education programs to use PSP. To do so, they highlight the promise of Shor’s eleven principles for empowering education: problem posing, participatory, situated, multicultural, dialogic, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary, activist, affective, and desocialization. Their argument in this chapter is clear: “However, if there are no risk takers who initiate change, then an inequitable status quo remains unchallenged and unchanged… [empowerment] is more a function of teachers’ abilities to create opportunities to present experiences that are situated and dialogic that can lead to the activism necessary in a Problem-Solution Proj-ect” (p. 227). This sentiment extends into the final chapter, Chapter 20, in which they argue that PSP is empowering, relational, and dialogic, especially during these difficult times of budget cuts and the negative, undermining narratives of teachers that circulate throughout mass media. Some of their recommendations for practice and policy include the following: 1) Placing increased attention on sociopolitical concerns inside our classrooms in ways that lead to teacher and student empowerment; 2) engaging in justice-oriented work that is grounded in social action; 3) encouraging open dialogue among different groups of people; and 4) proposing educational policies that promote student engagement in the learning process, and that value teacher and student autonomy, power, choice, and voice.

Overall, this book provides a rich, detailed, and inspiring assessment of the intersections among service-learning, critical pedagogy, and constructivism in relation to the Problem-Solution Project. The authors take great care with including a variety of perspectives from in-service teacher education candidates, pre-service teachers, students, and from their own perspectives as teacher educators. The book should be placed within a larger trajectory that includes important scholarship by John Dewey, Paulo Freire, and bell hooks. In fact, this is one of those books that we can read, learn from, and return to time and again if we seek to remain committed to engaging in service-learning work, fostering an empowering pedagogy, and addressing issues of power in critical, insightful, and purposeful ways. As Ji Park, a fourth grade teacher writes, “One of my students shared how she thought only adults could do something for others. But, discussing the processes of developing and implementing the project, my students referred to themselves as change agents” (p. 233). And this is one of the main goals of the book—to promote an empowering pedagogy and to encourage students (and teachers) to become change agents.
How best to educate and train graduate students in the 21st century is both a pragmatic and complex dilemma. On the one hand the next generation of scholars will face an ever changing job market both in and outside of academia. Competition and fiscal realities demand that these graduate students bring a host of competencies with them to address the challenges of the day. The editors of *Collaborative Futures: Critical Reflections on Publicly Active Graduate Education* make the case that for higher education to be relevant it must be constructed to address public concern. One critical aspect is how the graduate students themselves are engaged into their education. This volume makes the case that the best way to engage graduate students is via what is happening around the campus’ physical boundary. The editors have compiled a volume that addresses the historical development of publicly engaged scholarship. It clearly articulates the essential elements of this scholarly approach and gives a platform for the voice of the engaged new American graduate student.

From a practical perspective, this text fills a literature gap in that it is directed at graduate education. Having spent 15 years teaching in a place with roughly the same number of undergraduate and graduate students, I am amazed by how much more attention is given to undergraduate education. In a similar way the literature base on publicly engaged scholarship has a stronger undergraduate focus, which makes this text refreshing and vital. The book’s perspective addresses both issues for these modern age graduate students and for their instructors. As an instructor, one great question I have is how to be purposeful in academia. Frankly, I imagine that many in academia are similar in that they face the challenge of doing more than keeping the wheels of the institution churning; it is a question of being purposeful. Publicly engaged scholarship is one way to address this concern. This is especially true for those scholars who possess the critical consciousness to see the world outside of academia as really struggling to address the modern society challenges of poverty, homelessness, racism, and veteran reintegration to name but a few.

One core idea running through the text is that “Big C” culture remains America’s defining issue in 2015. Teaching graduate students to speak academia is insufficient; there is at least a need for a bi-lingualism where graduate students need to speak the language of the people. At the same time graduate students need to remain optimistic, to not let negativity drag them down into complacency. One clear strength of this volume is the depth of writing that is infused across many of the articles related to this skill set. The reader is repeatedly challenged to consider questions of privilege, power, and race, while maintaining a proactive activist mindset.

