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CALL FOR SPECIAL ISSUE

The *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* invites manuscripts for a special issue of the journal highlighting the contributions of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other minority-serving institutions (MSIs) to the communities they serve.

Manuscripts should be research articles that reflect the impact of community-based programs, or reflective essays on current and emerging trends, issues or challenges encountered when implementing community-based projects. For this issue, there is a particular emphasis on programs that serve diverse urban and rural communities and strategies leveraged to engage faculty and university agents in communities typically underserved.

Abstracts (maximum 500 words) for proposed manuscripts should be submitted by November 10, 2017. Drafts of manuscripts will be due February 23, 2018. Final drafts of manuscripts selected for inclusion in the special issue will be due April 17, 2018. The special issue will be completed for distribution in fall 2018. Submit your manuscripts to jces@ua.edu as a Microsoft Word attachment, following the formatting and style requirements of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. *JCES* is one of two research journals supported by the Engagement Scholarship Consortium (*engagementscholarship.org*). It is a peer-reviewed international journal through which faculty, staff, students, and community partners disseminate scholarly works. *JCES* integrates teaching, research, and community engagement in all disciplines, addressing critical problems identified through a community-participatory process.

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Community engagement is the largest public-private partnership process in existence. It is a grassroots movement that has grown to incorporate governments at all levels, academic and philanthropic institutions, religious, service and non-profit organizations and citizens from all walks of life. As growing political arrogance and inaccessibility fuels an increased polarization of society, we must not lose faith in the power and resilience of an engaged community.

Montana politician-scholar-statesman Daniel Kemmis (1995), an early mentor of mine, wrote: I once heard someone describe what had enabled Athens to make its democratic experiment viable enough for a long enough period that history has never forgotten the lesson. It was not, this student of Athens said, because Athenians agreed about everything; even the relatively narrow circle of those admitted to citizenship disagreed fiercely about all kinds of issues, both domestic and foreign. Rather, democracy took root and flourished in Athens because, on most issues, citizens taught themselves to act and speak “as if they cared more about Athens than they cared about winning” (p. 198).

JCES not only seeks to understand how and why a diversity of caring partners can help strengthen communities but we also seek to make all those voices heard. The contributors to this issue bring that sentiment to life.

In this issue’s lead article, Susan Goldberg and Camille O’Connor at Duquesne University examine the growing need for trauma-informed community development—how to deal with the abuse, mental health issues, and failures in the larger society. They discuss how, with assistance and facilitation, traumatized people created existential meaning and empowerment in their lives. They discuss how individuals’ stories “emerged from larger societal processes, such as racism, discrimination, loss of community, and other impacts of root shock” (p. 9). They also share the stirring impact of this work in the historic Pittsburgh community known as The Hill on their students.

John Diaz and his colleagues from North Carolina State University take on the complex issue of military-based partnerships for landscape-scale conservation. Using an evaluative framework combining climate, processes, people, policies, and resources, they document how a project metamorphosed into a partnership that leveraged preexisting relationships while simultaneously forging new linkages among all partners to create a diverse partnership that ensured success.

Stephanie Jackson and her colleagues in Albuquerque, New Mexico, address policy at a community level while documenting the power of coalitions to enable social change leading to the creation of a statewide absence policy for expecting and parenting students.

Andrew Hatala and his team, working in Saskatchewan, move us down in scale to examine the interpersonal skills required for successful community-engaged scholarship, and they bring meaning to the words of Diamantopoulos and Usiskin (2014): “We learned quickly that the ‘community’ researched was not a community at all. It was a field of conflicting interests, values, and social forces, neither cohesive nor coherent.” By humanizing the communities and groups they worked with by practicing diplomacy they were able to “…navigate the terrain of social and moral politics that unfold[ed]” (p. 79).

Human migration leads to challenges, opportunities, and sometimes conflict. Connie Clark and Bernita Missal of Bethel University immerse us in the cooperative learning environment of Somali emigrants in Minnesota, and demonstrate how building trust is a slow process of “respect, honor and cultural humility” and how working with children opens the hearts and minds of adults.

Geraint Osborne and Shauna Wilton from the University of Alberta, Augustana Campus, continue...
our ongoing examination of the responsibilities of academic researchers and practitioners as public intellectuals. They conclude:

Academics have a responsibility to conduct research, demonstrate to the public the relevance of research for public policy and to criticize irresponsible or harmful government policy that ignores the evidence provided by research. This responsibility can be realized through teaching, but also more broadly through professing in the media, whether it is international, national, or local in scope (p. 78).

With current debate about the adequacy of access to health care academic health centers under constant pressure to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs, there are no common metrics for evaluating their community engagement. Karen Vitale and her diverse team of academics and practitioners share their two-phase model that identifies and maps “…current community engagement efforts, identify institutional resources and potential gaps in order to set strategic community engagement goals for the future, and describe their community engagement efforts to internal and external stakeholders (p. 82).

Margaret Miltenberger and her colleagues from the University of Virginia Extension Service made an important discovery in their research—that involvement in engagement scholarship carries over into later life. They write: “…as the length of the time period volunteers served for one organization in college increased, the more likely they were to give service later in life, value giving service to others in need, and believe they could make a difference in their community” (p. 91).

Cynthia Gordon da Cruz at St. Mary’s College of California presents a most provocative examination of the good we purport to do for communities. She presents a teaching case that “…can serve as a pedagogical device for supporting post-secondary students in questioning their assumptions and thinking critically about inequities. The case is a tool for shifting thinking away from deficit-based ideas, such as ‘social problems exist in needy communities,’ toward asset-based ideas like ‘social problems exist in democracies that disproportionately fund public education, health care, and other human services, and the impacts of these democratic problems are often most readily seen in predominantly racial minority and low-income communities.”” (p. 101).

The Chicago Conservation Corps recruits, trains, and supports a network of volunteers interested in leading sustainable community-based service projects. Kristen Pratt of the Chicago Academy of Sciences describes a community-based participatory action research project that evaluates the effectiveness and future of the program.

Denise Boston, Phil Weglarz and Batya Ross recognize that “families who live in socioeconomically marginalized urban communities face daunting challenges as they attempt to earn an adequate living, negotiate distressed neighborhoods, and raise their children” (p. 120). Their “Playful Thursday” project harnesses the powerful forces of play and the expressive arts to help develop a culturally responsive collaboration.

Jennifer Marshall and colleagues from the University of South Florida invoke the spirit of Aldo Leopold’s land ethic and demonstrate how community gardens are “…hubs of community engagement; they provide opportunities to interact with neighbors and contribute to the development of community assets” (p. 139).

Our final contributors are Naomi Lumutenga and her international colleagues who describe the challenges that women face regarding menstrual hygiene management and the need to address it in order to keep Ugandan girls and women teachers in school and at work. They document a community learning process that combines entrepreneurial skills with a needs assessment and education that battles the twin forces of social stigmas and illiteracy.

Daniel Kemmis (1995) reminds us that “…community is not a commodity…. Regardless of what it is called, the assumption of one’s own responsibility for making community happen is its own reward…. And as it is true that without this assumption of responsibility, community itself cannot occur outside of the person, it is equally true that without the more subjective experience of this engagement of responsibility, the human wholeness that community promises must also remain incomplete” (pp. 199–200).

JCES is here to help you make that happen.

References


It was the day of the semester I have come to dread in my service-learning class, the day in which my college students visit the public elementary school students with whom they will collaborate to design a playground at the school. This day is usually the favorite of my students—it’s the day that class comes alive for them, when all the playground safety standards they’ve learned coalesce into meaning when they realize how the standards can be used to create a safe, fun, accessible playground. My students meet the children and catch the sparks of energy and imagination they share so freely, and leave the school with excitement to forge ahead with the creative process of playground design.

I dread this day because without ever coming out and saying so, if a group of people walks into an elementary school classroom and asks the children inside to share their worlds of play, and their dreams for a better play space, they in essence promise that some day, the playground will be completed.

I have been at this slow work, of collaborating with local public schools to update and modernize playgrounds, for almost 20 years, long enough to have many successes, and to see that my dream of a satisfactory play space for every child in this community is nearing fruition. But also long enough to have experienced many failures, and to know that despite my best efforts, sometimes, delivering a new playground is a slow process—slow enough that many children who shared their hopes and dreams of play have either left the school or graduated before we were able to deliver one.

On this simultaneously exciting and dreaded day, my students and I were brought into a third-grade classroom to talk play—and we did for awhile. We were getting ready to leave when one of the boys in the class said, “Wait—do we get to hear all y’all’s names?”

“How about just five of them?” the teacher helpfully suggested.

“Oh, okay,” the boy said, and he pointed at one of my female students and said, “What’s your name?” When she answered, he gave her a thousand-watt smile and said, “Oh, that’s a pretty name.”

My students laughed a low rumble in response—my female student was beautiful and this third-grade boy (we’ll call him Jim) was obviously flirting.

“What’s your name?” he asked another pretty woman enrolled in my class.

As she answered, I thought to myself, I can see where this is going—five of the women in my class are going to be asked this question—and Jim had many women to pick from among my students. Unlike engineering courses in which I was enrolled as a student, the biological engineering course I teach today has 55% women enrolled. So much of the sexism and discrimination I observed and endured has erased itself in the 30-year period in which I have transitioned from engineering student to the most senior member of my faculty. And erased isn’t the right word—I am one person in a tribe of people, men and women, who have fought to make engineering a more humane, just, and accessible profession.

Jim surprised me, though—he next asked the tallest student in my class, an African-American man standing in the back, what his name was. Trey laughed in his typical self-deprecating way and told Jim his name. Trey was an instant superhero in that class—which in a way, is so unfair, being instantly thrust into a role model position when you didn’t ask for it. But for Jim and the rest of the third graders in this class, Trey was LSU—Trey was a student who looked just like them. Trey turned the university less than 10 miles from this school from an abstract idea into a possibility.

I have come to the uncomfortable belief that the African-American men in my classroom represent miracles—and I know that my feeling, in a way, is so unfair. But the mountain that an
African-American man has to climb to get into college in Louisiana is formidable, because at every step of the way, so many situations and ideas and laws and institutions scream that black lives don't matter. Louisiana boasts the highest incarceration rate in the world, and African-American men are at ground zero of this ongoing travesty.

Meanwhile, Jim had asked a fourth student, a male, his name, and was coming up on his last query. He turned to a student almost behind him and innocently asked,

“What’s your name?”

At these words, every adult in the room took a nervous breath and held it. Jim had chosen the one member of my class of obvious Middle Eastern descent, a student who is Muslim. We were 19 days into Trump's presidency and in the midst of the president’s attempts to bar people from seven majority Muslim countries from entering the United States—and all the adults knew it.

“My name is Abdullah,” my student answered.

“What is it?” Jim asked, and the adults continued to hold their breath as Abdullah repeated his name.

“Hi-i-i,” Jim responded, drawing out his greeting and shining his thousand-watt smile on Abdullah. Abdullah smiled back while the rest of us relaxed and emitted half-relieved, half-honest laughter. We turned to go, and as we filed out of the room, Jim jumped up, ran over to Abdullah, and grabbed him in a bear hug. Abdullah smiled widely and hugged Jim back.

During this two-minute span, I felt hope for the first time since election night 2016. Because meeting and greeting and conversing and learning to understand people different from us is America. Because Black Lives Matter. Because even as we have to continually fight for people to gain access to professions, or college, or playgrounds, the concepts of access and equality are the backbone of America. Because even though these battles are long and slow, and will continue to be for the foreseeable future, those of us who toil in the trenches of our communities—and we are many—will continue to act with gritty, relentless resilience.

The articles in this issue represent stories of our communities and work being done throughout the world to lift all voices and all lives. I hope that you enjoy them and find ways to put them to use in your communities.
Voices in the Hill: Stories of Trauma and Inspiration
Susan G. Goldberg and Camille O’Connor

Abstract
Narrative interviews documenting individual and community trauma in the Hill District of Pittsburgh emerged from a capstone undergraduate community engagement psychology course that was a joint project between Duquesne University and FOCUS Pittsburgh. The interview project, which we gave the name Voices in the Hill, sought life stories and existential meaning-making of people involved with the Hill District of Pittsburgh, a formerly flourishing African-American community now mired in poverty due to a juncture of sociological, historical, and political forces. Themes that emerged from the interviews included abuse, mental health issues, and failures of the larger society. With the facilitation of FOCUS Pittsburgh, we discuss how these traumatized people created existential meaning and empowerment in their lives. We explore how their individual stories emerged from larger societal processes such as racism, discrimination, and loss of community, as well as other impacts of “root shock.” We also share the moving impact of the work on students.

Introduction
The ongoing loss of African-American life and potential to violence, incarceration, police brutality, and racist terrorism is again bringing America’s deep racial wounds to the forefront of cultural consciousness. African-Americans are crying out, “Black lives matter,” and an increasing awareness among the mainstream of how much Americans need to hear this anguished plea. Fifty years after the Civil Rights Movement, inequality, while less overt, is ever more insidious (Alter, Stern, Granot, & Balcetis, 2016; Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan-Seferin, Brief & Bradley 2016; Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2002). And yet the dominant American narrative often fails to name and address the ongoing symptoms that tell us that the injustices of past years are not gone, but have taken new forms. Media satirist and critic Jon Stewart in his critique of news coverage of the Baltimore riots following Freddie Gray’s death, noted criticisms that the mayor’s declaration of a state of emergency was delayed, but added that—considering the city’s high rates of poverty, unemployment, drug and crime issues, and lack of accessible education, housing, and resources—probably the emergency should have been declared in the 1970s: “…And this seems to indicate the issue in our city emergency alert systems. There appear to be only two points on the scale: normal and on fire” (retrieved from https://www.vox.com/2015/4/29/8515405/baltimore-riots-jon-stewart). A long-growing and long-unspoken discontent builds in many American cities; we are ready to burst. As we face this harsh truth of visions unfulfilled, Langston Hughes’s poetic contemplation “What Happens to a Dream Deferred?” speaks anew with brilliant and brutal prescience:

Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load.
Or does it explode? (Hughes, 1990).

This paper joins this context and conversation through an exploration of stories told by women and men, largely African-American, who grew up in or have some meaningful connection to the Hill District community, a collection of neighborhoods in Pittsburgh. “The Hill” has been home to working-class immigrants from various backgrounds and eventually became a residential and cultural center of Pittsburgh’s African-American population. The stories come from interviews conducted by Dr. Goldberg, along with students in her senior undergraduate Psychology and Community Engagement course in 2014, in collaboration with a community agency, FOCUS Pittsburgh, and its director, Father Paul Abernathy.
History

This work must be understood taking into consideration the major shifts in African-American life in the 20th century, and those shifts' far-reaching impacts: The Great Migration, the Civil Rights Movement, and so-called urban renewal. The Great Migration, a gradual mass exodus of African-Americans from their ancestral South to northern cities, occurred between 1915 and 1970. Isabel Wilkerson (2010) refers to it as “perhaps the biggest underreported story of the twentieth century” (p. 9). They moved because, after the failed promises of the Civil War and Reconstruction, many African-Americans in the South had poor and demoralizing prospects for earning a living (either sharecropping, a situation often not much freer than slavery, or the inability to pursue their skills and professions due to segregation), and they also literally feared for their lives under the constant threat of lynching. Under the brutality of Jim Crow laws of segregation, the South was “a caste system as hard and unyielding as the red Georgia clay” (Wilkerson, p. 8). So many African-Americans left, six million of them, radically altering the demographic, social, political, and cultural landscape of America along with their own individual lives. Wilkerson notes that we can see the Great Migration’s massive impact in terms of urban geography (the configuration of cities, the structure of black and white neighborhoods, suburbanization and white flight, etc.). We also see its impact in terms of culture, from the influence of jazz and the blues on American popular music to the influence of African-American intellectuals, artists, activists, and other anonymous artists, workers, and professionals that likely would not have existed without this major cultural shift.

Pittsburgh was one such northern city to which African-Americans emigrated, and the Hill District was one such community in which they settled and began to build their new social and cultural lives. The Hill District had been a community of various marginalized groups, including African-Americans, immigrants, Jewish-Americans, and Lebanese-Americans. With segregation limiting where African-Americans could live, the Hill became a self-sufficient world for African-Americans. While this unfortunately prevented a mingling of cultures, it also allowed for a powerful Hill neighborhood cohesiveness and functionality. Between the 1920s and 1950s, the Hill District was one of the most vibrant African-American neighborhoods in the United States, considered to be a place a traveler must see between Chicago and Harlem. People came from far and wide to see the jazz performances. One of the great American playwrights, August Wilson, grew up in the Hill and wrote extensively about its world. The neighborhood had a prominent newspaper and a Negro League baseball team (Fullilove, 2016). Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay even famously called the Hill “The Crossroads of the World” (Klein, 2015).

Yet life in the neighborhood changed dramatically with urban renewal in the 1950s, when federal money was available to “improve” neighborhoods (Fullilove, 2016; Pritchett, 2003). Urban renewal began in full force in the United States with the passage of the Housing Act of 1949 and the Housing Act of 1954, which gave cities federal funds to acquire perceived slums, which were then given to private developers for housing redevelopment, eventually with the incentive of Federal Housing Authority-backed mortgages. Pittsburgh began this process in 1950. While the city had some success from these changes, especially to improve its reputation as a dirty and economically depressed city in the wake of decades of industry, some aspects of urban redevelopment were disastrously unsuccessful.

The all-white Pittsburgh City Council deemed the Hill inadequate and radically altered it. It demolished the entire lower Hill, the area where most of the retail existed. The bulldozing of the Lower Hill in 1955, for the building of the Civic Arena for the Penguins hockey team (completed in 1961 and now demolished), displaced 8,000 people and 400 businesses and destroyed a whole neighborhood in one fell swoop. The position of this arena and traffic rerouting also left the Hill even more isolated from the rest of Pittsburgh, and this isolation continues, though official segregation has ended.

As in Pittsburgh, throughout the country, urban renewal most often damaged and displaced the neighborhoods of poor minorities, leading novelist James Baldwin to rename urban renewal “Negro Removal” (Fullilove, 2016; Graham, 2008; Mossman, 1989). Mindy Fullilove (2016), a psychiatrist who has studied and worked extensively with struggling African-American urban neighborhoods, estimates that 1,600 African-American communities were similarly and catastrophically bulldozed throughout the peak years of urban renewal. While this restructuring was supposed to remove “blight,” much of what was destroyed were vital and functioning communities, thriving in
unique ways and home to rich cultural lives (Scott, 2004). With the process of urban renewal and changing attitudes toward other minorities, the minority Hill residents who could move (e.g., Jews, Italians, Irish, Syrians) left the Hill and moved elsewhere. Some displaced people were moved into housing projects, which became crime-filled and without the social threads that used to tie the Hill together.

After the displacements and loss of people, the Hill culture was decimated. Retail had mostly disappeared. The 1968 riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. seemed to be an explosion of anger and frustration by those left behind. They resulted in property damage and a high arrest toll. As did African-Americans in hundreds of other U.S. cities, Hill residents turned to violence and looting that left parts of the Hill in ruins, as if offering the loudest cry of anger, grief, and despair from a shattered community that knew what had been done to it and many others, and that felt powerless in the face of lost dreams. The hopelessness was not without foresight: Clay Risen (2009) describes how the riots signaled an already-shifting tide and the end of the liberal visions of the 1960s. He notes that inner-city America, while “once a problem to be solved,” after the riots “became a threat to be contained.” White flight steadily occurred, and “security for the suburbs replaced opportunity for blacks” (p. 250). The Pittsburgh riots resulted in the closure of the remaining retail establishments in the Hill and it becoming a food desert (no grocery store) for the next 30 years (Dubowitz, Ghosh-Dastidar, Cohen, Beckman, Steiner, Hunter, Flórez, Huang, Vaughan, Sloan, Zenk, Cummins, & Collins, 2015), the destruction following the riots became the nail in the coffin for the Hill District.