*Collaborative Futures* gets off to a fantastic beginning by Timothy Eatman. He is such a leading voice with deep knowledge of publicly engaged scholarship. Eatman sets the tone by imploring us to be leader/activists in disseminating critical ideas. Highlighting that engagement by definition means inviting diversity to the table, diversity that is as underrepresented at the academic table as it is in positions of power outside higher education. Eatman directs us to work the horizontal plane of relationships by linking and bridging. This question of positioning is made throughout this volume: Are we helping our graduate students to be intentional in the space they create? Can they work with an understanding of their role as people of privilege and power? As the next generation of scholars, have they developed the ability to address the “wicked problems” (Rittle & Webber, 1973)? The clear answer provided throughout the text is that power and position need to be considered on the front end of our scholarship activities so that the new scholars can attempt to successfully address these critical questions.

The first section of the volume is dedicated to
an integration of the history behind publicly engaged scholarship. Timothy J. Shaffer, in addition to giving a fine history on the development of the land-grant system, makes a strong argument for publicly engaged scholarship as living the mission behind the very creation of a land-grant system: That there be access for all to the ladder of opportunity via the most historically successful of means—education. Positioning is a central concept in formulating engaged work (an idea later expanded upon nicely by Susan Curtis, Shirley Rose, and Kristina Bross). The question of how graduate students are taught positioning, and if graduate work that is informed at all times by positioning are important considerations given proper attention throughout the text. To this end, is the inclusion of a 1968 paper by Ivan Illich. The paper warns against the paternalistic thinking of American idealism. Brief in terms of length but long in terms of depth, it is a required reading for anyone thinking of doing public engagement work. Another great historical document is an early Kellogg Commission piece. To my mind the inclusion of the original seminal works in the first section of this volume not only sets the stage for the work but makes the text essential. Knowing from whence one comes helps the graduate student prepare for the realities of today. In a practical way, the seven-part test at the end of the chapter is a great tool to run before any of us dive into a project; it is a “checks and balances” tool to ensure the positioning that is essential in proper engaged scholarship. Another strength of the book is the way that AAUP is tied to publicly engaged scholarship (Nicholas Behm and Duane Roen’s chapter in particular). Exploring the limitations of a public/private binary is a requirement to avoid neo-liberalistic messes while maintaining the requisite academic freedom to do this work. I also credit the editors for including the AAUP statements as reference material. The history section closes with the most seminal of writings in this field, Ernest L. Boyer’s “The Scholarship of Engagement” (1996). Sure one can get the article elsewhere but including it just adds value.

The middle section of the volume focuses on present day application of publicly engaged scholarship to graduate education. Readers will find these chapters directly useful, coherent, and applied. Day and colleagues begin the second section by using examples to further the call to promote graduate students transitioning into both the new academia job market and the traditional job market, successfully arguing that engaged scholarship develops the required skill set for later success as an activist and engaged human. Part of this success is the skill set that is required in real cross-cultural exchange. Neither academia nor our graduate students get a pass in today’s society. We run the risk of being seen as charlatans if we do not have the ability to work alongside communities of color from an empowerment mindset (Solomon, 1976). George Sanchez picking up on Eatman’s thesis discusses the critical intersection provided by many engaged scholarship graduate course applications in which graduate students can wrestle with real diversity—“rubber hits the road learning.” Specifically, Sanchez extends the discussion to the role urban institutions have with the communities around them, strenuously arguing that we as faculty have a role in transforming our institutions of higher education so that they are more reflective of the diversity in America today and that we need to work to ensure that our community projects do not become feel good projects. (I struggled with the same in a recent community gardening project where my students consistently asked to work with the children over the more sticky work of engaging the adults who lived bordering the garden). This line of thought pushes the conversation into one of how do we educate in a democracy verses educate in a capitalist system? How are we positioning ourselves and our graduate students to be intentional?

These essential and thorny questions dominate the middle section of the text. Meighan uses the lived metaphor of “getting outside” the classroom to demonstrate how activist engaged graduate course work can directly transfer to post graduate life direction. Arguing against seeing publicly engaged scholarship as elective or add-on coursework, she frames it as the most vital of teaching pedagogy. Special kudos for her inclusion of syllabus material to show what full engagement in a semester really looks like. Linda S. Bergmann, Allen Brizee, and Jaclyn M. Wells use post dissertation analysis to provide rich example-driven content on how an engaged dissertation is actually possible and what is needed in terms of institutional support to sustain such. Articles by Jan Cohen-Cruz, Marcy Schnitzer and Max Stephenson Jr., and by Ron Krabill all give direct testimony to the vital nature for both graduate students and community partners of democratic, roots-oriented engaged scholarship. Collectively, they debunk myth and challenge old-school higher education tradition and publication ideologies to posit a voice for a more democratically minded engaged approach.
There is a brief but fantastic “interchapter” between the second and third section on specific skills from the kind folks at Imagining America – honest, useful stuff in a few short pages.