Understandably, these dramatic and devastating changes have a significant psychological effect on those whom they shake. Fullilove developed the concept of “root shock” to capture the traumatic response that people experience when their world is torn down around them, as in a tree falling down and its roots being pulled up. In the words of Fullilove (2016), root shock is “the traumatic stress reaction to the destruction of all or part of one’s emotional ecosystem” (p. 11). Her concept of root shock situates our psychological lives within meaningful places, revealing the intimate ways we extend into and are impacted by our environments; it disrupts the mainstream American sense of people as independent actors who, if sick, are ill only with problems within themselves.

By repositioning our understanding of sickness and health, root shock illuminates the profound interconnectedness of individuals and their communities and society. The trauma from being so uprooted can last for a person’s lifetime and even can span generations. Fullilove (2016) argues that the contemporary crises within African-American inner cities—“drug addiction, the collapse of the black family, and the rise in incarceration of black men” (p. 20)—all cannot be understood without understanding the far-reaching and devastating impact of those urban renewal bulldozers in the 1950s. In the media in recent years, we especially have seen issues of police violence and racist attacks, and the rage and grief of protesters and rioters. These are all expressions of this long-brewing trauma, as well as the pleas by the African-American community and others for understanding of and collaboration with African-American communities, considering the sociohistorical, economic, political, cultural, and emotional context.

The Hill is a painful example of this community trauma and root shock. The breakdown of community that followed the destruction of its neighborhoods has been devastating. In her own interviews with people who grew up in the Hill District, Duquesne University psychology faculty member Eva Simms (2008) documents this decline, noting the full functionality of the neighborhood prior to urban renewal: While it was segregated and residents still struggled with poverty and darker aspects of culture like drugs, violence, and prostitution, these realities were “held in check by the neighborhood community” (p. 84). There was a sense of interpersonal reliance, a network of adults who shared supportive and meaningful relationships and who watched out for all of the children. With urban renewal, though, the neighborhood experienced adverse effects from displacement and loss of connecting relationships. Families moved often, and the sense of safe belonging was replaced by turf wars between residents of various areas. Public life became associated with unsettledness, danger, and violence. The wide circle of adults watching out for each other and their children deteriorated, leaving an experience of “every man for himself” (Simms, 2008, pp. 85–86). Although large-scale organized gang activity has declined since the 1980s, poverty, drug use, and crime—including higher rates of gun violence and murder due to smaller-scale turf wars—continue to make residents feel unsafe in this new world, bereft of a stable intergenerational community.
Research Process

The research project was a joint project of FOCUS Pittsburgh and Dr. Goldberg, with the support of Duquesne University. It was completed in a senior-level semester-long seminar, a community engagement course required for psychology majors before graduation.

In the first half of the semester, the students read and studied how to be present with another human being and how to witness and honor each person’s story. They read about interviews of Holocaust survivors and earlier Voices in the Hill interviews. They practiced how to be a “vulnerable observer,” someone who brings affect into the sharing of research (Behar, 1996; Goodman & Meyers, 2012; Greenspan, 1998; Josselson, 2013). The process of teaching reflexivity to the undergraduate students through this course is being addressed in another article (Goldberg & Abrams, in preparation).

FOCUS Pittsburgh recruited participants, people currently or previously involved with FOCUS Pittsburgh in some way, even as minor a connection as coming in for a cup of coffee. Many people volunteered to be interviewed by a group of strangers to share stories of their lives. The interview teams consisted of two to three students, along with either Dr. Goldberg or a teaching assistant. Each interviewee met with the team and signed an Informed Consent form before participating in the one- to two-hour tape-recorded interview. Each student had a role in the interview, some asking introductory questions, others asking more in-depth questions. The interviewers used an Interview Guide with open-ended questions; the goal was to learn about participants’ most meaningful life experiences. The focus on meaning-making is based on theories of existentialism, which argue that there is no inherent meaning and we as humans must create meaning in our lives (Sartre, 1943/1993; Yalom, 1980). All participants’ names in these and other articles are pseudonyms chosen by participants, students, or Dr. Goldberg.

The study was conducted utilizing a narrative research approach, with an underlying existential epistemology (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006; van Manen, 2014). The goal of the research was to understand the stories and experiences of the people interviewed (their narratives), while seeking to understand their life worlds in a deep and powerful way. The leisurely pace of the interview process was to provide interviewees space to tell their stories of meaning and trauma in their own time and in their own way. Some life stories were chronological; others moved from the most traumatic experiences through other traumas. By using participants’ actual words, rather than our interpretation of their words, we capture their worlds, in a “hermeneutics of faith” (Josselson, 2004; Orange, 2011).

The interview teams recorded the interviews, which the student teams transcribed. The class then chose important excerpts, arranged according to these themes: childhood, individual and family suffering and trauma, societal suffering, how people found meaning, those still struggling to find meaning, and the role of FOCUS Pittsburgh. The class then presented excerpts by theme as a performance, in a public reading of the stories at an open space near FOCUS Pittsburgh, with a variety of people attending, including some interviewees, other Hill District community members, and members of the Duquesne University community. The hope for the public reading was to make the stories real, alive, and transformative. It was hoped to be even more powerful when the readers were people who looked different from the original storytellers. Performative research seeks to take research out of the academic world and bring it directly to the public in a live, creatively developed performance (Denzin, 2010; Gergen & Gergen, 2011).

The reading was presented on a rainy April evening. Students, audience members, and the FOCUS Pittsburgh volunteers helped set up the late-arriving tent and chairs, and the reading took place with grass turning into mud amid a noisy cacophony of hammering (setting up the tent) and pouring rain. Nonetheless, witnessing the public reading—in the rain—was intensely moving for both the Hill District and Duquesne University communities and an experience that bonded the diverse communities together.

This project was supported by Duquesne University, with significant attendance by university members at the public reading, extensive contributions of food to food drives for FOCUS Pittsburgh, and important financial assistance. The interviews and public reading are part of Duquesne University’s increasing emphasis on community engagement, particularly with the Hill District. This process reflects national trends of university engagement with the greater community of which universities are a part. Duquesne University is situated between downtown Pittsburgh and the Hill. Duquesne’s increasing efforts to foster meaningful community relationships with its Hill neighbors recognizes how the needs of communities have become ever more undeniable, and the isolation of universities ever more untenable. Conducted with the sensitivities
of the methods of phenomenological and qualitative inquiry, these interviews are a vital example of the process of getting to know the life worlds and experiences of Duquesne’s neighbors: the interviews foster entry into the intimate lives of individuals who grew up and made their lives in the Hill District across several decades. Yet, when heard within sociohistorical contexts, like a Greek chorus, they also reach beyond the level of individual African-American lives—they speak to the lives of African-Americans in Pittsburgh, and they speak to the lives of African-American communities throughout America. They are a celebration and honoring of black voices, both their anguish and their resilience. Ultimately, they express the dynamic shapes and textures of a community as it emerges through personal narratives. They also point a way forward for cities seeking healing and the creation of vibrant urban spaces that honor history and community.

Trauma-Informed Community Development

FOCUS Pittsburgh and the Hill community had been concerned about individual and community trauma. Dr. Goldberg and Father Abernathy, the director of FOCUS Pittsburgh, developed this community engagement project to hear stories of individual and community trauma as well as themes, if they emerged, of healing. The findings were then shared with the community in writing and performance. Another goal was to involve the students in a community engagement project that would seek to understand deeply the lives of people in the Hill.

We understood that the Hill community as a whole and those like it are traumatized, and that trauma must be appreciated as a group wound if we ever truly hope to address our social problems. The interviews were conducted to start to understand, hear, and honor the trauma. While the interview process was underway, FOCUS Pittsburgh developed the concept of Trauma-Informed Community Development and started implementing it in the Hill. It focuses on developing a neighborhood, taking into account the community members’ needs for healing on many levels: health, emotional, physical, educational, relational, and spiritual. Development under this model is not just about creating buildings but about healing a community.

The Narratives of the Hill

This larger context of African-American history in this country and in Pittsburgh speaks through the individual life stories people shared with us and the students. These individual narratives speak several major themes: relational trauma within the African-American community created by drug abuse and violent and violating interpersonal relationships, mental health issues and mental health care in the lives of traumatized African-Americans, a larger sociohistorical failure of Pittsburgh and America to African-American communities, and the possibility of empowerment for disenfranchised people through engaging with the community and making their own meanings. The participants’ names have been changed, in addition to some details of their lives, in order to protect their privacy.

Relational Trauma: Violence, Substance Abuse

Many people in the Hill District have experienced multiple traumas, beginning at a young age, due to gang and drug activity; domestic violence; and sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. One participant, a woman in her thirties we call Amanda, captured this pervasive and ongoing traumatic context when she said: “My life is hard. My life has been hard. I don’t know when it’s gonna become happy.” Tragically, these traumas often seem first to occur at the hands of primary caregivers, creating lasting wounds and ongoing issues of trust. Additionally, all of the participants’ traumas were influenced by the abuse of alcohol and other drugs. A middle-aged man we call Gerald provides a potent example of this chronic prevalence of substance abuse and its impact. His father drank heavily; he himself is an alcoholic and said he once went to jail countless times in one year for fighting with girlfriends. His son is now in prison for selling drugs.

Many of the male participants experienced trauma due to economic and cultural pressures to participate in gangs and drug dealing, leading to high rates of incarceration and failures in fatherhood, first from their own fathers and later as fathers themselves. In describing men’s traumas, a young man, Matthew, explained that the desperate conditions of life in the Hill leave men looking for extra help: “And when it’s not there, you’re forced to go find it. Sometimes when you find it, it’s not the good find, it’s a bad find. And then when you get the bad find, you get incarcerated.” In his own situation, Matthew experienced the trauma of being in prison at the time that one of his children died (even more tragically, he was incarcerated for a crime he claimed he did not commit). It was excruciating for him not to be able to attend her
funeral. Matthew never knew his own father, and his stepfather committed suicide. Despite the seeming hopelessness of this situation, Matthew added: “But you live and you learn and you make mistakes to be the man.” Wendell, another young male participant who also participated in gangs, similarly described a narrative of some hope, as he stopped using and selling drugs when he learned he was having a child.

Male and female participants described the traumas in women’s lives around them as stories interwoven with men’s pain. Some participants described watching their mothers undergo severe beatings and other forms of abuse, or experiencing their own abuse as women in relationships. Tragically, some also described their traumatized mothers then turning and abusing their own children. The trauma was overwhelming and many of these women seemed to be so injured—emotionally and physically—that it was challenging for them at times to care for their own children or protect them from the violent men in their (mother and children’s) lives.

Josiah, a young man, described growing up with domestic violence fueled by his father’s alcohol and drug use. (His father was eventually jailed.) Josiah repeatedly feared for his mother’s life, finding her again and again rendered unconscious by his father’s choking. She lost many jobs because “you can’t go to work with black eyes and lips all swollen.” As she was forced to work all day in an effort to provide for her children, and because of her frequent job loss and the family’s poor living conditions, one of their neighbors called Children and Youth Services, and Josiah and his siblings ended up in foster care. The attacks left his mother without her singing voice. She died at a young age. Amanda also described the fear, pain, and instability of being exposed to domestic violence.

Some participants described experiences of physical and sexual abuse in their childhood homes. Sherry, a middle-aged woman, disclosed for the first time that she had experienced sexual abuse at the hands of her “gangster” father, a man she deeply admired. Other participants described childhood emotional abuse and/or chronic instability. Amanda recounted an erratic schedule and sometimes neglect due to her parents’ excessive drinking. Her mother was verbally abusive. Her father died young. Her brothers were subjected to gang violence. Miranda, a middle-aged woman, also experienced emotional trauma in an unstable family: She had four siblings, all from different fathers. Her own father was addicted to gambling and alcohol. He died when she was 14 years old. Her mother also was an alcoholic. Miranda described herself as “conceived from alcohol,” and her origin story expresses the challenges of people who were meant to love her: Immediately after Miranda was born, her mother tried to give her up for adoption at the hospital. (She was rescued by her grandmother, who brought her home and raised her.) Patti, a middle-aged woman, described her mother’s cruel stance toward her when she became pregnant as a teenager. At her mother’s insistence, Patti underwent a late-term abortion she did not want, during which her mother chastised and shamed her. Patti also described being sexually harassed by her mother’s boyfriends, while her mother never believed her when she told her that they were not good men.

Other participants also described traumatic experiences reoccurring in new forms in their adult lives, expressing the tragedy of traumatic repetition that can make change so difficult. Following her victimization at the hands of her father, Sherry experienced domestic violence in her adult partner relationship. She stayed for 11 years because she wanted her children all to have the same father. But when the man began hitting her children and calling them cruel names, she decided to change her life. She obtained protection from abuse orders, yet endured continued attempts at violence and harassment, including nearly being killed by her ex-husband in front of her son. Sherry also stayed with abusive men at various points to support her, her children, and her drug addiction. Reflecting on her line of relationships with men, beginning with her father, Sherry said, “I was looking for love in all the wrong men.” Miranda’s trauma also continued, as she was raped and, during another traumatic experience, almost murdered when she was spending considerable time around heavy drug and alcohol users. Amanda’s childhood traumas also took new forms in her adulthood: She became an alcoholic like her parents and was sexually assaulted while living at a halfway house. Later she also was violently attacked and left for dead by a friend while they were high on cocaine. Miraculously, a compassionate stranger found her and saved her life.

Some women turned to desperate and painful ways of life as they attempted to support themselves. Sherry worked in prostitution to support her crack addiction, eventually contracting HIV. She said, “My addiction took me places I said I would never go.” Miranda shared a similar story about staying in abusive relationships due to her
need for drugs and alcohol: Men would seem caring and then want to act as her pimp. She also eventually worked as a prostitute.

The traumas of Patti’s life continued into her adulthood, as well. She had her first child at age 19, and her mother proceeded to kick her out to the streets even though the temperature was below zero degrees. Patti lived in abandoned cars and on convenience store snacks for a month, then walked door to door trying to find someone to feed at least her child, even if not her. Nonetheless, Patti tried to continue relating to her mother with integrity and compassion: “I just tried to love my mom regardless of the way she treated me. Just love her the way she is.” Their relationship concluded with trauma as well. Fifteen years ago her mother was murdered by her husband, a man Patti had never trusted, yet she had stayed silent due to her mother’s years of denying his harassment of Patti. Patti’s description of the way he buried her mother’s body, in pieces, and her family’s relief when her mother’s body was found and given proper rest, seems to capture her life’s violence, fragmentation, and longing for peace.

One participant, concerned about the well-being of her young sons growing up in a such a place, poignantly said, “It’s crazy now in this world.”

**Mental Health Issues**

These experiences of chronic traumatic stress contributed to mental health issues for many participants, whether or not they explicitly referred to emotional suffering as mental illness. Many described years fraught with neglect, abandonment, violation, and loneliness, which explained in some way that their later abuse of alcohol and drugs and their tempestuous and violent relationships were means of coping with devastating wounds and losses.

Five participants described experiences of mental health issues, ranging from severe depression and anxiety to psychotic states. Josiah described his experience as a recurring “deep depression.” He periodically pursues psychiatric services and takes medication. He related his depression to his experience of terrifying domestic violence in his childhood household. Miranda spent time in a mental institution to address her mental health issues and drug abuse. Amanda described experiences of chronic stress and anxiety that at one point felt so intense that she attempted suicide. Matthew also described himself as “having mental health issues.” He shared that he often calls a local crisis network to talk to someone and tries not to have knives in his house out of fear of harming himself. He has felt suicidal and experienced seemingly psychotic or dissociative states, during which he acts without awareness and ends up involuntarily committed and disoriented. He described his experiences in the hospital as being “like jail” and often somewhat frightening. He seems to have felt helped by medication at times but also has disliked its effects. After Sherry experienced abusive situations with men, she sometimes would become so overwhelmed that she also checked herself into Western Psychiatric Hospital, Pittsburgh’s primary mental health institution, leaving her children with their father even though he was abusive and dangerous. She characterized these hospitalizations as being for “psychotic episodes.” Like other participants, she disliked her experiences of the hospital (as much as it also served as a source of necessary peace for her), feeling that she was given too much medication that left her “like a zombie.”

Participants also described family members who have experienced mental health crises and these experiences’ impact on them. Amanda’s sister suffers from schizophrenia, which is difficult for Amanda as she sometimes cares for her. A young man named Taylor told how his mother committed suicide after a failed relationship, a tragedy that almost drove Taylor himself to suicide, and which did lead his brother to “go crazy.” Matthew’s stepfather committed suicide.

Some participants also were explicitly aware of and articulate about ways in which the psychiatric field, in diagnosing and treating their symptoms, misses the larger context of the community trauma of urban African-American life. While diagnoses, medication, and the medicalizing of psychological experience may mean to be helpful to suffering people, ultimately it only offers a small piece of the picture. At its most problematic, it can overlook and even perpetuate core issues of isolation, loneliness, and shame.

Of all the participants, Quentin, a middle-aged man, spoke most explicitly about these failures of the mental health system and its medical model in addressing the heart of his suffering and the suffering of others in the Hill community. Quentin is the only white participant in these interviews and he did not grow up in the Hill District. However, in his adulthood he has chosen to spend a great deal of time there. While he has a different sociocultural experience than other participants, his position illuminates a great deal about trauma as a part of the human family, and a great deal about the gifts
and grace that a traumatized community can share when residents recognize and support each other. His interview included powerful descriptions about his choice to devote much of his life to an African-American community. He described how he feels connected to the Hill District, even at home there, because the suffering that he has experienced in his own life resonates with the suffering of many community members. For example, like many participants Quentin described how he “grew up in a very very unstable household” and how he was physically abused by his alcoholic father. He feels deeply supported by the awareness of trauma in the Hill community and the presence of sensitivity and compassion, a kind of attunement that is often absent in other and white American cultural spaces, even though trauma often still exists behind closed doors.

Quentin described these themes of community trauma and social connection poignantly and powerfully as reflected on people’s mental health problems. Quentin has experienced depression for 30 years. He has utilized Western Psychiatric periodically and is on disability. He watched his brother have a nervous breakdown after being drafted for the Vietnam War. Quentin commented on how mental health care is “inadequate to deal with the isolation a lot of us experience,” adding that while medication may help some people manage their pain, “there’s not a cure for loneliness. … Everybody needs love. Everybody needs companionship,” he elaborated. Sherry shared related comments, noting that her most helpful mental health care experience has been psychotherapy, as it offers her the opportunity to talk to and connect with another person meaningfully and tell the painful stories of her life.

In addition to mental health issues, participants also described some physical health issues common to African-American communities, shaped and aggravated by community suffering. Both Nicholas, a man in his fifties, and Amanda talked about diabetes running in their families, with deadly consequences. Amanda also has a sister who suffers from HIV, and Sherry herself contracted HIV.

Failures of Pittsburgh and America Toward African-American Communities

In an even broader sense, some participants also noted that we must understand a sociohistorical context of trauma to appreciate the individual, familial, intergenerational, and cultural traumas of these African-American lives. They described the ways in which Pittsburgh and the larger country have failed African Americans. Some participants, especially older ones, recounted experiences of overt racism. Others described subtler, yet no less traumatic, failures that have devastated them and other African Americans around them and cut off their options. Participants spoke explicitly about these failures as they impacted the Hill District.

Gerald, a middle-aged man, described the pain he felt when he had to move out of the Hill because of urban renewal when he was 13 years old. As he described the trauma that the Hill community experienced during this time, he powerfully said, “They crucified the Hill.” Christopher, an older man, also described the impact of urban renewal on the Hill. Older than Gerald, he lived in the Hill for some years prior to the demolition, displacements, and forced migrations and was able to share memories of how life used to be.

He described how:

You had the community that was involved; you had your neighbor down the street [and] the person across the street from your family. If you were in need, they helped you. They helped each other. Today, people don’t even know each other across the street. When I came up, the preachers walked the streets. They knew people.

As he described how the neighborhood has changed, he recalled gradually seeing fewer people taking part in the community of front porches and streets while witnessing the deterioration of housing. Tragically, he noted that festivities and parades and the mood of creativity and celebration that had flourished in the Hill also disappeared. This unique vitality, functionality, and resilience of the neighborhood was lost when politicians made decisions about the community, missing its integrity and value. Patti also talked about how the Hill changed drastically in the decades after the displacements and bulldozing. She commented on how there used to be many things to do in the Hill, but now such activities are lacking; children end up in trouble due to this void. Businesses and centers of community began shutting down, and “they didn’t rebuild nothing for the kids and that’s when the kids got wild and out of hand.” She added that she wished that developers had built more centers for the community rather than homes because people...
in the neighborhood cannot afford to pay for camp or other recreational activities for their children, and spaces where children and adults can gather are so crucial to community cohesiveness and health. Christopher, an older gentleman, shared painful aspects of the earlier years of segregation, contextualizing the breakdown that was to come. He shared a poignant story of both segregation and kindness:

I remember as a kid something meaningful—I had busted my hand, split it open on a bottle of Coke…. And Passavant Hospital didn't accept blacks, but you were in a black neighborhood. The cops came. My hand was all messed up and they actually took me up there and told them ‘You will stabilize or work on this here boy….’ And they wind up sewing my hand. Not knowing that I was supposed to be kept there, they told my mom to take me home. Well, I catch an infection and the whole nine yards….

The heart of Christopher’s memories is pain from the harsh discriminatory treatment against African Americans: first, segregation, then urban renewal, and the dismissive attitudes toward the health of African-American communities that permitted urban renewal’s destruction to take place in the first place. A younger participant, Wendell, described racism as an ongoing issue for African Americans, as he even recently experienced racial harassment in public schools.

A few older participants additionally described the 1968 riots, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They were children then and explored the confusion in their understanding of themselves and their world as they grappled with questions of “who” destroyed the Hill District. Their stories waver between us/them language, ultimately holding a painful tension between the government’s destructive and abandoning behavior and the self-sabotaging, despairing response of a traumatized community. This is consistent with the findings of Fullilove (2016) and Simms (2008). This tension continues as we face the shattering pain, rage, and hopelessness behind contemporary riots and looting.

In describing the 1968 riots, Christopher talked about the fear and powerlessness that he and others felt as they watched the community descend into chaos and the harsh control of Martial law. He said: “The whole Hill was lit up. They was burning buildings,” and added “You hear ‘America, the free’ and all this they taught in school, but you seen when Martial law steps in that they have the power over you regardless and you have no rights.” Touching on a part of the painful paradox, he said: “We became savages in a sense, as far as I was concerned, because we were the ones doing this to our own self.” At the same time, Christopher spoke of America’s failures to its African-American communities. As the Hill declined, suffering increased. He talked about some older people who were eating cat and dog food to survive. “This happened in a country that has everything. This happens in a country that provides the world with everything. But we could not provide our own people with a decent way of living.” Christopher similarly felt this anger during the Vietnam War and his service. He asked of the U.S. government at the time: “How can you have me fight your war if you are hanging my people and not doing nothing about it?” Nicholas, who was 8 years old at the time of the riots, also commented on the situation’s horror and destruction. He said, “I seen when this Hill went down in flames.” Echoing Christopher’s description of the paradox, he added: “The community never recovered. We hurt ourselves so bad. Anger does that. Frustration…. We hurt the community but I believe that the government had hurt our state of living so much.”

Despite this clear awareness of the suffering that was inflicted on their community, participants continued to express anguished ambivalence about responsibility as they talked about their own individual lives and the lives of their loved ones. In describing the failures of his son’s life, who is in prison for selling drugs, Gerald described all of the things he did for his son to help him live a clean, good life: buying him clothes, helping him learn to read and write, sending him to private school. Reflecting on his son’s falling into risky behaviors nonetheless, Gerald said: “Something didn’t work with that guy. Maybe it was me. That’s the hardest thing—blaming myself for his ills.” In light of everything that many participants, and Gerald himself, so eloquently said about the sociocultural trauma of life in the Hill District, Gerald’s return to self-blame is heartbreaking. Perhaps it is easier to blame yourself in a situation that is so out of personal control; that begins with the cards so formidably stacked against you. The tragedy of Gerald’s son’s life must be understood in the context of sociohistorical forces larger than any single person or relationship.
Empowerment and Creation of Meaning

While participants shared their experiences of trauma and suffering, their interviews also highlighted the possibility of empowerment through community support and love and the opportunity to help others and make one’s own, new meanings. As people who are involved with FOCUS Pittsburgh, many of the participants spoke highly of the nourishing, invigorating, and empowering space that FOCUS Pittsburgh has provided for them. It has allowed them to create chosen family and chosen meanings, even when biological family is broken or nonexistent and larger social and cultural structures are similarly devastated. Their stories highlight how this creative work of empowerment and love facilitates healing at both individual and community levels.

Participants characterized FOCUS Pittsburgh as healing in two major ways: as a source of sanctuary during times of darkness and strife, and as a chance to work and give back to the community. Christopher said that being involved with FOCUS Pittsburgh “gives you some sort of stability within your life.” Taylor referred to it as “the FOCUS Pittsburgh family.” In further redefining family beyond blood ties, he added: “My version of family is people who is there no matter what the situation. No matter what you hear you still give a person a chance. You could trust them, you could bond with them. You could do anything with them, for real. They don’t judge you.”

Amanda spoke simply and beautifully of FOCUS Pittsburgh’s impact on her life as a place of loving peace, and her story shows the power of a welcoming space where one can bring the fullness of oneself and have that held in compassion:

I have many brothers and sisters and I can’t find no support anywhere….I walked past this place one day [FOCUS Pittsburgh] and I was in so much stress and everything and I walked in and asked what kind of place this was and they told me. And they told me I could come in and sit down for awhile. People were volunteering. People came in donating. They gave me food. They gave me coffee. And they kept me warm. And they had an open ear for me. And I’m grateful that I came here.

These simple gestures meant the world to her. She felt less alone, more a part of a community, and thus as if her own existence were not only more bearable, but more meaningful. She sees FOCUS Pittsburgh as providing a unique kind of community home. She said that FOCUS Pittsburgh “has been teaching me how to build” and helping her feel a “foundation.” She added: “There ain’t nothing like your own place. If ya’ll have your own place, don’t let no one destroy your foundation.”

Miranda similarly experiences FOCUS Pittsburgh as a nourishing home. She visits there every day to help herself stay on track with her sobriety. Patti also experienced FOCUS Pittsburgh in this way. For a big milestone birthday, people at FOCUS Pittsburgh threw her a surprise party, the first she ever had in her life. She was overjoyed. She said, “FOCUS Pittsburgh did a lot for me. They let the light shine on me. And I just hope I can let it shine back.” For participants who have had limited connection and care in their lives, and who have endured numerous shattering traumas, these seemingly simple gestures uplift profoundly. Quentin, who spoke so extensively about his debilitating loneliness, described how his relationship with FOCUS Pittsburgh has provided him with a kind of healing that mental health care could never give.

FOCUS Pittsburgh’s support also serves as a source of strength and inspiration for people to work with the community in previously unimaginable ways, meaning that the love increases as it is cultivated and shared. A wide network of people can reap the benefits. Patti commented on this richness: that by allowing her to “focus” on herself and her own wounds and needs, and to heal herself, FOCUS Pittsburgh then allows her to be able to consider helping others. Many of the participants talked about finding meaning through giving back to the community. Quentin said, “It’s an extremely difficult life, and the thing that gives me meaning is my work.” Wendell described how so much of his own fulfillment has come from learning to listen with curiosity to people on their own terms and to help them from that open and attentive space. He has loved helping rebuild houses and giving talks at schools. Matthew spoke similarly, especially naming Father Abernathy, FOCUS Pittsburgh’s director, as a source of inspiration. He spoke of his learning from Father Abernathy, someone who openly listens without overpowering another person with his own agenda. Matthew commented that it is only through this kind of listening that people ultimately can find the space and care for self-discovery. Nicolas felt fulfilled by working with FOCUS Pittsburgh to help homeless people find housing. Miranda also
talked about the benefits of volunteering at FOCUS Pittsburgh.

Many of the participants noted an appreciation for FOCUS Pittsburgh’s open-minded religious orientation, which is Orthodox Christian and welcoming to people of all backgrounds and spiritual walks of life. Echoing earlier themes, Matthew referred to FOCUS Pittsburgh as a “spiritual family,” and a few participants described members as “brothers and sisters.” Christopher called FOCUS Pittsburgh not only “a stable platform,” but “a spiritual platform.” Matthew said that FOCUS Pittsburgh gives him an opportunity to speak at events and plant God’s seeds for a better community.

One other means of healing, empowerment, and engagement with the community that participants discussed is the power of this interview and the sharing process itself. While it understandably was difficult to share such painful stories with other people—strangers—the act of telling the story, and especially the knowledge that it may create a sense of community connectedness, was a potent positive outcome. It was particularly meaningful for participants to be talking with a group of people, most of whom had come from different cultures and backgrounds. As Quentin noted, isolation is a major problem in this neighborhood. Sherry noted feeling fulfilled through not only the act of telling her story to compassionate interviewers but also through anticipating that her story would be shared with other community members and might be able to help them work with their own lives. Her comments echo her feelings about psychotherapy and the healing in the act of telling another person one’s painful life events and feeling connected to humanity through that sharing.

While survivors of trauma and others struggling to make a life for themselves in a harsh world may feel shame or guilt about their experiences, releasing those experiences from the burden of secrecy, as in this interview process, reveals that in actuality, the most private experiences touch other people and can be healing for both the teller and the listener. Participants can also come to recognize that their stories have a meaningful sociohistorical context and relevance. Thus, they may increasingly be able to politicize their experiences, finding ways to articulate and channel the healing of intergenerational community wounds. With this new information and inspiration, the participants felt they could work together and with the community for healing. As Wendell and others noted, truly “renewing” the Hill District, on its own terms, could be a powerful shared dream toward which to work.

Impact on Students

One student wrote about her experience in the public reading in the journal she was keeping for class. She first described her fears and expectations before the public reading:

I am about to leave for FOCUS Pittsburgh community public reading. This is the event we were told about on the first day of class, and it is truly the climax of the course. It is the moment we have been working up to and practicing hard for within the past few weeks. Our script is a culmination of all of our interviews, yet only gives a taste of the richness we have found when speaking to these individuals. As we were practicing on Wednesday, it was the first time that we were reciting excerpts from the actual transcripts.

While we had told each other the stories in our own words when recounting our perspectives in class, hearing the stories as the interviewees actually told them was ten times more impacting. The rehearsal was when the power of our work and of sharing these stories truly began to sink in for me. Our script has many vivid stories that are so important to share, both of pain and of resilience…. While it will not be easy, I feel [the story I am reading] is one of the stories that deserves to be shared most, as it was one of the most significant moments of impact in my interviewee’s life. I hope to be able to bring honor to her experience as a whole.

She realized the importance of the narratives and how they touched her. After the public reading, she wrote:

The public reading was so much more of a success than I could have anticipated. When we arrived at FOCUS Pittsburgh, it was steadily raining, the tent was beginning to be assembled half an hour before the reading was scheduled to begin, and there were people everywhere. There was chaos and disorganization. However, as a response, we all came together in a way that is characteristic of FOCUS
Pittsburgh and of the Hill District community. We all helped out by bringing chairs from the upstairs and assembling them on the stage and in the audience. There was no separation between our class, the people from outside the Hill community who came to listen, and FOCUS Pittsburgh community members. We all worked to set up the event, and in doing this, we became one as a community, with shared values and a common purpose. I am grateful that the event happened in this way, because it connected all of us in an important way, taking away the formalized boundaries that would normally be automatically put in place.

When Father Abernathy gave his introduction, he said he was grateful for the rain, because it was symbolic of the struggles that the Hill faces, yet rises to meet in its resilience. I think that was a perfect introduction to the stories we were about to share. As we got started, I noticed a unique atmosphere starting to form. The audience was completely attentive and appreciative of us being up on stage. As we spoke, all their eyes were on us, and we could all tell they genuinely wanted to hear what we had to share. I could tell that our class came together in wanting to share our stories, knowing that this was the big moment. We had the important role of being channels of these stories, not just as they were told to us, but also as they impacted us. We were sharing as vulnerable observers.

… As I was speaking, I felt connected to all of the people around me in a very human-to-human way. I began to ease into the moment and appreciate how special this was. I had just enough time to read my interviewee’s painful story of trauma. She was present in the audience, but had left the tent because she could not bear to hear her story being read…. As I began to read my part, I could tell I was becoming emotional, but my will to share the story in a fluent and meaningful way overpowered the emotions I was feeling. I tried to slow down, speak clearly, giving it the affect I was feeling, and to just be in the moment. As I was speaking, the audience was responding, and I knew that they were in the moment with me, as well. When I was done, I paused to let it sink in for all of us, and I felt I had truly done my best to convey the power and meaning of [our interviewee’s] story.

I could tell the audience was deeply impacted by it, and I felt that this was what made all of our work worthwhile—to have this opportunity to share, to move other people by telling another human’s story of meaning. I became very emotional as I sat down, but I was truly grateful for that moment (Stokoski, unpublished manuscript).

This student’s impactful reaction was echoed by the other students. It is hoped that this experience will change their interactions with impoverished, undereducated people, as they will have experienced firsthand the challenges the community members face every day, as well as the resilience FOCUS Pittsburgh and perseverance provide.

The Larger Impact
FOCUS Pittsburgh and Duquesne University are continuing the work of Voices in the Hill. FOCUS Pittsburgh is involved in Trauma-Informed Community Development and its first community development organizer is working street by street in the Hill to hear stories and talk and work with residents as local people develop the block. Emphasis has been on sharing the findings in this article with policymakers and funding agencies to ensure that the voices in the Hill are heard. The university also has several faculty and students doing community-engaged teaching in the Hill in a more reflexive way than in earlier notions of service learning.

The Voices in the Hill lab is part of a larger project involving both academic and community stakeholders. It is part of a multi-disciplinary effort and has inspired other efforts and articles (e.g., Koelsch, Bennett, & Goldberg, in press). Dr. Goldberg and students are currently conducting drop-in focus groups called “Community Talking Circles” at FOCUS Pittsburgh, on topics such as living with trauma, to join in the Hill community’s efforts at a continuing sharing of stories among residents. Students will be presenting the focus group stories to the Hill District community
shortly. Future projects include participatory action research in which both community and university members will engage with and organize Voices in the Hill studies and make sense of their findings (Khanlou & Peter, 2005; Minkler, 2000) as well as all parties sharing stories with policymakers.

There are many affected communities such as Pittsburgh with blighted neighborhoods that were devastated by urban renewal and other societal inequities. Several other communities and universities are working together in civic engagement in a larger context of community/university partnering (Marriott, Lipus, Choate, Smith, Coppola, Cameron, & Shannon, J., 2015). Other teachers and researchers are participating in community engagement in an effort to improve this legacy (e.g., Reardon, 1998) and as a form of social justice and civic engagement (Howarth, Currie, Morrell, Sorensen, & Bengle, 2017; Weiss & Fine, 2004).

Conclusion

Many white Americans like to think history has no impact on current life (Klein, 2008; Streich, 2002). Yet we can also see that the history that we push away returns to us, demanding to be seen, to be known, to be respected, and to be integrated into the community, the city, and the country’s awareness of itself. This collection of interviews seeks to articulate and thematize this denied history, as a contribution to efforts to contextualize the Hill District in the larger Pittsburgh community. For while Pittsburgh has undergone a renaissance in recent decades, reinventing itself after the collapse of the steel industry, the Hill District largely has been left behind. As much of Pittsburgh attains a new identity, becoming a center for medicine, technology, art, culture, and food, debilitated minority communities cannot be ignored. At the same time, we have learned that these communities do not benefit when they coercively are “improved” by outsiders who think they know best, as what happened with urban renewal in the 1950s. Instead, the unique wisdom of community voices must be honored and respected. These Hill District interviews illustrate the revealing and powerful outcome of inviting community residents to speak for themselves and on their own terms. We hope that these voices from the Hill will educate policymakers, developers, community stakeholders, and others in Pittsburgh—who are seeking to change and revitalize the Hill District—as well as those throughout the country.

Finally, in a more intimate way, as Sherry commented, this project could help to foster increased connectedness among Hill District community members. Experiences of trauma often leave people feeling alone, isolated, needing to hide many secrets, and ashamed. The sharing of stories can heal this alienation by illuminating ways in which suffering is not merely or primarily individual, but shared and a core part of the human condition. In a community like the Hill District, the sharing of stories can help residents see that not only are they not alone, in fact the most profound traumas of their lives are sadly too frequent, as their neighbors also tell stories with similar content and themes.

At the deepest personal level and at a level of understanding the place of the community in larger sociohistorical/political forces, the sharing of stories has great potential to empower the Hill District. Already, through the experience of these interviews, their presentation, and the Trauma-Informed Community Development initiative at FOCUS Pittsburgh, many people have felt empowered to come forward and help their community with this sharing, meaning-making, healing, and energizing process. Thus, these interviews ultimately belong to the people who told the stories, and to their neighbors.

As seen in this article, the work is crucial, transformative, and life-changing for students and faculty. The work must also benefit the community as much as the university (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Ultimately, community healing will come from within (McBride, 2003; Thurman, Plsted, Edwards, Foley, & Burnside, 2003). Until then, we hope this kind of partnering and sharing will benefit both the community and local universities.

References


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About the Authors

Susan G. Goldberg is an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at Dusquesne University and Camille O’Connor is a psychologist at the Western Washington University Counseling Center.

In an oversight, Dr. Camille O’Connor and I did not acknowledge the comprehensive and effective work that Dr. Matthew J. Walsh has done in developing the Trauma Informed Community Development (TICD) initiative with FOCUS Pittsburgh. We wish to correct this oversight and add his citation to our Reference list that appears on the JCES website as follows:


See also:
https://focuspghcommunications.wordpress.com/programs-and-services/community-development/; and
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kcbu58p0fbA.

Signed: Dr. Susan G. Goldberg
Lessons Learned for Military-Based Partnerships for Landscape-Scale Conservation: A Case Study of the North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Partnership

John M. Diaz, Robert E. Bardon, Dennis Hazel, Jackie Bruce, and K.S.U. Jayaratne

Abstract

Landscape-scale conservation has become a popular approach for addressing complex land and water issues. Achieving this level of conservation requires regional collaboration that evokes a variety of approaches tailored to fit the scope and nature of the particular issues. In many states, military training grounds are a part of the rural landscape, resulting in significant interest from the military services in the maintenance and enhancement of land uses that are compatible with their operations. Many programs and initiatives are managing this issue utilizing a landscape-scale approach based on a recognition of the interconnectedness of interests. To date, there has been limited research on military partnerships related to land conservation. In order to better understand how engaging stakeholders from various sectors impacts the initial stages of military-based partnerships for landscape-scale conservation, this study explores climate, processes, people, policies, and resources—five variables that shape cross-sector partnerships, an important theoretical framework for evaluating such collaborative partnerships.