The final section is dedicated to walking the talk by providing opportunity for direct voice. Sylvia Gale challenges us with discussion but most importantly a tool to use for ourselves and with our students to get them to slow down and connect to what they truly want. There is nothing wrong with a goal such as “I want to be a full professor” but what Gale helps us do is to deconstruct that desire and then look at the intersecting pieces that make up what is behind that goal. It is a question of intentionality. Intentionality is about space. Space is useful in directing sustained engagement energy. Space is useful in addressing the role of power and privilege. My guess is that the readers will put this particular chapter into practice as a self-correcting tool. While there are several chapters in this final section, four are worth particular mention: Chris Dixon and Alexis Shotwell offer direct advice on how to maintain an activist mentality while in graduate school with balance and creativity. This is useful stuff for faculty to read lest we forget what the crazy juggling act of graduate school is like. Ali Colleen Neff takes us even further down this colorful rabbit hole. The final two articles, one by Damien M. Schnyder and one by Amanda Jane Graham conclude the text with stories of their deeply personal work. Exceptionally well written, they are examples of this new scholarship, not the dry dusty road stuff, but the living American engaged scholarship and without going over the top provide perfect examples of the type of real work that pushes way past “do-goodism” into honest connection and usefulness to those connected.

In summary, this is a highly useful volume on several levels: It works as a reference guide; it is directly practical with regard to teaching today’s graduate student; and there is clear example of what successful engaged scholarship artifacts look like from today’s emerging scholars. That said, the biggest room in the house is the room for improvement. Specifically I was surprised a few voices were not included, most glaringly, I would say, KerryAnn O’Meara, who is such a modern champion, and while referred to and cited, her original voice would have added strength, as would that of Dwight Giles and Sarena Seifer. This concern aside, the editors are to be congratulated for this well-articulated and much needed volume.

References


Institutionalizing Community Engagement in Higher Education: The First Wave of Carnegie Classified Institutions identifies a renewed purpose for higher education at the turn of the 21st century. The editors explain that, as the century opened, U.S. colleges and universities “increasingly turned to community engagement as a natural evolution of their traditional missions of service to recognize ties to their communities along with their commitments to the social contract between society and higher education” (p. 1). Community Engagement provides an essential foundation and institutional framework for universities and colleges to both define and measure their impact as change agents, not merely analyzing, but intentionally seeking to affect, social change in the 21st century.

It is in this context that a new classification for Community Engagement was extended through the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The elective (voluntary) classification was first offered in 2006 (and again in 2008 and 2010; the most recent invitation to participate was extended in 2015). This unique classification involves data collection and documentation of relevant aspects of an individual university’s mission, identity, and commitments to community engagement. Although participation requires substantial effort (it is not a task to be taken lightly), the elective classification is not an award; rather, it is an evidence-based documentation of institutional practice to be used to assess the university’s role—and higher education’s role—in affecting community. The Carnegie classification is part of a larger call, in other words, that puts the onus on institutions of higher learning to contribute to the public good.

Institutionalizing Community Engagement comprises 10 chapters, each of which contributes to a better understanding of the then-new classification by addressing different qualities and challenges that surface in the applications submitted by institutions that earned the inaugural elective classification. The overall effect is to identify correlations, offer insights, and reflect on long-term and prospective transformation.

Setting the context for the exchange, Chapter 1, “Carnegie’s New Community Engagement Classification: Affirming Higher Education’s Role in Community” provides an overview of the history and origins of the classification itself. A. Driscoll highlights the intentional emphasis in the Carnegie framework, as well as the focus on community engagement as curricular engagement, outreach and partnerships, or both (as was the case for the first wave of classifications). In her purview of the various campuses, Driscoll identifies common areas yet to be explored—including assessment, promotion and tenure policies, and communication and collaboration with community (p. 9–11). Many of these same issues continue to be identified as gaps for further research and development—and thus it is of little surprise that fellow contributors to the monograph address each of these challenges in more detail. To the authors’ credit (and presumed satisfaction), significant work has been done since 2009 to address various aspects of these challenges.

Assessment is especially tricky. In A. Driscoll’s survey of institutions, she found that assessment of community engagement was “in dire need of development. Even the simple tracking and recording of engagement activities,” she acknowledges,

1 The framework has changed since the inaugural wave of Carnegie classified institutions. Beginning with the 2010 classification, campuses needed to provide evidence in both Curricular Engagement and Outreach and Partnerships in order to be classified. In 2006 and 2008, however, campuses could choose to be classified in one area or in both. For a listing of 2010 and 2015 community engagement classified institutions, see http://nerche.org/images/stories/projects/Carnegie/2015/2010_and_2015_CE_Classified_Institutions_revised_1_11_15.pdf.

2 Two publications are worth noting because, as is the case with the collective essays under review here, both are reports that result from collaborative efforts to identify “best practices” in responding to the call to contribute to the public good through community engagement. Kellogg Foundation (2002) and National Center for the Public Policy and Higher Education (2008).

3 Indeed, in the concluding chapter, the editors return to areas that were and continue to be identified as challenging, including the authenticity and reciprocity in community partnerships and validating and documenting such partnerships for the benefit of faculty rewards; a revisit to and revision of (in some cases) the language of engagement; and—not surprisingly—assessment.
“appeared to be difficult to maintain with a systematic institution-wide process” (p. 10). A. Furco and W. Miller dig deeper into the challenges of assessment in Chapter 5, “Issues in Benchmarking and Assessing Institutional Engagement.” In their survey of the first wave of classified institutions, the authors discover that the tools of assessment vary widely by institution. Regardless of the approach used to conduct an assessment, the process of assessment is invaluable in setting the university on the right path toward the development of institutional goals and strategic plans for community engagement. Furco and Miller observe that, “Assessment must be coupled with action planning, whereby the information garnered from the assessment is used strategically to make decision that can advance community engagement at the institution” (p. 53).

Part of the problem is that institutional impact can be experienced internally, as well as in community. The characteristics and choices of institutional leaders; the role of advancement and other offices such as extended learning, in providing the necessary resources; and the ways in which organization theory can help to maximize institutional understandings are three areas addressed by respective contributors to the volume. For example, in Chapter 2, “Leading the Engaged Institution,” the authors assert that advancing engagement requires staying on message as well as setting institutional direction through strategic planning and employee evaluation processes, for example. A wide variety of organizational structures exist to promote community engagement in higher education; no single structure seems to be better than another. However, Sandmann and Plater assert that leaders who are personally committed to the values inherent in a community-engaged university are far more likely to steer their institutions authentically toward that mission. Personal mission is as important, if not more important, than dominant, executive leadership of the university mission. “By engaging themselves, leaders engage their whole institution” (p. 15). Moreover, effective leadership cuts across the campus, not top-down. “Truly engaged universities have leaders in many roles, all of whom can interact with a shared commitment because they are also personal commitments” (p. 23).

The role of campus leadership in defining an “engagement culture” and an “engagement brand” is emphasized in other contributions to the volume as well. Citing supporting research, C.H. Thornton and J.J. Zuiches observe that institutional culture plays a significant role in a university’s commitment to public service and engagement, as well as in garnering the commitment of its organizational members. (Chapter 8, “After the Engagement Classification: Using Organization Theory to Maximize Institutional Understandings”). In “Engagement and Institutional Advancement” (Chapter 7), D. Weerts and E. Hudson assert that by redefining institutional organization (and organizational culture) through a lens that considers the “bigger picture,” traditional university advancement practices are being reconsidered in light of the new emphasis on community engagement. The “engagement brand,” they argue, has been leveraged to increase both private philanthropic and public legislative and state funding. In their survey of the Carnegie institutions, they found that internal financial commitment was matched by fundraising and marketing efforts. Weerts and Hudson reiterate that campus leadership—and campus presidents, in particular—may be “the most important marketing tools to shape the civic identities” of their respective institutions. Presidential communication, they argue, “is critical to reinforce the engagement brand” (p. 72). Weerts and Hudson conclude that the prospective benefits of collaboration between leaders of community engagement and the advancement offices on their respective campuses are “enormous.” Whether this relationship is as potentially fruitful as the authors suggest, they demonstrate that the Carnegie classification has played an undeniable role in helping institutions of higher education assess institutional impact across the campus. But even when institutions demonstrate institutional commitment, what is engagement without community? “Creating a productive, healthy, and sustainable partnership is hard work and time-consuming,” asserts C. Beere, who sets out to discover the results of partnership-related data. In “Understanding and Enhancing the Opportunities of Community-Campus Partnerships” (Chapter 6), Beere describes the fact that partnerships vary widely, and that in the first wave of Carnegie classified institutions, these partnerships were affected by the university’s history, size, mission, and overall nature; areas of expertise; and demographics of the neighborhood. With respect to best practices, Beere observes that genuine partnerships begin in community. “In determining which partnerships to establish or embrace, campuses should consider the significance of the problem that will be addressed and the resources and commitment needed to make a meaningful impact” (p. 61).