Introduction

Landscape-scale conservation represents a new collaborative approach that has become a widely agreed upon strategy by conservationists, policymakers, and practitioners to address land and water issues facing North America (McKinney & Johnson, 2009). Landscape-scale conservation encompasses three criteria: multijurisdictional, multipurpose, and multistakeholder (McKinney, Scarlett, & Kemis, 2010). Landscape-scale conservation efforts also operate with various governance arrangements and at diverse geographic scales (McKinney et al., 2010). To achieve landscape-scale conservation requires regional collaboration that evokes a variety of approaches tailored to fit the scope and nature of the issues (McKinney & Johnson, 2009).

For many organizations, utilizing a landscape-scale approach to deal with conservation is based on the recognition of the interconnectedness of interests (McKinney & Johnson, 2009). For the military in many states, their interest in landscape-scale conservation is in maintaining their readiness by maintaining compatible land uses with their military training grounds (Governor’s Land Compatibility Task Force [GLCTF], 2012) including Department of Defense (DOD) owned or controlled lands and adjacent or nearby non-DOD lands that impact training.

To date, research efforts are limited to military partnerships addressing encroachment and incompatible land use for lands buffering military installations, but little effort is shown in protecting such things as military flight paths or what is often referred to as away spaces. Away spaces are training areas away from the main military installation (Lachman, Wong, & Resetar, 2006). Lachman et al. (2006) research indicates that military-based partnerships have been quite successful because installations are leveraging diverse partners for different buffering needs around their installations. They found that bringing together a diverse group of partners helps to leverage diverse types of funds and funding sources (Lachman et al., 2006). Besides directly funding investments, partners also contribute significant time, skills, expertise, and other resources to conservation buffering (Lachman et al., 2006).

This does not mean that military partnerships do not run into issues. Policy guidance for military-based partnerships is often inadequate and thus, there are inefficiencies in execution of partnership projects. For example, overemphasis on fair market value defined by the DOD’s appraisal process has caused effectiveness problems, such as lost deals (Lachman et al., 2006). Additionally, the military’s process takes too long for developing, approving, and completing deals (Lachman et al., 2006). This can be a significant obstacle to buffering.
military installations because of the need to purchase land or buy conservation easements on private lands, as it can be difficult to engage landowners without funding in hand.

Even though research indicates that the military has had success in leveraging diverse partners in offsetting military installations from incompatible land uses and encroachment, little is understood about military-based partnerships for landscape-scale conservation. To better understand how engaging stakeholders from various sectors impacts the initial stages of military-based partnerships for landscape-scale conservation this study explored climate, processes, people, policies, and resources; the five variables that shape Cross Sector Social Partnerships (CSSPs) outside the specific fields of economics and management (Melaville & Blank, 1991).

Theoretical Framework
The evaluative framework utilized in this study is based on the five variables shaping interagency partnerships (Melaville & Blank, 1991).

Climate: Social and Political
Melaville and Blank (1991) identified the social and political climate of an area as the first factor likely to influence a cross sector partnership. The chances of a collaboration occurring among potential partners will depend on how favorable the social and political climate is with regard to potential partners’ current relationships, the urgency of the issues, how well-defined the problem is, and other social and political factors (Melaville & Blank, 1991). When human needs, public sentiment, legislative priorities, and institutional readiness converge conditions are ripe for collaboration (Melaville & Blank, 1991).

Processes: Communication and Problem-Solving
Melaville and Blank (1991) identified the processes of communication and problem solving as the second critical variable in creating and sustaining interagency efforts. The process establishes the working relationships and defines the operational rules necessary to guide the partnership initiative, mitigating turf battles, reconciling differences, and making critical corrections in strategy and implementation (Melaville & Blank, 1991; Wondelleck & Yaffee, 2000). Inclusion of a specific geographic location or biophysical feature of interest provides a means for realizing common ground and allows the partnership to explore new and innovative strategies for achieving their goals (Wondelleck & Yaffee, 2000). Successful partnerships are able to maintain a collective vision through the institutionalization of collaboration that requires creating and leveraging structures that will allow for the management of change and turnover, thus allowing the partnership to continue beyond its initial efforts (Wondelleck & Yaffee, 2000).

People: Leadership and Participation
Melaville and Blank (1991) identified the people who lead, participate in, and eventually implement the activities of cross-sector initiatives as the third variable affecting the growth and development of joint efforts. Carefully designed organizational structures, especially in large coalitions, can ensure that all partners have a leadership role to play in achieving common goals (Melaville & Blank, 1991) and that shared leadership is fostered when participants have clearly assigned opportunities to plan and implement action and are held responsible for those actions (Gray, 1985). It is also important to recognize that the vision, commitment, and competency of the leaders are important to the success of the partnership (Melaville & Blank, 1991). Once broad-based participation has been achieved, leaders must ensure that participants are fully involved in the partnership process (Melaville & Blank, 1991).

Policies: Governing of Partnering Organizations
A fourth variable affecting interagency partnerships is the set of governing policies that each agency brings to the table. These federal, state, and local level policies, guidelines, and definitions comprise each institution’s unique identity. The natural tendency of participants to maintain their distinctive organizational characteristics gives rise to the turf issues that many joint efforts experience (Gray, 1985). When the laws, regulations, and standard operating procedures of participating agencies are perceived as generally compatible with each other and the goals of the collaboration, conflict is minimal. However, when substantial differences exist, adjustments and accommodations are necessary to improve their fit (Gray, 1985; Melaville & Blank, 1991). A strong communication and problem-solving process and persistent efforts to avoid jargon and shorthand, to clarify terms, and to establish mutually acceptable definitions can help partners learn to understand each other (Melaville & Blank, 1991).

Resources: Availability
The availability of resources will determine if the efforts of collaborative partnership will become
permanently institutionalized (Melaville & Blank, 1991). In collaborative ventures, resources of all kinds must be pooled and reconfigured to achieve the hoped-for results. The continuity of funding is as important as the amount of money available. A predictable level of support allows participants to make long-term plans and consider priorities beyond day-to-day survival (Melaville & Blank, 1991).

The partnership must be held accountable for the resources through measuring, monitoring, and meeting the objectives within a reasonable period of time. Establishing clear target goals and objectives, and benchmarks to monitor progress on a continuous basis, can provide important feedback to the partnership (Gray, 1985; Melaville & Blank, 1991; Wondelleck & Yaffee, 2000).

Study Area

North Carolina is a rapidly urbanizing state. It is the 9th most populated state in the nation and by 2030 it is projected to rise to the 7th largest, with 12.2 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2015). The military in North Carolina is the second largest economic sector in the state, just behind agriculture (Nienow, Harder, Cole & Lea, 2008). North Carolina has the third largest military population in the nation, home to the largest army installation and the world’s largest amphibious training complex (NC Military Foundation, 2015). North Carolina leadership has a vested interest in the sustainability of rural landscapes that contribute approximately $100 billion to the state’s economy and provide irreplaceable ecosystem services that promote environmental quality (GLCTF Report, 2012).

The Partnership

Study participants represent a range of organizations including: academia, state agriculture and environmental agencies, military, environmental and agricultural non-government organizations, and economic development organizations. They were either involved in the inception of the partnership, a member of the overall steering committee, or a key collaborator. These partners and key stakeholders served an important role in the creation of the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership, which began with focusing on four initiatives.

The initiatives are designed to conserve and protect the interests the partnership values — working lands, conservation, and national defense. These initiatives include developing and implementing tools that foster landscape-scale conservation, creating and delivering a working lands conservation professional training and landowner outreach program, increasing the military’s local purchasing capacity, and testing an innovative conservation strategy focused on compensating private landowners for placing term limited restrictions on their property.

Methodology

Using an intrinsic case study design (Yin, 2013), we explored partnership documents as well as partner and key stakeholder perceptions to understand how the variables that shape cross-sectoral partnerships impact the initial stages of military-based partnerships for landscape-scale conservation. Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained, purposive sampling was used to identify the initial study participants based on their influence on overall partnership decision-making. Additional participants were selected using the snowball sampling approach, where each of the initial participants identified additional subjects to interview based on their reputation and influence among key stakeholder groups. There were a total of 13 participants selected that represented a variety of agencies, organizations, and interests.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. These interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. The constant comparative method was used for data analysis, requiring analysis to begin simultaneously with data collection. Bias was kept in check by constantly comparing new data to previously received data. Categories that were developed were constantly reviewed and combined to form more current categories that coincided with the developing research. These themes, ideas or categories were driven directly from the data; not an existing conceptual or theoretical framework (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

As part of the constant comparative method, content analysis was completed during data triangulation to analyze organizational documents. This approach encompassed open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. The categories that emerged were then used to understand and complete a holistic view of the Sentinel Landscapes Partnership.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of this study was founded on four tenets (Berg, 2004; Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 1998; Dooley, 2007; Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009). These tenets include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.
**Credibility**

Credibility requires prolonged engagement (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), data triangulation (Berg, 2004), member checks (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), peer debriefing (Creswell, 1998; Dooley, 2007), and negative case analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers were engaged with the partnership for approximately three years, which allowed for the development of a holistic and comprehensive understanding of the case and the development of trust among study participants. Over the three years of engagement the researchers had the opportunity to observe the participants by attending more than 20 in-person partnership meetings, more than 30 partnership conference calls, four partnership-related landowner workshops, and three other partnership events resulting in hundreds of hours of engagement and observation.

Researchers analyzed documents and triangulated those against the semi-structured interviews data in order to gain a deeper understanding of the findings that emerged (Berg, 2004). After each interview was transcribed, the researchers provided the participants transcripts of their interviews to check for accuracy. Participants were also able to review rough drafts of the researchers’ work in order to correct or provide substitute language (Creswell, 1998).

A team of peers was formed to take part in the debriefing process based on their knowledge of the partnership, qualitative methods and partnership evaluation. After each step in the analysis process researchers created a memorandum for the team, updating them on the study process and data analysis. The peer debrief team provided guidance throughout the process by suggesting revisions to categories and reviewing themes with the researchers. Once feedback was provided, the researchers would correct and change the developing analysis.

Negative case analysis was conducted to explore all exceptions that emerged during analysis through subsequent interviews and literature review to account for the exception and confirm patterns emerging from the data. This analysis provided overall direction for the presentation of study findings but was not explicitly stated within the findings themselves. It was used as a measure to ensure that the research process was not pursuing interpretations of events that were not shared among multiple participants or presented in previous studies.

**Transferability**

In order to promote the reader’s ability to transfer the findings of the study to their own context (transferability), the insights and lessons learned are richly described along with the population of interest and study context. By developing this comprehensive view, the researcher facilitates the reader’s ability to identify the commonalities and differences as they relate to their case and ultimately judge how the associated findings may transfer (Creswell, 1998; Krefting, 1991).

**Dependability**

To ensure the dependability of the study a dependability audit trail (Berg, 2004; Dooley, 2007) was constructed based on detailed notes taken throughout the study. This audit trail was then used to conduct an inquiry audit that leveraged the input of external researchers to evaluate the researcher’s ability to outline a process for replication. Each auditor was provided detailed notes that outlined the overall research process, the evolution of the process through analysis, and associated thoughts and decisions along the process.

**Confirmability**

A closely related confirmability audit trail was also constructed in order to authenticate the confirmability of the study. The confirmability audit was conducted at the same time as the dependability audit, requiring the auditors to evaluate whether the data and interpretations made are supported by material in the audit trail, are internally coherent, and represent more than the researchers’ biased perspective (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The audit trail provided detail for how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry (Merriam, 2009). The audit trail provided an organizational structure to understand the relationship between the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations by clearly linking to the data sources themselves. Triangulation was also used to increase confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers used multiple methods of triangulation including triangulation of sources and analyst triangulation to help facilitate a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

To help maintain objectivity, the researchers developed a reflexive journal that allowed the researchers to track methodological decisions and study logistics as well as the researchers’ own values and interests. Journal entries were completed...
before and after every interview as well as throughout the process to keep bias in check and keep the researchers on track. The researchers documented bias that related to both personal experience and beliefs as well as experience with the partnership throughout the research process. Journaling allowed the researchers to review data and reflect on personal variables that may affect the interview and data collection process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

Climate: Social and Political

The partnership was thrust into an environment that exhibited characteristics of both a positive and negative climate. Several partners cited a “recognition of what's happening in North Carolina” among state leadership as an important precursor for the social capital available to the partnership. Leaders in agriculture, forestry and conservation were cognizant of the need to work collaboratively to effectively address mutual issues and had already begun work to address the issues facing rural landscapes. Multiple partners recognized that the expansive military training network was a part of the rural character of the landscape, where stakeholders “saw a value in supporting the military.”

This broad recognition resulted in beneficial policies, mandates, and tools that promoted collaborative efforts. For instance, a program lead explained that this recognition among the General Assembly was crucial to “set up an Agriculture Development and Farmland Preservation (ADFP) trust fund whose mission statement was basically to preserve these resources and to do what has been suggested in mutual partnership activities.”

While the climate among state leadership was positive, local communities in eastern North Carolina had a negative perception of the military as land grabbers based upon previous experience. Several partners and key stakeholders cited the United States Navy’s process for trying to establish Outlying Landing Field (OLF) training area as a specific experience that tarnished the military’s reputation and relations with local communities. Multiple partners identified frustration among the local supporters of the OLF based on misinformation provided by the Navy.

Based on the experience with the OLF, it was evident that there were still leaders who were agitated and who influenced the implementation of the innovative conservation strategy known as the Market-Based Conservation Initiative (MBCI). Partners who led the initiative explained that “the residual effects of OLF is the sole reason why we never delivered market based in Beaufort and [Washington] County.” One of these partners went on to explain that “select county commissioners had the attitude that market based was an end run to come at the concept of an outlying landing field from a different angle.” Several partners cited the value of the partnership for overcoming the aforementioned perception issues, which the military partner stated was the reason for “the development and implementation of the whole partnership.”

The aforementioned climate that was a result of the OLF project may have been further exacerbated by the administration and outcomes of the MBCI. Concerns of credibility were cited as a potential impediment for future military programs as well as the ongoing work of the other partners’ home agencies or organizations. Many of the partners felt that these issues would further exacerbate military-based conservation efforts in the future with one partner explaining that they are afraid that it will create a mentality where “landowners are going to say well here we go again.”

One of the biggest issues cited by numerous partners was the Navy’s decision to transition away from the original intention of performance contracts to traditional easements, which landowners were told would not be part of the initiative. One of the core leaders explained that “it definitely makes you more skeptical, more cynical and wanting more assurance before you do it again.” Additionally, partners and key stakeholders explained that programmatic change that resulted in issues of timeliness and the abrupt termination of MBCI “didn’t help improve that trust [among landowners].”

Processes: Communication and Problem-Solving

While the partnership was successful at bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, their initial approach was more project-centric, compromising the group’s initial efforts at achieving collective gains. The group developed multiple projects with respective timelines, scopes of work, and expectations for accomplishments, resulting in project silos that challenged the partnership’s ability for holistic and comprehensive thinking. Members of the core leadership group expressed concerns that it “hurt the situation that some [of] the partners approached it as a project” and believed that “[the] whole thing is a process [that is] more organic in nature than just doing a project within a specific time frame.” According to the sentiment of several partners “there could have been any number of projects that could have
been done under the Sentinel Landscapes umbrella” but due to the fact that everyone was “focused on getting something done by a certain date” many partners “fell out of the loop on what the overall goals were.” Partnership documents including meeting notes identified a transformation from a project-based approach to partnership building midway through the original grant.

Multiple partners believed that the transition allowed “for goals and objectives [to be] embedded in building a broader partnership than something that just met [individual] needs.” Through a consensus-driven model, the partnership welcomed a diverse set of ideas, which was cited as the trademark of the partnership. Several partners expressed the importance of this approach based on the complexity of the partnership citing it as “one of the better aspects of [the partnership].” The partners also felt that by welcoming the diverse set of ideas, thoughts and expertise to the table it helped to reduce conflicts encountered by the partnership.

While cultural differences as a result of partnership diversity appeared to be an issue from the outset, multiple partners believed that over time the partnership was “able to work to create those bridges” by looking at “the common links.” Several partners believed that a shared vision was developed based on “the common link [that] ended up being private landowners because they were the resource that [we] had in common and services related [to] these resources linked all of us together.”

Also as a result of the diversity of actors involved with the Sentinel Landscapes efforts, multiple approaches were needed to solve problems and resolve conflict. Several partners identified the utility of an informal approach within this core group for the continued development of mutual respect that one partner explained was “present among all of those involved here at the state level.” In turn, the partnership evoked structured problem-solving processes in order to increase the ability to reach consensus.

The partnership developed a steering committee in order to represent the diverse interests and needs associated with the context of management. Multiple partners explained that by having the university and Extension develop “a formal steering committee and a core team” it provided some much needed “structure” and a shift to “thinking strategically that [wasn’t] fully realized the first couple [of] years.” Additionally, several partners felt that it provided value-added because “everyone who was in the steering committee [was]

representing a stakeholder [group] and having all of them in place implied their buy in from their organizations.”

According to several partners and key stakeholders, the partnership dedicated a significant amount of time toward informal engagement including “going out to eat,” “sitting down over a beer,” and attending “social events.” Once the relationships were built, these partners and key stakeholders explained that it promoted a sense of “commit[ment] to making all of this work.” According to several program leaders, the “consistent[cy] with communication and meetings” was pivotal, explaining that “once you lose communication you cannot build trust.” To this end, the partnership developed a formal engagement structure that included face-to-face meetings, conference calls and emails based on lessons learned through the pilot process. While several partners and key stakeholders believed that “the frequency with which communication occurred via telephone was beneficial to keeping all of the players informed” all the partners felt that “being able to meet face-to-face was critical.”

Even though the program partners viewed the face-to-face engagement as critical, one of the program leads expressed a sentiment shared among multiple partners who thought the initial quarterly meetings “got into that level of rut” where they eventually morphed into one-way communication. The partnership realized that the meetings were not producing the type of outcomes they wanted and altered the meeting structure to promote effective group discussion. A program lead explained that “you will get more out of it if you have the partners with all their perspectives brainstorming about directions and solutions and not just listening to reports,” which aligned with the sentiments of several partners.

Overall, the communication approach evoked by the partnership was effectively summarized by one of the key partners as being focused on maintaining “an open line of communication” through the aforementioned engagement schedule, which the majority of partners again expressed was important for the development of trust. Several partners explained that it was a challenge to simply “keep our leadership in our respective areas informed” but expressed an additional challenge in keeping leadership informed across the context of management. Specifically, many partners identified the complexity of communicating and effectively educating the military stakeholders because in “the military you’ve got a department of
defense and then in the department of defense you’ve got the different branches that have their own little cliques or organizational [mandates] to address.”

Several partners cited the dynamic of “constant turnover” as an important factor to consider when developing a communication and education strategy because “there’s people that are appointed or not reappointed to positions, and if you don’t have the ability to keep everybody at least aware, people’s opinions get formed in a vacuum.” The partners reiterated that it is “an education issue” where the partners must “communicate almost excessively” and it is their responsibility “to continue to encourage that communication, not just for themselves but towards the upward management.”

Partnership documents and partner interviews highlighted a need for better communication of the needs of the military for the efforts of Sentinel Landscapes. Several partners identified the utility of a Geographic Information System (GIS) map to highlight military conservation priorities in order to “focus some of those resources from existing programs on those areas.” The initial program manager explained that the map “enhanced [the partnership’s] understanding of what the military is looking for,” going on to explain that it “opens the door for future collaboration, particularly on land conservation, land use issues that can either benefit or be to the detriment of the military.” This sentiment was shared among multiple partners and a core leader expressed the value of “a good map that has the operational footprints of the military services as they currently exist and has the different services envision them to the best they can currently envision them.”