With respect to community partners, Beere's
recommendations are slightly less salient. She suggests that the university’s focus on generating knowledge implies that the partner should be “open to accommodating such interest and participation in work alongside campus partners to establish action or engaged research agendas” (p. 62). Increasingly, leaders in community engagement celebrate the recognition that genuinely mutually reciprocal campus-partner relationships involve the shared, co-generation of knowledge: Knowledge originating in community is seen as equally valid (if not valued) as that generated in the academic institution.

This point is echoed in “Rewarding Community-Engaged Scholarship” (J. Saltmarsh, D.E. Giles, Jr., E. Ward and S.M. Buglione). The authors focus on the extent to which engaged universities embed values of community engagement in the institutional reward policies that define faculty roles of teaching, scholarship, and service. Serving as the foundation is the reconceptualization of scholarship to include the scholarship of engagement, which is based on reciprocity and genuine collaboration with community. Essential to best practices is a concrete definition of engaged scholarship; a more integrated conception of scholarship across faculty roles of research, teaching and service; a clear prioritization of reciprocal campus-community relationships; and a reconsideration of “publication” and who is considered a “peer” in the peer review process (p. 34). The faculty rewards system continues to be an issue of utmost concern among Carnegie classified institutions, but as the authors assert, it is a process that demands a culture of engagement—in genuine collaboration with community.

A shift toward “engagement culture” is more likely to be realized as engagement is implemented more widely across higher education, according to B. Holland in “Will it Last? Evidence of Institutionalization at Carnegie Classified Community Engagement Institutions” (Chapter 9). Holland makes the case that community engagement inherently involves others outside academia; the result is that higher education must inevitably “develop new skills and capacities of collaboration and cooperation…” (p. 97). In other words, the process of institutionalizing university-community engagement is in itself leading to cultural and organizational change.

R.G. Bringle and J.A. Hatcher assert that curricular engagement, such as service learning, correlates with a community-engaged university in “Innovative Practices in Service-Learning and Curricular Engagement” (Chapter 4). Acknowledging that many manifestations of civic and community engagement exist, the authors observe that service learning classes are “core components as campus progress beyond traditional models of engagement...[to] develop broader and deeper impact across the campus and within communities” (p. 37).

With the exception of Chapter 4, on service learning, overall the editors give little attention to discussion of democratic engagement and civic learning as core components of a Carnegie-engaged institution. Yet, democracy is central to community engagement. In the first part of the last century, Dewey (1916) asserted that the core mission of the university is civic engagement. Although the inaugural wave of institutions may not have demonstrated the relationship, contemporary literature seems to suggest that subsequent Carnegie classified institutions are indeed likely to be more explicit in their emphasis on and assessment of the university’s civic responsibility (Ramaley, 2000).

The essays in this volume raise as many questions as they answer. To their credit, the editors and authors of Institutionalizing Community Engagement make no false claims: The collection does not pretend to serve as a “how to” guide; rather, as the editors acknowledge in the concluding chapter, the analyses are “only the first step required on the path of recognizing and defining the meaningful and useful best practices [of community engagement] that many desire to know” (p. 100). As each of the essays makes clear, there’s still plenty of work to do! The editors conclude: “What is fairly unknown about the engagement efforts described by classified institutions is who is benefiting the most and the least, whether these engaged efforts are the most efficient way to address community issues and concerns, and whether these efforts are leading to sustained community change” (p. 101).

This collection of essays is invaluable for any institution of higher learning that is either toying with or seriously considering participating in the Carnegie elective classification. Indeed, the essays are equally relevant for any institution of higher learning that is making a new (or renewed) commitment to community engagement, quite apart from the Carnegie classification. Readers eagerly look forward to a successive and updated collection in the series to learn more about the subsequent waves of Carnegie Classified institutions, and the many ways higher education is responding to the call to contribute to the public good and demonstrating a commitment to affect community change in impactful and sustained ways.
References


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