The partners also identified the need to engage all services of the military and maintain their engagement in order to develop a shared vision for collective action. Multiple partners identified that “all of the services” were invited to participate but only one military service sincerely participated in full. They believed that if the partners were able to maintain the engagement of their military partners, “it would have been more beneficial” and a weakness of the partnership that some believe hurt the efforts of the partnership. This was expressed by several partners and was effectively encapsulated by a core group member that stated that “keeping the other services at the table has been harder [than expected].”

**People: Leadership and Participation**

A key strength of the Sentinel Landscapes leadership was its ability to leverage pre-existing relationships to create a diverse partnership. Before the partnership was established, brainstorming meetings were held that included approximately 30 different agencies and organizations that represented the interests of working lands, conservation, and national defense in order to understand how to move forward in a collaborative fashion. Multiple partners and key stakeholders explained that along with the network of typical state and federal actors, the network that was tapped into provided capital from “several private industry folks across the state and the military.” All of the interviewees mentioned the importance of these pre-existing relationships, going as far as citing them for being “vital stakes in the ground.”

Several key partners explained that the Commissioner of Agriculture was critical for “making sure this project stayed on everybody’s radar, [providing] influence at the national level” and “open[ing] things up with the military installations [for such initiatives as] Food and Fuel for the Forces.” According to multiple partners, the support from this champion’s parent organization led to an important partnership tool, “the [Agricultural Development and Farmland Preservation] trust fund” that the partnership was able to effectively leverage for “funding through Marine Corps that has been crucial to us keeping the dialogs going.”

Additionally, several partners also lauded the work of program champions within the military. Originally the partnership had two uniformed officers that were “huge advocates” and cited for being “very valuable” in engaging the right military stakeholders to attain social capital within the military. Unfortunately, several partners identified that “there’s a real challenge to sustaining a champion in the military particularly because every few years [leadership] change[s].” Partnership documents show that these individuals are no longer involved in the partnership although the partnership was successful in maintaining a program champion “on the civilian side” of the United States Marine Corps. There is a strong belief within the group that “you need a champion there on the civilian’s side” but those within the military strongly believe “that champion needs to be a uniform in the military.”

Based on the reflection of program leadership, the reach of the land-grant university and Extension provided an appropriate administrative structure for coordinating diverse stakeholder
groups within a statewide partnership. Several partners explained that they thought that having the university as a coordinating entity was a positive experience based on their ability to “monitor [performance] and pull the official meetings together because of the different aspects of Sentinel Landscapes and its [partnership] diversity.” The majority of partners explained the university was an “effective convener of diverse interests and parties” based on their “network of partners and relationships that [they’ve] built with different federal agencies, state agencies, and [non-governmental organizations].”

Core partners also stated that by housing the partnership under the university, it “ended up delivering value to the Marine Corps that exceeded their investment” based on the “oversight and leadership” provided as well as the fact that “the deans were personally involved.” Multiple interviewees also expressed that land-grant universities exhibited a “natural aspect to the fit for this project for its outreach, research, and teaching functions” as well as it being part of [their] mission [in] solving the problems of the people of the state.” The natural fit for land-grant universities to serve as a coordinating entity for large collaborative partnerships was expanded on by key program leaders explaining that these institutions are well positioned with the “expertise to solve the problems of the state” and “recognize[ed] there’s a lot of really good science that can be applied to some of these socially relevant issues that are out there that we’re all having to deal with.”

All of the partners interviewed explained that turnover strongly influenced the success of the partnership, especially due to the changes in internal leadership during the program pilot. Several partners identified the role of the program coordinator as well as all of the partners to help manage the extent of change and turnover. One of the program element leads echoed a sentiment shared by several partners and key stakeholders that the changeover in leadership was such a significant challenge because the partnership “lost certain values when [turnover] occurred” and believed that with the accompaniment of a steep learning curve for new members that “it took a while for them to become fully reengaged with the process.” This resulted in a general “lack of focus on the part of the individuals within the partnership” because there was so much effort dedicated to “getting [new partners and key stakeholders] to the same point because of all that turnover.” One partner who became involved mid-way through the effort explained that “it would have been nice as me walking in, if I could have run through a year’s worth of the notes for however long they met and then I could have gotten a better handle on things a lot quicker.”

Policies: Governing of Partnering Organizations
When asked about the governing policies of partnering organizations, only one policy was identified to have had significant influence on the partnership. All of the partners and key stakeholders interviewed expressed significant frustration with the Navy’s policy and associated process for developing conservation agreements with landowners. The policy that the partners identified was called 2684A, which evokes a real estate transaction process for these agreements. The aforementioned policy resulted in a prolonged and costly process for establishing agreements, which was echoed by several partners and key stakeholders as a challenge associated with the military funding authority.

Several partners expressed that the process of due diligence resulted in extremely high administrative costs that were not anticipated by the Navy and resulted in their decision to abruptly terminate the MBCI pilot. The program initiative lead shed some light on the prolonged and costly process that resulted in the aforementioned suspension of the MBCI. This program lead explained that “every contract ended up requiring a 60-year title search,” which involves an extensive process and the inclusion of attorneys and real-estate specialists that quickly increase the costs.

Resources: Availability
The partnership realized that in order to achieve their overarching goals in the midst of public funding limitations it would require the adoption of a match funding strategy. Even amidst this realization, multiple partners felt that the partnership initially fell short of attaining the necessary funding needed for long-term success. The program sponsor expressed a concern that the partnership’s inability to achieve robust funding may be as a result of the perception that the “DOD [is] a cash cow,” with another of the military partners explaining that “the military cannot fund the whole thing” and that “being able to sustain what comes out of the pilot will require more participants” coming to the table willing to fund these efforts.

The partners identified two dynamics where match funding would facilitate success through partnership coordination and mutual gain projects. Multiple program leads expressed that in order for
some of these projects to get off the ground, the idea of match funds must be expanded to encompass coordination costs to manage “the front end of setting up the process and building the partnerships.” Additionally, the partners believe that through the prioritization of projects that achieve multiple benefits it will encourage various agencies and organizations that typically reside in their own silo to come to the table with matching funds, understanding the opportunity for mutual gain.

It was evident that the partnership understood the benefit of match funding based on a subsequent funding proposal submitted to the DOD. In this proposal, match funding was attained from more than twenty organizations that would be brought to bear within the partnership’s area of interest. While this funding approach was viewed by the partnership as a win, it did not cover the administrative components for the management of the partnership. In order to effectively develop and implement these multiple benefit projects, the partners felt that there is a significant amount of coordination and administration that must be taken into consideration in the match funding paradigm in order to develop a true match scenario.

In order to successfully coordinate the breadth of projects under the Sentinel Landscapes umbrella, it requires multiple avenues to disseminate funds that provide enhanced flexibility. The partnership utilized the DOD’s Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unite (CESU) to channel funds from the military to the land-grant university that served as the administrative entity to further disseminate funds. Many of the partners expressed the value of using this funding structure to disseminate funds because it did provided the partnership with relative flexibility because “the military didn’t try to direct the funding to a dollar amount but rather they allowed the creative minds to work to determine the cost.”

While the partnership experienced relative flexibility through the use of the CESU for administering program funds, multiple partners expressed a heightened level of frustration related to the timeliness of the overall process. One of partners expressed a sentiment shared by the entire partnership explaining that “the biggest headache [was] just the sheer amount of time it takes to move funds from the Marines, through the Army Corps, down to NC State and then to the other partners” further explaining that “the whole CESU process, that’s a royal pain.” Meeting notes show the overall frustration expressed by the partners due to the manifestation of the aforementioned issues in the attainment of a no-cost contract extension along with prolonged issues with connecting with the program administrator. Multiple partners explained that due to these issues it interjected “uncertainty into the next year” because the partnership was unsure of future funding and “everybody comes to a screeching halt.”

A lesson learned that several partners identified was the need for ongoing evaluation of current and potential funding mechanisms. Multiple partners admitted that not enough attention was provided to the level of flexibility in funding due to the overreliance on a single mechanism for administering program funds. The partners expressed an ability to create flexibility through the utilization of multiple funding structures as well as developing related funding contracts that integrate flexibility. Several partners believe that based on the experience from the program pilot that partnerships should “build into the structure” measures that enhance flexibility and specifically, “flexibility for future funding.”

Discussion and Implications

The overall social and political climate of eastern North Carolina demonstrated a good mix of a recognized need, associated legislative priorities, and institutional urgency for what Melaville and Blank (1991) outline as conditions conducive for effective collaboration. Unfortunately public sentiment did not align, as many local communities in eastern North Carolina developed a negative perception of military programs based on previous experience. This negative perception impacted the overall partnership’s ability to implement certain initiatives because local leaders viewed their actions as a means to take a different angle for taking land away from their communities. The manner in which the partnership implemented the MBCI merely exacerbated these perceptions. Several partners and key stakeholders expressed significant concern that the scrutiny of the initiative had negative implications on future cooperative arrangements with the military. While these issues will continue to impact the ongoing implementation of similar efforts, they also provide an opportunity for the partnership to improve the climate for change by evaluating the individual partner’s need to improve the manner for which they provide services to private landowners (Melaville & Blank, 1991).

Leadership quickly identified building a broader partnership as a priority and transformed the Sentinel Landscapes project into a Sentinel
Landscapes Partnership. The reach, capacity, and mission of land-grant universities provided an appropriate administrative structure for providing guidance and coordinating diverse stakeholder groups within a statewide partnership. This approach helps overcome a significant shortcoming identified by Lachman et al. (2006) where military-based partnerships suffer from an overall lack of guidance (Lachman et al., 2006). Land-grant universities and Extension have the available leadership and capacity to facilitate the process of agreeing on a common goal and negotiating a practical vision (Melaville & Blank, 1991). Effective leaders press each side to understand their partners’ point of view and the way they perceive the issues and problems at hand (Melaville & Blank, 1991). Based on the organizational mission of land-grant universities, it provides the necessary leadership that represents the goals and interests to the community at large and cultivates potential allies, which aligns with the belief of Melaville and Blank (1991) of what constitutes an effective leadership organization.

The leadership’s ability to leverage preexisting relationships while forging new linkages across the context of management resulted in a diverse partnership that is pivotal to the success of military-based efforts that promote effective collaboration (Lachman et al., 2006; Melaville & Blank, 1991; Wondelleck & Yaffee, 2000). Program champions played an important role in ensuring that the partnership remained on everyone’s radar and that the needs of the partnership would be taken into consideration among various organizations. This partnership, in comparison with other successful partnerships, has program champions that play an important role in securing resources, attaining institutional support, marketing the efforts and pushing for effective implementation. The unique dynamics of the NC Sentinel Landscapes Partnership resulted in the need for maintaining program champions across multiple sectors but most importantly within the military. To this point, Melaville and Blank (1991) highlight that an indicator of a partnership’s effectiveness hinges on its ability to create or secure new champions, that within the military poses a significant challenge due to increased and ongoing turnover.

Since relationships were leveraged across various stakeholder groups, the coordinating entity developed a steering committee representing the diverse interests and needs across the context of management. The steering committee approach provided the partnership with a formal problem-solving process that was sufficient to enable partners to accept each other’s respective goals for the partnership and to resolve difficulties as they arose (Melaville & Blank, 1991). Through a consensus-driven model, the partnership welcomed a diverse set of ideas that was cited as the trademark of the partnership. This aligns with the findings of Wondelleck and Yaffee (2000) that show partnerships are able to build on common ground through shared decision-making in which choices within the group were made by consensus. Accordingly, the partnership was able to constructively explore differences and develop solutions that met the needs and interests of everyone involved. Like other successful collaborative efforts, the partnership was able to identify commonalities of partners rather than their differences, identifying the private landowner as a common link that provided a means to bridge compatible yet disparate interests.

The use of an adaptive management approach allowed the partnership to develop meaningful and effective processes for engagement that institutionalized collaboration, allowing the partnerships not only to develop realistic goals but also to provide a process for measuring partnership impact that is necessary for public support and funding (Gray, 1985; Melaville & Blank, 1991; Wondelleck & Yaffee, 2000). To ensure and maintain an open line of communication for such purposes, a recurring engagement structure of in-person, electronic, and telephonic exchanges were developed by the partnership that resulted in the development of trusting and effective working relationships. Literature highlights the success of many collaborative processes that can be attributed quite simply to the establishment of an opportunity for interaction between parties where one did not previously exist. This is of paramount importance, specifically to military-based conservation partnerships that need to leverage and build long-term positive relationships between the military and its partners to overcome issues of trust and lead to collaborative success (Wondelleck & Yaffee, 2000).

The need for ongoing and meaningful engagement among a range of stakeholder groups highlights the pivotal role of the coordinating entity, in conjunction with the partners, of managing for turnover and change across the context of management. The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership did not have such a process in place, which compromised its ability to move forward expeditiously as new members were introduced into the group. The coordinating entity must lead the
charge in facilitating organizational change as new issues and needs arise, using established structures like the steering committee and adaptive management processes that provide the partnership with a means for adaptation. According to Wondelleck and Yaffee (2000), successful partnerships institutionalize collaboration by creating and leveraging structures that will allow for the management of change and turnover, thus allowing the partnership to continue beyond its initial efforts.

Leadership identified the importance of strategic communication in order to increase overall awareness of the program, as well as social capital for effective collaboration. The novelty of the program required a strategic approach toward educating a diverse group of stakeholders of the issues the partnership sought to address and in turn the value of the partnership. Additionally, the extent of actors needed to take compatible action required extensive strategic efforts to communicate up the hierarchy of leadership as well as across the silos of interest. For landscape-scale conservation strategies, this approach is key for increasing the joint effort’s ability to mitigate turf battles, reconcile differences in institutional mandates and professional perspectives, and make critical corrections in strategy and implementation (Lachman et al., 2006; McKinney et al., 2010; Melaville & Blank, 1991). The partnership also identified the utility of mapping the landscape of interest using GIS maps that allows the military to communicate its own priority areas, thus allowing its partners to prioritize resources that can be leveraged to achieve mutual gains through conservation. According to Wondelleck and Yaffee (2000), by identifying a specific geographic location or biophysical feature it provides common ground for which successful cooperative efforts are built and allows the partnership to explore new and innovative strategies for achieving their goals.

In relation to strategic communication, the military needs to be made aware of an ongoing issue related to frequently leveraged authorities for developing agreements with landowners. The Naval policy, in this case funding authority 2684A, proved to be a significant obstacle in the partnership’s ability to achieve its intended goals and effectively implement related projects. This aligns with the findings of Lachman et al. (2006) identifying that the military’s process, particularly within the United States Navy and United States Marine Corps, takes too long to develop, assess, approve, and fund agreements (Lachman et al., 2006). Since it can be difficult to engage landowners without funding in hand, “such processes need to be streamlined and other flexibility needs to be built into the system to enable the military to respond faster to real estate opportunities” (Lachman et al., 2006, p. xxi).

Finally, funding from a single source will not be sufficient to sustain the partnership, requiring a strategy of match funding that provides the opportunity to pool and reconfigure resources to achieve the partnership’s intended outcomes (Melaville & Blank, 1991). According to Melaville and Blank (1991), the commitment of resources is the litmus test “of any joint effort’s determination to make a difference and a prime factor in determining whether partnership goals are likely to be institutionalized, replicated, and expanded” (p.32). While match funding is important, it is important to consider that it is an unrealistic expectation for all projects to have partners who can match or even come close to matching military funds (Lachman et al., 2006). One way to overcome this overemphasis on cost-efficiency and one-to-one match strategies is to consider administrative costs. Program coordination requires administrative work to develop a collaborative forum and associated structure to achieve the stacking of benefits this strategy seeks.

Once funds have been attained, these partnership efforts require multiple avenues to disseminate funds that provide enhanced flexibility. While the funding mechanism used by the partnership provided relative flexibility, there are challenges related to future funding and contract extension as a result of DOD process requirements that must be considered, understood, and managed. Flexibility must be a significant consideration when using funding mechanisms and developing cooperative funding agreements to ensure the availability of resources. Melaville and Blank’s (1991) findings show that a partnership ability to reconfigure and attain resource flexibility allows for continuation of funding that is a critical component for collaborative success.

Conclusion

As collaborative efforts to conserve rural landscapes continue, it is important to understand how to effectively engage leadership among diverse stakeholder groups to achieve sustainable, landscape-scale conservation. The case of the North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Partnership provides a unique example of military leadership becoming integrated into a collaborative partnership of federal, state, and local agencies and non-government organizations to achieve the
conservation of land uses compatible with military training operations. The scale of these efforts represents a divergence from traditional locally based buffer projects that provide minimal protection to the military training mission and center on relations between an installation and local communities. This case provides insights into the complexity and challenges that result from increasing the scale of conservation and integrating military interests and investment, while also providing a robust set of best practices and lessons learned that should be taken into consideration when leadership across multiple sectors seeks to engage in large landscape partnerships with the military.

References


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Creating a Statewide Absence Policy for Expecting and Parenting Students: A Case Study of Community-Based Policy Work

Stephanie Jackson, Micaela Cadena, Marylouise Kuti, Paige Duhamel, and Kristine Tollestrup

Abstract

Community-based coalitions can be a powerful force for social change. This article describes how a group of organizations and individuals combined their knowledge and strengths to succeed in crafting an educational policy that was signed into state law. The Young Parent Working Group is a multidisciplinary coalition that advocates for the educational attainment of expecting and parenting students. This case-study highlights the progression of the initial policy development, the evolution of the group, successful interpersonal processes, legislation, messaging, lobbying for bi-partisan support, and finally the transition to policy implementation and next steps.

Introduction

High school and middle school students who are expecting a child or parenting have one of the highest dropout rates of any population (Perper, 2010). Many students experience a life event that requires an adjustment to general school attendance policy, such as those with an illness, injury, or behavioral health issue. Schools have developed policies so that these students can keep up with their classwork and remain in academic good standing. However, in the typical American public school, students who are expecting or parenting have no such policy to assist them. Responding to this need, a diverse group of advocates developed a strategy to improve the educational environment for expecting and parenting students through legislation. The Young Parent Working Group, a coalition based in Albuquerque, New Mexico pooled their experience and resources to develop an excused absence policy for expecting and parenting students that was successfully passed and signed into law. The process for this policy development, advocacy, legislation, and implementation is a case study for how community-based organizations can create significant change in education policy at a state level.

New Mexico is a largely rural state with an ethnically diverse population consisting of 44% Hispanics, 42% non-Hispanic whites, 10% American Indians, 2% African-Americans, 1.4% Asian and Pacific Islanders, and 3.2% multi-racial (New Mexico Department of Health, 2015). In addition to these population features, New Mexico also has one of the highest rates of adolescent births and one of the lowest high school graduation rates in the United States (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015). In 2015, New Mexico's birth rate for all race/ethnicities for ages 15–19 years was 47 per 1,000 females compared to the national rate of 24.2 per 1,000 females (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015). Nationally, Hispanic teens have a national birth rate of 46 per 1,000, the highest rate of any ethnic group. In New Mexico, the rate was even higher at 59 per 1,000 girls; 67% of all teen births were to Hispanic young women (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015).

New Mexico is the first state in the U.S. to pass legislation providing a baseline standard for leave and absence policies for expectant and parenting students at the school district level (NM HB300: An Act Relating to Public Schools; Requiring School Districts and Charter Schools to Establish Policies that Provide Excused Absences to Pregnant and Parenting Students). The 2013 law recognizes that these students need the flexibility to achieve their educational goals, including high school graduation, while managing their responsibilities as parents. Although the federal Title IX legislation ensures that schools do not discriminate on the basis of pregnancy or parenting, this is not enough to prevent the majority of these students from dropping out of school. The excused absence policy is a step toward educational equity for expectant and parenting students with their peers that are attending school without the addition of being a parent.

The New Mexico law was a result of the work of a coalition of community organizations working with young parents to identify their most pressing issues and then developing feasible solutions.
In the time since the legislation has passed the coalition has continued to work on barriers to implementation and evaluation.

**Significance**

The United States has the highest adolescent birth rate in the industrialized world (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009). It is important to recognize that adolescent parents may also be students who face barriers in balancing the needs of their child with their responsibilities as students in the educational system. Educational attainment is one of the most important indicators of lifelong health and economic well-being, but there has yet to be a concerted effort in the U.S. to create educational policies protecting this population of students who face a high risk of dropping out of school.

Outcomes associated with pregnancy and parenthood in adolescence involve a host of socio-economic challenges, including high poverty rates, growing health disparities, and more (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009; Lipman, Georgiades, & Boyle, 2011; Sum, Khatiwada, & McLaughlin, 2009). These outcomes, along with societal attitudes around parenting young, have resulted in stigma that may serve to increase barriers to young parents’ success. Increasingly, scholars have begun to tease out the true impacts of young parenting without falling into stigma-based assumptions. Findings indicate that the age at giving birth does not necessarily determine the economic and social outcomes of a young parent’s family to the same extent that ethnicity, race, ZIP code, and access to education does (Kearney & Levine, 2012). Of these social determinants that dictate the outcomes of young parents and their families, the one that most readily influences long-term success is access to education (Rumberger, 2013).

Educational access and attainment are significant factors influencing a young person’s future achievement, regardless of whether they are a parent or not. A young person who drops out of high school is less likely to find a job and earn a living wage and more likely to live in poverty and suffer negative health outcomes (Rumberger, 2013). High school dropouts can expect to earn a median of $493 per week, which is approximately $200 a week less than high school graduates (United States Department of Labor, 2016). Although dropout rates in the U.S. have been declining in the past few decades (Ventura, Hamilton & Mathews, 2014), in New Mexico this rate is 15%. In addition, 69% of the population in New Mexico does not have a college degree (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015). This relatively high lack of educational attainment throughout the state creates a labor force that is disproportionately centered on low-wage jobs when compared to labor forces in other states.

According to a report from The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, nearly one-third of teenage girls who have dropped out of high school report that either pregnancy or parenthood is a key reason (Shuger, 2012). The national data also show that only 40% of young mothers finish high school, while less than 2% of young women who give birth while under the age of 18 obtain a college degree before the age of 30. Educational data on young mothers is sparse and only available at the national level. Although there are no New Mexico data for expecting and parenting student graduation rates, there is little reason to estimate that trends are different for New Mexico, a state with high poverty, few resources, and one of the lowest graduation rates in the U.S. (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015).

The Young Parent Working Group believes that a student who becomes a young parent does not lose their potential to learn and succeed. However, it is also the experience of the young parents in the group, as well as the educators that work with expecting and parenting students, that it is difficult to balance the needs of a child with requirements of a traditional high school education. Adding to the problem is the fact that very few accommodations exist within the education system for students without the family resources to care for a child while the parents are in school. With these issues in mind, a grassroots effort in New Mexico began to create educational policy that could increase educational attainment for the state’s parenting student population.

**Process of Policy Development**

**Focus Groups**

In the fall of 2011, the American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico (ACLU-NM) approached Young Women United (YWU), a reproductive justice organization that leads community organizing and policy initiatives by and for young women of color, about an opportunity to conduct focus groups with high-school-aged mothers. Both in New Mexico and nationally, the ACLU had been working to expand the application of Title IX, specifically the protections it offers to expectant women who are in school. The most well-known provision of Title IX, passed as part of the United States Education Amendments in 1972,
includes the requirements for equal access to athletics opportunities for male and female students in schools. However, Title IX goes beyond protecting against sex-based discrimination in athletics. Title IX provides that “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972).

The Federal Department of Education has interpreted the broad prohibition on sex discrimination in public schools as protecting the rights to equal educational opportunities for expectant and parenting students. More specifically, regulations passed for the implementation of Title IX state that schools are prohibited from discriminating against students on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery from any of these conditions. Additionally, schools cannot take discriminatory action against a student based on their parental, family, or marital status that treats them differently on the basis of their sex (Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972, 1972). The ACLU-NM was interested in learning about the educational experiences of young parents in New Mexico public schools. YWU, leading community organizing and policy initiatives through a reproductive justice lens, had begun to challenge what they have experienced as the inaccurate and judgmental portrayals of young parents that serve as foundation for many pregnancy prevention models. As a first step, the ACLU-NM and YWU collaborated in running focus groups investigating these issues.

YWU staff, in coordination with an ACLU-NM attorney, facilitated focus groups with more than 40 expectant and parenting students in four different New Mexico communities (Las Cruces, Albuquerque, Española, and Santa Fe). The overall project and outreach efforts were supported by New Mexico Graduation Reality and Dual-role Skills Program (NM GRADS), a statewide system providing an in-school, for credit classroom and case management program for teenage parents that includes on-site licensed child development centers and sessions on college and career readiness, youth leadership, fatherhood programs, and early childhood and infant mental health. The focus groups were facilitated by the following organizations in their respective communities: NM GRADS, New Futures School, the Santa Fe Teen Parent Center, and Tewa Women United. With considerable experience in youth organizing and facilitation, YWU staff designed the focus group instrument to document the educational experiences of young mothers while capturing some of the dynamics that shape young parents’ lives. These included such topics as: the stigma and judgment they faced and the support they found within their schools, families, and communities. For the majority of participants, these groups were their first opportunity to articulate their experiences as young parents and students in New Mexico schools.

Legislative Memorials

After assessing the political opportunities within a New Mexico legislative session, the ACLU-NM and YWU introduced two legislative memorials during the 2012 legislative session based on findings from the collaborative focus groups. YWU collaborated with young parents in the NM GRADS programs in Southern New Mexico to author Senate Memorial 25, which was passed and established August 25 as the New Mexico Day in Recognition of Young Parents. Symbolic in nature, the Young Parents Memorial was designed to begin shifting the narrative around the lives of young parents and raise awareness that parents of all kinds need respect, trust, and recognition. As part of civic engagement efforts in support of the memorial, the YWU organized a Young Parents Day of Action, working with the NM GRADS System to bring more than 50 young parents and allies to the New Mexico capitol to speak to legislators about their lives as young parents and the positive impact this memorial would have in New Mexico.

Also in 2012, the ACLU-NM drafted and introduced a legislative memorial aimed at assembling a task force to examine the educational barriers faced by expectant and parenting students in New Mexico. The ACLU-NM and YWU took the lead on the legislative advocacy effort to pass the memorial. Although it passed unanimously through multiple committees and the Senate floor, the session ended before the memorial came to a vote on the House floor.

Evolution of the Young Parent Working Group

Throughout the 2012 legislative session, the ACLU-NM and YWU continued to identify individuals and organizations interested in further work on this issue. The ACLU-NM convened an initial meeting of these groups, and the majority of those in attendance agreed to spend 2012 as part of a single working group that would follow the direction of the proposed task force. The group...
met monthly from March to November of 2012, and the preliminary meetings developed potential approaches to improving programs and policies that impact the access young parents have to education in New Mexico. Participation in this phase had the largest number of organizations and included district representatives from the Public Education Department, Albuquerque Public Schools, and the Children Youth and Families Department. It was important for the Young Parent Working Group to seek out and include input from young parents. The University of New Mexico Public Health Program had previously developed a study to pilot test a peer mentor program for new young parents to support educational attainment (among other goals) for the promotion of healthy and strong families. Mentors from this project, who are young parents who graduated from high school, participated in the working group and contributed their experiences and insights.

In the fall of 2012 the Young Parent Working Group reviewed previous conversations and began to narrow down areas of concern and proposed solutions. In both the focus groups and the working group, the young parents explained that expectant and parenting students are negatively impacted by the often arbitrary decisions of individual educators and administrators to excuse (or not) absences related to their pregnancies, labor and delivery, or parenting status. The working group came to the agreement that adding an expectant and parenting excused absence policy to the New Mexico attendance code was a no-to-low cost solution that would positively impact New Mexican young parents working to graduate from high school. Together the group created a report titled “Investing in the Future: Reforming Absence and Leave Policy for Pregnant and Parenting Students in New Mexico (Investing in the Future).” (See Table 1)

**Table 1. Participating Organizations and Individuals in the Young Parents Working Group**

- Albuquerque Public Schools (including New Futures and Home Hospital)
- American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico
- New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department
- New Mexico Graduation Reality and Dual-role Skills System
- Pegasus Legal Services for Children
- Southwest Women’s Law Center
- University of New Mexico Public Health Program
- Young Women United
- Individual young parents

**Successful Working Group Process**

The Young Parent Working Group was strongly participatory, and all parties were queried about their knowledge, perspective, and capacities to carry out activities at different phases of the process. After examining the issues at hand and agreeing to collaborate on a legislative agenda, the group identified the policy issue that would be moved forward and the overall frame in which the advocacy was to happen. The group then identified key areas in which the full group would make decisions together while also establishing roles and responsibilities for each organization. The effectiveness of the working group was due in large part to the depth of expertise of each organization and the collective experience across multiple sectors. The efforts of the group were designed to synthesize the strengths and capacity of each organization so that the shared impact was much greater than it would have been otherwise.

**Drafting Legislation**

At the end of 2012, a subsection of the larger working group began to draft, introduce, and advocate for legislation to create an excused absence policy for expectant and parenting students in the state. ACLU-NM and YWU were joined by advocacy partners that included the Southwest Women’s Law Center and Strong Families New Mexico in building and leading legislative strategy. The NM GRADS System and public health researchers continued to provide data and expertise around the issue.
Presenting the “Investing in the Future” Report Before the Interim Legislative Committee

As an important step toward bill introduction, the working group presented the report (Investing in the Future) to the Legislative Educational Study Committee (LESC). This was also an opportunity to field questions about the issue and build support. It allowed working group members to practice presenting and discussing the proposed policy in an official setting. Through this process the working group was able to design a strategic approach to identifying appropriate messages and continue working toward effective ways to communicate the proposed policy.

Legislative Bill

Based on feedback from the LESC process and supportive legislators, the group finalized the key points of the legislative proposal, which was then legally reviewed by the ACLU-NM and the Southwest Women’s Law Center. The bill was drafted and introduced early in the 2013 session. The key points were as follows:

- Ten day excused absence for documented birth of child;
- Four excused absences per semester for expectant and parenting students when pregnancy or caring for a child necessitates missing class (supplementing general absence policy);
- All absences will be documented; all work will be made up (students will allowed an equal number of days to make up work as they were absent from school, supplementing general absence policy);
- Students will be responsible for notifying appropriate school personnel of their expectant or parenting status;
- Policy applies to both mothers and fathers (*this was later interpreted by the New Mexico Public Education Department (NMPED) to only apply once the child was born).

The intent of the law was to create a base threshold for school districts and charter schools to follow in granting students leave for pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting reasons. This intent is borne out in the regulations issued by the NMPED.

Messaging and Media

The working group crafted a legislative strategy that included a strong messaging and media plan as a key component. Teen pregnancy has historically been a controversial and emotional political issue. The group understood that to pass this bill and have it signed into law that excused absences had to be framed as key to educational access. New Mexicans needed to understand that this bill would benefit both young parents and the state overall by increasing graduation rates. YWU facilitated conversations with young parents so that the lead messages of the legislative strategy came from their expertise, articulating the importance of this bill to families like their own. From those early conversations, YWU drafted talking points so that advocates and legislators alike were able to communicate the same messages across multiple conversations and committee hearings about the bill. As the bill began to garner media attention, the ACLU-NM fielded press calls while YWU prepared young parents, allied advocates, and elected officials to speak on the issue.

Successful Lobbying

Advocates working on this effort had a shared goal of increasing the high school graduation rates of New Mexico’s expectant and parenting students. It was understood that this would be a policy that would matter to a bi-partisan audience, and measures were taken to build a coalition of legislative leaders on both sides of the aisle. The working group lobbied legislators based on shared values and highlighting both the character and challenges of the districts they represented.
Legislative advocacy is time consuming and requires many people with various levels of access and experience, so finding a role for anyone who wanted to advocate on behalf of this bill was critical to success. Managing advocates and their activities was achieved through clear and direct daily communication during the session. Coordination of efforts was essential to each step of the process as the bill made its way through the committees and floor votes.

With broad commitment to a shared legislative strategy, the working group partners engaged in ways that used their particular strengths, experience, and connections. Individuals within the working group that had relationships and experience that were beneficial to moving the bill forward followed those avenues of opportunity. Other times, it was a case of which advocate was present and available to perform a task or have a conversation. The flow of a legislative session is unpredictable, but working group members with experience were skilled at spreading resources and operating to the best advantage.

The group’s shared organizational strengths were crucial to the success of the passing of the bill. Over the course of three months and in key moments, the legal expertise of the ACLU-NM and Southwest Women’s Law Center, the diverse communities represented through Strong Families New Mexico, the research and data provided by public health partners, the expertise on the issue provided by the NM GRADS System, and the powerful messaging and legislative strategies YWU carried throughout the session came together to support the success of the proposed bill.

Transition to Implementation

The implementation of the new legislation signed by the Governor in April of 2013 required that the NMPED create the policy to provide guidance to school districts. During the passing of the bill, lawmakers recognized that it was not as inclusive of young fathers as it should be, therefore, “Pregnant and Parenting Teens” was changed to “Expectant and Parenting Teens.” This is also in line with the federal language enacted in the same time frame, changing the term pregnant to expectant in regard to funding and programs addressing teen births.

Although the policy was in place for young parents when school resumed in August 2013, there was insufficient time for NMPED to add the language to school handbooks across the state. Efforts were made by the working group to inform school administrators and staff of the new policy. These efforts included YWU collaborating with NM GRADS programs in towns across New Mexico during the annual “Young Parent Day” celebrations and observances on August 25, 2013, which highlighted the absence policy. Young Parent Day continues to be celebrated on an annual basis with activities and social media twitter chats. There was also a NM GRADS day at the legislature in 2015, where young parents from all over the state gathered at the capital to speak about their stories and celebrate their accomplishments. Also in 2015, the National Women’s Law Center hosted a webinar, “Title IX & Pregnant & Parenting Students 101.”

Implementation Barriers

Barriers to implementation include the length of time it took NMPED to write a policy to be sent to New Mexico school districts for implementation. Throughout this process, federal language had changed from “pregnant and parenting” to “expectant and parenting;” however, the policy information that the NMPED sent to school districts included the original language. Currently, NMPED is writing an amendment to include the above-mentioned language change. Also, expectant mothers are able to attend pre- and post-natal visits through these policies; however, until the language modification has been made by the NMPED and sent out to school districts, young fathers are not covered for the pre- and post-natal visits. Additional barriers include the lack of understanding and dissemination within specific districts. This information needs to be shared with every teacher within a given district, which creates a challenge in those districts that do not have a NM GRADS or other intervention program. NM GRADS programs cover approximately 31% of high schools in the state. NM GRADS teachers have received professional development and are aware of this policy and are supported by NM GRADS state staff to advocate for students with regard to this policy.

It is important to note that this policy does not supersede Title IX, and districts must still adhere to the federal laws with regard to Title IX. Educators and administrators must understand both Title IX and the absence policy in regard to expectant and parenting teens; however both must be adhered to respectively.

Additionally, there were several school districts within New Mexico that already had an absence policy in place, which in some cases went above and beyond the requirements of the new
absence policy. For example, some schools allow for up to six weeks of leave with the appointment of a homebound instructor for young mothers post-delivery. This leave is granted primarily due to a school's lack of an on-site childcare center and the fact that childcare facilities typically do not accept infants until they are four to six weeks old. However, the new state-mandated absence policy could be interpreted as only needing to provide the 10 days with four additional days per semester, creating a barrier within districts with a more comprehensive policy.

Conclusions

Practical Implications

It has now been four years since this policy went into effect. In 2015 Southwest Women's Law Center completed a review of the high school policy handbooks received by students. Of the 117 school district and charter school governance policies and handbooks surveyed, only 35% contained reference to the protections offered by New Mexico's Excused Absences for Pregnant and Parenting Students law (NM HB300). The remaining 65% of school districts and charter schools had no discernible policy language in their governance policies or handbooks outlining the rights of the Excused Absence law for students. School districts that utilize the New Mexico School Board Association's policy services have the highest rates of adoption of up-to-date leave and absence policies for expectant and parenting students.

While compliance appears to be low, the Southwest Women's Law Center does not discount the possibility that schools are handing out copies of the leave policy to students directly instead of incorporating them into handbooks and district governance documents since the statute requires schools to provide students with direct notice of their rights. Additionally, other school districts have instituted their own comprehensive absence and leave policies for expectant and parenting students that offer greater protections and are driven by local needs. The Center also understands that some schools with NM GRADS programs may be reviewing their current absence and leave policies to ensure compliance with the statute while also offering their system's greater accommodations.

Evaluation and Research Implications

The legislation requiring school districts to establish the policy does not mandate that state agencies or school districts provide any data on the implementation or effectiveness of the policy. In addition, there is currently no system in place to ensure dissemination of knowledge about the policy or assessment of its usage. Previously existing educational policies for expectant and parenting students vary by school and school district; however, this new statewide excused absence policy is the first of its kind in the nation. If this policy is successful in its intention to keep expectant and parenting students in school it could serve as an example for other states. Therefore, it is important to begin evaluating the effects of this legislation in order to develop strategies that maximize best practices for students and schools.

The University of New Mexico Public Health Program, Southwest Women's Law and NM GRADS are collaborating on a project to address these needs. The project objectives are to: (a) design questions about attitudes and use of the excused absence policy for expectant and parenting students to develop a statewide student survey, and (b) create a variety of informational materials on the absence policy for expectant and parenting students. A pilot project has been completed that includes telephone interviews and a focus group of parenting high school students. This project was done to elicit feedback about the development both of materials and approaches to delivering them that are both culturally and age appropriate, and for developing a survey for evaluation of the policy and its effectiveness. Funding is currently being sought for further development of evaluation of the policy and an information campaign.

Additional research needs include establishing a denominator for expectant and parenting students. Currently, adolescent birth data and NMPED student data are not linked. If these two data sets were combined, numbers of parenting students and their educational outcomes could be evaluated and followed to provide critical information on the educational attainment of parenting students.
References


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The Interpersonal Skills of Community-Engaged Scholarship: Insights From Collaborators Working at the University of Saskatchewan’s Community Engagement Office

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Abstract

Perhaps more clearly than other research approaches, community-based research or engaged scholarship involves both technical skills of research expertise and scientific rigor as well as interpersonal skills of relationship building, effective communication, and moral ways of being. In an academic age concerned with scientific precision, cognitive skills, quantification, and reliable measurements, the interpersonal skills required for research—and particularly community-based research and engaged scholarship—demand growing importance and resources in contemporary discourse and practice. Focused around the University of Saskatchewan’s Community Engagement Office located in the inner city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, the authors draw on over 50 years of collective experience to offer critical reflections on the notion of interpersonal skills in community-engaged scholarship that manifest particularly in place-based contexts of Indigenous community partnerships. Overall, we argue that discourse and practice involving community-engaged scholarship must pay attention to the notion of interpersonal skills in various aspects and across multiple dimensions and disciplines. This approach is crucial to ensure that research is done effectively and ethically, that good quality data are produced from such research, that subtle, systematic forms of micro-aggression and oppression are minimized, and that community voices and knowledge have a meaningful and significant place in scholarship activities.

This paper rests on a single claim—that interpersonal skills are vital for community-engaged scholarship. In various social science disciplines, so called soft skills (what we refer to as interpersonal skills) are defined as the social and interpersonal qualities or capacities required to effectively deal with and promote positive human relationships, interactions, personal and interpersonal development, or social participation (Azim, Gale, Lawlor-Wright, Kirkham, Khan, & Alam, 2010; Gibb, 2014; Kechagias, 2011). Strategies of engagement, negotiation, and participatory knowledge production are difficult, but not impossible, to systematize and replicate. These skills often involve communication, emotional intelligence, leadership, organization, motivation, creativity, and spiritually-informed attitudes, virtues, or values (i.e., compassion, kindness, forgiveness, patience, etc.) (Gibb, 2014; Heckman & Kautz, 2012; Kylönén, 2013; Thompson & Clark, 2013). As Ridder, Meysman, Oluwagbemi, and Abeel (2014) assert, “The term soft skill refers to one of the many different aspects of social behavior” that can include “communications skills, coaching and leadership abilities, as well as personal qualities such as friendliness, empathy, and optimism” (p. 1).

In contemporary literature, interpersonal skills are often juxtaposed against a host of hard or cognitive skills that center around the cognitive domain and a kind of intelligence attributed to or measured through standardized tests such as the IQ, LSAT, GRE, or MCAT. A notion of cognitive skill can also refer to the processes, procedures, and techniques of scientific endeavor; they are the competencies required that allow researchers to manipulate, employ, and work with the available methods for generating knowledge within a certain field or paradigm of inquiry (Franz, 2009;
To date, higher education admission policies in nearly all developed countries around the world are based primarily on the cognitive skills of standardized admissions tests. Arguments about their validity and fairness abound, yet these discussions focus predominantly on the importance of cognitive ability, its heritability versus learned quality, or race/ethnic differences (Gibb, 2014; Kylloinen, 2013). These sentiments filter into higher education research and training cultures that prioritize and focus almost exclusively on the development of cognitive skills. Outside the academic environment, these trends extend into the workplace. Kylloinen (2013) observes that, due to the literature in industrial-organizational psychology attesting to the importance of how cognitive hard skills are the most likely to identify workers who will succeed at training and work effectiveness, overall selection of candidates is almost exclusively based on cognitive abilities (p. 17).

Reflecting these sentiments, many policies and practices in academia are also designed to reward or privilege cognitive or hard skills over and above any notion of social or interpersonal skills. These tensions between hard or soft or interpersonal and cognitive skills are further reinforced in contexts of academic service-learning and civic engagement. Like aspects of community-engaged scholarship, service-learning is a pedagogical approach that bridges potential theory-practice gaps by actively engaging and connecting students with the wider civic community (and vice versa), in order to accomplish mutually defined goals and objectives (Conville, 2001; Eyler, Giles, & Astin, 1999; Marullo & Edwards, 2000). Although recognition for the importance of university civic responsibility is growing, scholars participating in such practices and discourses still confront polarizing and conflicting expectations of outcomes and measures of success, as an academic culture prioritizing cognitive skills continues to undergird norms and policies that are often at odds with the demands and cultures of community or civic engagement. Moreover, the acquisition of interpersonal skills is often based on engaged experience and processes of embodied doing of social activities in cultural context (Marullo & Edwards, 2000). Again, this embodied sense of experiential knowledge and learning is typically downplayed by academic institutions that emphasize cognitive development. As a result, university training tends to privilege cognitive skills and thereby inadvertently silence, or even impede, the development of embodied, interpersonal skills that are central for sustained and effective service-learning and engaged scholarship.

These tensions and dichotomies also emerge in contexts of intercultural competence and Indigenous methodologies or knowledge systems (Brown, 2005; Dimitrov, Dawson, Olsen, & Meadows, 2014; Kovach, 2009; Lavallée, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Although practice of service-learning and community engaged scholarship has taken strides to address widening gaps between theory and practice, or the academy and community, these approaches can still carry with them subtle forms of power imbalances that tend to privilege academic or Western forms of knowledge over other cultural ways of knowing and being (Wilson, 2008). Recent calls, therefore, have been voiced to decolonize the areas of collaboration and knowledge production, between Indigenous and Western modes of research and scholarship, between hard and soft skills, and between academic and community-based ways of engagement—and to rewrite and thereby “re-right” the epistemic boundaries among disparate cultural ways of knowing (Dimitrov et al., 2014; Smith, 1999). Thus, an Indigenous and more culturally competent approach to community engaged scholarship can differ from conventional approaches—or qualitative research more generally—in that it embraces and works from an epistemology that “acknowledges the interconnectedness of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of individuals with all living things and with the earth...” (Lavallée, 2009, p. 23). Indeed, it is often this spiritual domain and the interpersonal skills engendered therein that are continually and often systematically neglected in contemporary Western forms of knowledge, scholarship, and community engagement (Franz, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

Looking more broadly, although cognitive abilities and proficiency with various tools, methods, and procedures of cognitive scholarly endeavors are important, the burgeoning critique in contemporary literature is that social and interpersonal abilities, diverse forms of knowledge and ways of being, and individuals’ personality skills and traits, are equally important for research success and community engagement (Gibb, 2014; Lavallée, 2009). More specifically regarding community-based research and engaged scholarship, it seems that when interpersonal skills are hard to come by, reinforcement of systemic aggressions and abuses can occur. These issues have been especially important to consider in research with Indigenous communities. Historically, academic
research did not always undergo ethical and moral engagements with Indigenous communities, as academic scholarship and research have been plagued with a clandestine history of colonialism, and neo-colonialism (Bennett, 2004; Smith, 1999). This history can inform a top-down view of community engagement with minimal or no impetus for a responsible and reciprocal form of relationship building. Additionally, subtle forms of systemic and systematic racism in academic cultures have further perpetuated a colonialismand neo-colonialist savior complex, and these forms of “othering” adversely impact Indigenous community/university relationships (Bull, 2010). Recent efforts by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) and the implementation of their “calls to action” will likely go a long way toward assisting the processes of correcting previous harms (Bull, 2010; Smith, 1999; TRC, 2015). The notions that interpersonal skills are somehow more dispensable are also an issue. Thus, throughout this paper we present a critical contribution and re-imagining of the so-called interpersonal skills as being equally central to effective, creative, co-creative community-based research and engaged scholarship—a discussion centered around meaningful engagement and partnerships with Indigenous communities. How do researchers navigate between the cultures that support interpersonal skills required for authentic community engagement and the culture of cognitive skills that saturates academia? How do students and scholars of all backgrounds build competency in interpersonal skills required to carry out their research and collaborative learning endeavors? And how might learning to partner and collaborate with Indigenous communities and peoples shed light on other important areas of community-engaged scholarship?

In offering critical reflections on these questions, the authors here draw on a 50-year collective pool of knowledge and experience pertaining to community-engaged scholarship. All of the authors have worked at some point in their careers at the University of Saskatchewan’s Community Engagement (CE) Office located in the inner-city of Saskatoon four kilometers away from the main University of Saskatchewan campus. The CE Office focuses on enhancing and building community/university relationships in Saskatoon’s inner city aimed at supporting social, educational, economic, and health equity through research, artistic projects, and community-engaged service-learning. For the most part, projects and partnerships are driven by community interests, recognizing evidence that sustained action and effective knowledge mobilization occur when studies are initiated at the community level (Cook, 2008). The CE Office aspires to be interdisciplinary, link local and global issues, and honor knowledge co-creation and information exchanges that are both meaningful to communities and academically rigorous. To support these ends, CE Office staff endeavor to make it easier for community members, groups, and organizations to connect and collaborate with the university, while also facilitating community connections and offering support, advice, and work or meeting space to scholars and students pursuing community-engaged projects. In many ways, the CE Office functions as an incubator for

Following this, we present three interpersonal skills that have surfaced in our work over the years which we argue are significant for researchers as they carry out community-engaged scholarship of various kinds: (1) Respect and Humility; (2) Diplomacy; and (3) Flexibility. We then address questions pertaining to the development and place-based practice of such skills, including some ways that future scholars and trainees can develop critical competencies in these areas and the ways in which university structures and spaces can support this process. Overall, we argue that discourse and practice involving community-engaged scholarship must continue to pay attention to the notion of interpersonal skills in various aspects and across multiple cultural dimensions and disciplines. This is crucial to ensure that hard cognitively framed research is done effectively and ethically, that good quality data are produced from such research, that subtle systematic forms of micro-aggression and cultural oppression are minimized, and that community voices and knowledge have a meaningful and significant place in scholarship and service-learning activities.

**Station 20 West: A Community Engagement Office**

The University of Saskatchewan’s Community Engagement (CE) Office at Station 20 West is located in the inner-city of Saskatoon four kilometers away from the main University of Saskatchewan campus. The CE Office focuses on enhancing and building community/university relationships in Saskatoon’s inner city aimed at supporting social, educational, economic, and health equity through research, artistic projects, and community-engaged service-learning. For the most part, projects and partnerships are driven by community interests, recognizing evidence that sustained action and effective knowledge mobilization occur when studies are initiated at the community level (Cook, 2008). The CE Office aspires to be interdisciplinary, link local and global issues, and honor knowledge co-creation and information exchanges that are both meaningful to communities and academically rigorous. To support these ends, CE Office staff endeavor to make it easier for community members, groups, and organizations to connect and collaborate with the university, while also facilitating community connections and offering support, advice, and work or meeting space to scholars and students pursuing community-engaged projects. In many ways, the CE Office functions as an incubator for
community/university collaborations, while learning about and supporting the development of community engagement promising practices among stakeholders.

The CE Office is situated on Treaty Six territory of predominantly the Plains Cree peoples and the homelands of the Métis peoples and within the inner-city neighborhoods of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where there is a high proportion of Indigenous peoples in general. As a result, the unfolding place-based reflections are largely grounded within and shaped by Indigenous communities, contexts, and cultural ways of interaction. The primary approach to community engagement and scholarship, therefore, involves what has been referred to as a two-eyed way of seeing, where Indigenous community partners and academics from typically Western ways of knowing (worldviews) are learning to work alongside one another. This two-eyed seeing framework proposed by Mi’kmaw elders Albert and Murdena Marshall was a means to bridge Western science and Indigenous knowledge, an approach that recognizes the benefits of seeing from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and finally to use both of these eyes together (Martin, 2012). Two-eyed seeing holds that there are diverse understandings of the world and that by acknowledging and respecting a diversity of perspectives (without perpetuating the dominance of one over another) we can build mutual understanding that lends itself to dealing with some of the most pressing issues facing community partners and Indigenous peoples (Iwama, Marshall, Marshall, & Bartlett, 2009). As a loose community of scholars and community members, employing this approach allowed us to foster equivalent consideration of diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews. The projects and insights described here that are situated within the CE Office all employ interpersonal skills particularly suited to navigating multiple contributions from diverse cultural worldviews, perspectives, and knowledge systems.

The CE Office is also situated alongside a host of similarly minded co-locators, including CHEP Good Food Inc., the Boxcar Café, Quint Development Corporation, the Saskatoon Mothers’ Centre, and two Saskatoon Health Region programs (KidsFirst and Our Neighborhood Health Centre). Collectively, the co-locators of Station 20 West endeavor to contribute to the social and economic revitalization in Saskatoon, and specifically Saskatoon’s inner-city. It also affords partner organizations and the broader community collaborative project and learning opportunities, and the benefits of shared facilities and equipment, thus enabling each group to make the best use of resources.

Over the last three years there have been approximately 12 community-engaged research projects based out of the CE Office. These range from studies looking at the food environment and interventions within these for families in the inner-city neighborhoods of Saskatoon; studies of the perceptions of those with HIV/AIDS and their access to health care systems; mental health and resilience among First Nations and Métis youth living in Saskatoon’s urban contexts; measuring social return and quality management and performance measurement documenting the value added by inner-city social agencies; exploring youth in transit and growing out of foster care; and work with the Saskatoon Mothers’ Centre detailing the challenges and barriers for mothers from inner-city Saskatoon contexts. In these and other projects facilitated at the CE Office, several interpersonal skills were identified as being central to the start-up, community-engagement, sustainability, and successful completion of projects.

The impetus of this paper emerged through formal and informal discussions over the course of three years among those working at the engagement office in Saskatoon. We recognized during these discussions that, primarily among the university context and culture, the notion of interpersonal skills tends to be minimal compared to the more cognitive hard skills of research expertise. In practice, however, interpersonal skills were recognized to be central in assisting scholars at the CE Office to not only navigate and negotiate the complexities inherent within community-engaged work, but also to help repair relationships impacted by a legacy of Western knowledge and cognitive skill-driven research on Indigenous communities (Smith, 1999). With the intention of developing the knowledge base in this area, and of supporting best practices for community-engaged scholarship, contributing authors offered their critical reflections and experiences regarding interpersonal skills and their use within their various projects and interactions. The first author served as the coordinator of this project over a two-year period, connecting and engaging authors in several conversations and in informal interviews. Together, these conversations and interviews produced
several reflections and insights on interpersonal skills from over 50 years of collective experience.

This was an informal academic project and therefore did not seek ethical review board approval or engage in formal research process. We did, however, follow the principles of thematic qualitative analysis (Rothe, 2000), wherein all contributions on this topic were organized by the first author according to the themes and concepts most referenced. The informal analytic steps included: (1) coding conversations and personal accounts for statements about what people were describing and doing in the contexts of their community-engaged scholarship; (2) developing tentative categories concerning these topics that were explored in further conversations and group meetings; (3) writing memos on the categories; and (4) describing the links between categories and connecting these reflections and categories with the wider body of literature in the area. In the end, three interpersonal skills emerged as being central to community-engaged scholarship at the CE Office: (1) respect and humility; (2) diplomacy; and (3) flexibility. The CE Office provides the backdrop for these discussions and the context within which these skills are practiced and develop. Cutting across and central to all aspects of community-engaged scholarship discussed here is the importance of forming and maintaining positive equitable relationships with Indigenous communities and peoples.

Interpersonal Skills of Community-Engaged Scholarship

Respect and Humility

Respect and humility inform a particular approach to knowledge, including its generation, application, and diffusion. The quality of respect involves an understanding that someone, somewhere, or something is important or serious and as such shapes a way of relating to or interacting with that particular person, thing, place, or situation. Respect also implies that this understanding is worthy of high regard or admiration and demands a certain amount of concern for proper behavior and interaction. Humility is thus coupled with respect insofar as it informs the proper behavioral interaction elicited by respect; the quality or state of not thinking you are better or superior than other people creates an environment where respect can flourish (Wilson, 2008).

For those working at the CE Office in Saskatoon, these qualities, attitudes, and skills assist us in viewing community members as knowledge experts in their own right, based on their experiences and knowledge working in the area related to the research of interest. This perspective is also the basis of social constructionism and views of cultural relativism (Crotty, 1998), epistemological positions where knowledge emerges through dialogue and exchange among individuals. From this position, there is no single reality or truth, and so reality must be interpreted to discover and comprehend the meaning of events and activities. In this way, it is crucial to respect the expertise and knowledge of community partners and find ways to ensure broader community knowledge and wisdom are fundamentally integrated into a project. By minimizing power imbalances that often situate academic scholars as arbiters of knowledge (Kajner, 2015), respect and humility allow a constructionism position to emerge more authentically thereby recognizing the important sources of knowledge held by members of a community who may or may not have any formal academic training. In this way, axiology informs and substantiates epistemology in important ways.

It is also critical to recognize that academic education in general does not foster this approach to respect or humility. Rather, academic education is primarily focused on creating knowledge experts. In the contexts of community-engaged scholarship, as well as opportunities for service learning, the notion of knowledge experts creates dichotomies between and reinforces power imbalances among community and academic collaborators that can stifle the practice of respect and humility. Indeed, in the contexts of Indigenous community research, we have seen time and time again how important it is for the “experts” trained in Western academic knowledge to be willing to humbly let go of formal titles and achievements in order to respectfully engage with and listen to the views and perspectives of community members and elders who may have limited formal schooling and yet have an abundance of practical, spiritual, or traditional forms of knowledge and experience.

Many of the practical aspects of respect and humility play out in the domain of language and communication. In community-engaged scholarship occurring out of the CE Office, we have learned that communication needs to be focused on a reciprocal process of sharing. It also needs to be kept in mind that community members engaged in research projects do not necessarily have professional backgrounds, so a non-personal approach to
communication often emphasized in academic and professional cultures can be hard for community members and partners to relate to and connect with. To foster deeper collaboration and communication based on respect and humility, we have found that it is ideal for scholars and researchers to open up and share with community members (within reason) about their personal backgrounds and to show vulnerability, as this is often a normal part of the Indigenous cultural norms in many of our community contexts. As one contributor mentioned, “I ask people about their families and tell them about mine. I think this helps us all relate better and build trust.” This humble sharing and exchange of life experiences can create a bridge and common understanding that fosters positive working relationships and mutual respect, which can further minimize potential stereotypes and lower power-distance (Bull, 2010). Building authentic relationships is fostered by respect and humility; it requires a willingness to be personally forthcoming without being self-centered. This form of sharing is central to Indigenous methodologies in particular, as it fosters a practice of research based on living in and being with relationship (Wilson, 2008). Being comfortable with and willing to openly disclose what might be considered personal or private aspects of the self from a Western knowledge perspective are key to fostering powerful relationships that can connect different peoples and cultural ways of knowing in a social and spiritual process that is greater than either of the individuals alone (Wilson, 2008).

In another practical sense, it is also important for community-engaged scholars to learn to use language and speak in terms that respect the comprehension levels of those with whom we work. Being trained to use technically specific jargon or eloquent words that are precise and academically friendly can be alienating to community members who do not have the same vocabulary. We need to be humble in our language use and also listen to the words that community members are using, and not necessarily use these words, but recognize why these words are used, and respect the local dialect and meaning systems that inform their understanding. Indeed, we have found during our activities at the CE Office that community members may not use or have the same meaning for certain words. For example, the word “research” can be threatening or alienating in some community contexts—and particularly many of our Indigenous community contexts where previous emphases on hard research has damaged community-academic relationships—so learning to be sensitive to these nuances and using alternative words or phrases, like “evidence-based solutions” can in many instances improve communication, cooperation, and engagement (Arrazattee, Lima, & Lundy, 2013).

A further example of language use comes from a local outreach worker who was giving a presentation with a room full of community members discussing HIV/AIDS risks. Despite the honest efforts to offer support and guidance, this individual quickly alienated a large majority of people by using the word “prostitution” in a discussion with core-neighborhood community members about condom use. While he meant no disrespect, this community of people prefers the term “sex work,” which is less pejorative from their perspective than the term “prostitution.” This incident also highlighted that the individual giving the presentation was an outsider and made working with this group of people more difficult than it needed to be. In this way, respect and humility involves a willingness to admit shortcomings and lack of knowledge and being willing to learn from community experts about proper or normal modes of communication within the given community and context. Humility also allows and permits researchers to seek and be receptive to feedback, and incorporate such feedback into their working models of engagement. In this situation described above, the individual apologized for the misuse of terminology and thanked the community members for their feedback and knowledge. The humble posture of learning in this regard, helped to ensure relationships were maintained and “otherness” was minimized (Kajner, 2015).

Reflecting further regarding the qualities of respect and humility as they manifest in language and communication, another author mentioned:

The greatest difficulty I had during my time at the Community Engagement Office was in overcoming my own perspective and training as an academic. In our last project together, I was required to create communication pieces to share with various community members and audiences. It would seem that plain language is the simplest way to communicate, and that anyone familiar with the English language could develop products accessible to all audiences. I believe in everyone’s ability to do so; however, once
years of academic reading and language colonized the very way I thought, it was difficult to take apart this carefully honed approach to communicate simply and directly. I became comfortable with the volume of input from different directions, from both my university and community partners. However, it was difficult to take apart this carefully honed approach to communicate simply and directly. It was difficult to communicate, in direct and concise prose, alongside distinct visuals, in an efficient way to multiple audiences.

This notion of balancing modes of communication between the demands of academia and community partners was a common theme in all reflections offered by community-engaged scholars at the CE Office. It was further mentioned that what helped people bridge this gap was to work, as much as possible, from a non-power based position, with humility and respect. This approach included aspects of language use and personal sharing as mentioned previously, but also avoiding patronizing language or assumptions regarding what forms of knowledge (community versus academic) are more valuable. Drawing on a constructionist epistemology and a two-eyed seeing approach, researchers have to struggle to view many different forms of knowledge on the same level of power and significance (Crotty, 1998; Iwama et al., 2009). It is having that kind of awareness to co-create safe, respectful, and trustworthy encounters that leads to successful interpersonal interactions. This kind of relationship building is not something that can be codified or systematized beyond description and, as such, it lies within the interpersonal and often subtly embodied skills of the researcher.

Overall, it is recognized that successful community-engaged scholarship is founded upon mutually respectful and trusting relationships among academic and community partners (Brown, 2005; Bull, 2010; Bustamante, Domshy, Findlay, Lovrod, Quinlan, Sayok, & Teucher, 2015; Findlay, Ray, & Basualdo, 2014; Franz, 2009; Kovach, 2009). Phipps, Johnny, and Wedlock (2015), for example, characterize community engaged scholars as “knowledge brokers” who are “responsive to the needs of the community,” and who work “towards a balance between community and academic expertise” in order to “address power differentials between community and university collaborators” (p. 71). Similarly, Weerts and Sandman (2010) describe community-engaged scholars as boundary spanners who sensitively bridge the different cultural and epistemic worlds of the university and community. Qualities such as respect and humility, and the ability to listen to various needs and ideas are all cited as central characteristics of community-engaged scholarship, especially when working among Indigenous communities and peoples. Practical examples of these skills as provided are intended to add to this literature in this area.

Diplomacy

The concept of diplomacy is defined as the work required to maintain good relations between one or more groups, and specifically the skills required in negotiations and navigations across different cultural divides without causing harm to relationships. Diplomacy is often discussed in political contexts where handling sensitive affairs without arousing hostility is a necessary art and practice. It is especially related to forms of communication where a keen sense of what to do or say to maintain positive relations with others is paramount, or forms of perception where abilities to identify and diffuse potential areas of conflict before they arise or become severe are crucial. In the contexts of community-engaged scholarship employed at the CE Office, diplomacy centers on delicate negotiations between cultural realities and systems of power. For anyone having experience working in community contexts, it is clear there can be significant cultural differences between the norms, customs, and practices of academia and the different local social worlds in community contexts. This situation can manifest with regard to specific terms and language as mentioned previously, or in subtler embodied aspects of dress, behavior, or one’s comportment, that is, how one’s posture and bodily stance are presented and displayed in a room during a conversation or community presentation.

Anthropologists have long reflected on these aspects of navigating or walking between different cultural worlds (Madden, 2010), and community-engaged scholars from other disciplinary backgrounds are also making important contributions regarding this process of negotiation (Lavallée, 2009; Phipps, Johnny, & Wedlock, 2015; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). One point common in anthropology and community engagement is the need to familiarize oneself with the community as much as possible to foster the engagement process.
It is important, for example, to invest time in learning about potential community partners: What is the culture of the organization, capacity, strengths, struggles; how and what do they communicate; to explore their identity and how they are perceived more broadly. It is important, however, to do this in ways that do not burden the community organization or partner. This could involve subscribing to their newsletters, following them on social media, studying their website and publications, and attending public events they host or participate in. In a sense, then, this background work can prepare scholars working with community to be involved with the culture of the community or organization, and to pick up some of the terminology that is key, the concerns that are frequently mentioned, and the ways of being or interacting that are common or considered normal in those contexts.

It is also important to caution, however, that any time we undertake community-engaged scholarship, we are working implicitly or explicitly with an understanding of what constitutes community. Often, we use “community” synonymously with organization or neighborhood. Other times, we use it to mean a collection of people who, outside of a CE research project, have little connection but because they represent certain constituencies of people, we bring them together for one research project. There are plenty of other ways of conceptualizing community. Related to the notion of diplomacy, however, is the ability to recognize both the community with whom we work and how members of that community see themselves. In this approach, we sympathize with the reflections of Diamantopoulos and Usiskin (2014) regarding the notion of community in their work that was also situated within the inner-city neighborhoods of Saskatoon:

We learned quickly that the “community” researched was not a community at all. It was a field of conflicting interests, values, and social forces, neither cohesive nor coherent. It was a community in dispersal and dislocation as well as a community in development. The theoretical utility of the term “community” might thus limit and even mislead insofar as it suggests a false unity.... To discuss community based research in Saskatoon often meant asking in which community research was “based” and in which communities’ interests that research was conducted. This created a treacherous terrain for community-based research. (p. 79).

Diplomacy speaks to the learned capacity of negotiating and dealing with these various forms of community and the often-competing demands that can emerge when working with multiple partners, individuals, and stakeholders. It seems again that social constructionism and a two-eyed seeing approach (Crotty, 1998; Iwama et al., 2009) can aid the thinking and practice in this area, that is, that community is something that needs to be learned about and interpreted, not something one can assume exists out there in the world as a fixed entity, and a place where multiple worldviews and ideas are converging, some complimentary and some contending. As Diamantopoulos and Usiskin (2014) again remark, “In contrast to the faux objectivity of documenting ahistorical and de-subjectivized phantom community—populated by facts, figures, and problems alone” a more ethical and appropriate stance “highlights the importance of our interpretive understanding of actors’ identities, aspirations, and strategic conceptions” (p. 81). Community is open and fluid and changes based on shifting intentions and needs of its members. An engaged and culturally mindful sense of diplomacy has been crucial in helping researchers at the CE Office sensitively navigate different cultural worlds and community realities.

Due to the inherent complexities within communities, diplomacy can also help one navigate the terrain of social and moral politics that unfold. This situation involves a reflection on what position and status a researcher holds within a community. Being an outsider who tries to exert influence or who does not pay attention and attend to political dynamics can lead to long-term negative implications. At the very least, it can impact opportunities with different parts of the community, and at most, it can diminish one’s respect and the ability to build and sustain future relationships in a particular community. Community members have the right to take a stance regarding moral and political positions with other community members, while outsiders are not often given as much leeway. Conversely, researchers’ acceptance and access to a community can be based on the ability to get involved and support a community’s position. These types of situations need to be respected, reflected upon, and honestly supported. In this regard, we observe that the strongest relationships between researchers and community partners—
and particularly those involving Indigenous partnerships—tend to emerge where scholars are also activists, allies politically and morally engaged in a community. This alliance ensures that research is inspired by real life community needs and not merely an academic exercise, and that scholars are “walking alongside” the people living and working in the community that demonstrates shared interests and goals.

Related to this is a diplomatic ability to read and interpret the community landscape one is working within. In Saskatoon’s inner-city neighborhoods, this approach entails having both a sound academic understanding of the colonial context within Canada and an ability to interact with community in a way that sets aside a “redeemer” mentality, especially within Indigenous contexts and communities. Understanding the effects of Canadian colonialism from a variety of perspectives helps frame the civic and community responsibilities we each share at the CE Office in dismantling arbitrary power imbalances. These systemic power imbalances have, for so many years, resulted in an inability to facilitate authentic and genuine interactions and dialogue between diverse peoples and nations, and particularly, as Smith (1999) keenly observed, between academic researchers and Indigenous communities. Understanding Canada’s history with a consciousness about the complex journeys Indigenous people are on in the effort to dismantle colonialism is essential to working in and navigating the complexities of community, and it provides a tool for helping to read the variety of landscapes and settings one may enter. Understanding Canada’s dynamic history and contested forms of Indigenous identity is also important to understand the fluid nature of culture in all its diversity.

Colonialism has affected diverse Indigenous communities in a variety of ways and each community may be seeking its own means and methods toward decolonization (TRC, 2015). Seeking support from holders of Indigenous knowledge and cultural protocol is critical for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples new to incorporating Indigenous cultural practices, such as smudging [purifying a room with the smoke of sacred herbs] and praying, into their community-engaged work (Iwama et al., 2009). A resource such as McAdam’s (2009) Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre’s cultural protocols and methodologies book and traditional knowledge keepers or elders working at the University of Saskatchewan have helped researchers at the CE Office develop appropriate experience and diplomatic skill in navigating and employing the use of cultural protocols and traditional knowledge in diverse community settings.

A final aspect of diplomacy is about negotiating the actual working relationship between a community partner and an academic researcher. At the outset of a mutually determined project, it is key to discuss and/or develop project terms of reference and when possible to determine the role of all involved with respect to decision making, project resources, post-project responsibilities, navigating conflict, and communicating within the project and about the project. In our experience, these discussions can lead to the formation of formal research agreements between researchers and the community partners. Other times, it is more appropriate that such agreements and understandings are verbal and more fluid in nature. Regardless of the formality involved, it is important to honestly discuss project resources: How they are secured, how they are distributed, accountability, expectations around in-kind contributions, and how they are recognized (Kovach, 2009). In an effort to follow ethical and cultural protocol engagement with Indigenous communities, many researchers at the CE Office are learning to employ the principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) in the overall process and how we are committed to community engagement with Indigenous peoples in the urban community contexts of Saskatoon (Baydala, Bourassa, Hampton, McKay-McNabb, & Placsko, 2007; Schnarch, 2004). OCAP principles were established to provide specific direction and a model for how an Indigenous community should be involved in the research process and how research with Indigenous peoples should be conducted. Importantly too, these discussions should also involve talk about values—where they are aligned, where they are not, and their implications for developing a working relationship. Importantly, we have found these principles are useful with all community partners and not just those of Indigenous cultural backgrounds. The more this kind of dialogue occurs at the outset of a collaborative project, the less likely there will be tenuous areas to navigate and negotiate as the project unfolds. Overall, the skills of diplomacy in these areas, coupled with genuine respect and humility, are central.
Flexibility

In addition to being diplomatic at the outset of a project, in harboring respect and humility, and in outlining intentions and forming research agreements, we have learned that it is also important to refrain from approaching a community partner with a “fully cooked” project or proposition. Rather, another important interpersonal skill of effective community engagement is flexibility; that is, the ability to hold onto an initial idea for a collaborative project loosely, realizing that authentic co-creation and collaboration with a community partner, however defined, will fundamentally change the course of a project.

Flexibility is characterized by being ready and able to adapt to new, different, or changing requirements. In community-engaged scholarship as well as service-learning opportunities, it is important to hold reasonable expectations for how efficient or effective a planned or proposed project will proceed. Working with community means accepting different and varying norms with respect to accuracy, efficiency, and timing with regards to tasks, appointments, and communications. To hold community members to normative standards perhaps derived from Western academic systems of knowledge is unfair and disrespectful of where they come from and their cultural or social realities. So too in service learning we have to be clear that the responsibility for civic engagement does not create unnecessary stress on the part of those being “engaged” (Eyler, Giles, & Astin, 1999; Marullo & Edwards, 2000). This approach also comes into effect regarding the results of the research findings themselves. Many working out of the CE Office have been asked to present to community audiences on our research, even when results are still quite preliminary, because it serves a community need for certain information at a particular time. We have made every effort to do this, by analyzing certain results earlier than we otherwise would, and creating presentations or other research products as needed on a flexible schedule. This mode of flexibility and prioritizing community needs and goals reflects Franz’s (2014; 2015) models for disseminating outputs that are important to the community and also beneficial to the university. In these situations, plans for how to create dissemination products through consultation with the communities involved is key, especially when working with Indigenous communities and where OCAP principles are employed.

Flexibility can be a difficult skill to acquire, yet is key to hearing the perspectives and needs of community partners and Indigenous communities and knowledge perspectives. Traditional academic scholarly work tends to reward the individual with responsibilities for archival research with the time for research, writing, and analysis. To a much greater extent, community-engaged work involves teamwork, where multiple partners are responsible for each aspect of work, and the consequences include the health of important relationships, as well as any clients or service-users, and likely students. This also reflects on the notions of cognitive and interpersonal skills more generally, with the former typically focused on individual efforts and merit and the later typically focused on collective knowledge and relationships (Gibb, 2014; Kyllonen, 2013).

At the CE Office, scholars are constantly reminded to hold a project “gently.” In other words, while we might work hard to meet deadlines, and give our best efforts toward knowledge translation, on any given project with multiple partners, endings can occur abruptly, meetings can be canceled, someone might not have time to share feedback, or someone else may have more feedback when we were convinced we had a final product. Ultimately, in our community engagement we have to acknowledge that much of our work is shared, and thus flexibility not only helps to foster better relationships across our community partners, but also allows us to be detached from the specific direction of a project and a “go-with-the-flow” attitude to emerge.

One example of this is illustrated by a project looking into the resilience and well-being of urban Indigenous youth. At the outset of the project the plan was to engage in a photovoice session with 10–15 youth focused around generating knowledge of youth perspectives on or understandings of resilience. After forming a local advisory committee of several parents, youth, community organizations, and elders from the community, as well as the formation of a research team of local Indigenous research assistants, an idea emerged to conduct the project once per season, or four times over the course of a year, rather than only once as was originally planned. This idea, it was suggested, would better capture the natural flux of resilience and well-being that can occur over the course of a year as well as follow important Indigenous teachings and knowledge around the change of seasons ceremonies and cultural protocols. The project coordinator had to be flexible and open to
executing several more rounds of photovoice and qualitative interviews with the youth than were originally planned. In the end, this idea that emerged from interactions and dialogue with community partners and team members produced a better and more rigorous project that more adequately captured urban Indigenous youth resilience and the incorporation of Indigenous forms of knowledge. As such flexibility became important for creating stronger partnerships and collaborations, and for fostering more meaningful research outcomes and projects with potentially higher community impact.

Another perhaps more subtle aspect of flexibility central to engaged scholarship is a comfort at having your day hijacked by community priorities when you are working in an embedded context like the CE Office. This situation can mean putting certain agendas on hold, canceling or rescheduling appointments or meetings due to a funeral or wake. There is also a tendency to drop in rather than schedule meetings and appointments during community-based work, especially with Indigenous community contexts. This flexibility can also mean learning to read and understand indirect communication, recognizing when an approach or idea is not going to work, but still stewarding the relationship to the best of your ability. Overall, then, we have learned to see flexibility as an important asset and skill for those working at the CE Office particularly and other community-engaged places generally, insofar as it allows them to center their efforts on the relationships being engendered through engagement rather than outcomes being driven by university expectations and Western knowledge systems.

**Interpersonal Skills and the Pedagogy of Practice**

Most literature attests to the notion that interpersonal skills are rooted in aspects of human personality, traits, and preferences yet also involve aspects of learned behavior and social practice. In this regard, Kyllonen (2013) concluded that “traits are not set in stone. They change over the life cycle and can be enhanced by education, parenting, and environment to different degrees at different ages” (p. 462). Overwhelmingly, research in this area suggests that education programs can develop, foster, and increase interpersonal skills directly and the personality factors that inform them more broadly. Given the growing recognition of the importance of soft or interpersonal skills (Bull, 2010; Gibb, 2014; Hackman & Kautz, 2012; Smith, 1999; Tough, 2012), it is clear that higher education and research training will become more concerned with this area of development and competence in the years to come, especially in the contexts of intercultural competence of graduate students (Dimitrov et al., 2014; Eyler, Giles, & Astin, 1999; Franz, 2009).

Our interest here is in exploring, in the contexts of community-engaged scholarship, the degree and manner to which interpersonal skills can be learned or developed. A core theme that emerged from the contributors was the notion of “helping out,” volunteering, or being involved with the community in some way. As previously alluded to, developing credibility in a community takes time, and investment into relationships becomes easier when one is seen as a long-term ally and not as a person who is there in the community for a short time to try to “fix” or “save” a situation. This approach needs to be an important caution in the context of service-learning initiatives that are often crammed into a single semester with limited time constraints (Marullo & Edwards, 2000). Such constraints can inadvertently reinforce the power imbalance and dominance of researchers working within Western knowledge systems that demand access to communities or civic engagement opportunities to fulfill their own responsibilities rather than taking the time to consider mutually beneficial goals and outcomes. One of the authors at the CE Office, for example, works primarily in food security and food systems within inner-city Saskatoon contexts and has done research on cooking with low-income families. In this experience, an important aspect of her work has involved many hours chopping vegetables, doing dishes, and preparing meals. As this researcher reflects, “I think that being willing to contribute to the day-to-day tasks people just need to get done when appropriate is central to the work that we do.” All contributors and community engaged scholars at the CE Office in Saskatoon echo these sentiments.

This dimension of community volunteerism or service learning is not another interpersonal skill per se, but rather a way by which such skills are developed. More than simply a way to build relationships and social connections—although important goals in their own right—what we suggest is that being involved in and volunteering with individuals and organizations in the community is a way of learning, through engaged practice, the interpersonal skills central to community-engaged
scholarship. It is through practice, we argue, and through the embodied engagement in the day-to-day lives of community members and the various cultural communities unique to those that occupy the mainstream academic spaces, that respect and humility are learned and developed, the delicate aspects of diplomacy are grasped, and flexibility becomes felt and known. Indeed, recognizing this notion, Ridder et al. (2014) contend that “many of these skills are hard to acquire by just reading a book. Instead, they can only be learned through practice” (p. 1, emphasis added). Similarly, Gibb (2014) concludes:

The most important of the soft skills are best learned with a small amount of highly focused and relevant formal input, a large amount of real-world experience, practice inside and outside of one's comfort zone, and timely, relevant and constructive feedback from other people in a community of practice, and where the consequences of what we do can be easily observed and understood.” (p. 457, emphasis added).

It is these notions of “real-world experience” and practice within a community of support and learning that are central to questions of how students and future community-engaged scholars develop, and indeed come to embody, the interpersonal skills necessary for their work.

The acquisition of any skill requires practice, and the notion of interpersonal or soft skills as discussed here are no exception. What Bourdieu (1977) characterizes as “habitus” is applicable here because we are advocating for interpersonal skill competency that rests on a bodily and social “disposition” that becomes internalized and historicized to the degree that it operates within a given “field” as a kind of bodily know-how or second nature—an “unconscious, collectively inculcated principle for the generation and structuring of practices and representations” (p. 72). Habitus, for Bourdieu (1977; 1990), is shaped within a field, a structured social or cultural space with its own rules, norms, and schemes for behavior. In this regard, we suggest these interpersonal skills are largely a somatic form of practice and reflection that are part of a broader vision of somatic knowledge—an embodied, preconceptual, and nonpropositional type of knowledge.

In the context of community-engaged scholarship, participation and volunteerism within a community fosters the development of a localized habitus that allows one to operate with cultural appropriateness and proficiency. In this way, our use of the concept of community throughout largely reflects Bourdieu's (1990) notion of field, the interactive social and cultural space where embodied practices are learned and developed. What we are suggesting here is that the development of competency in the areas of community-engaged scholarship must include the embodied practice of interpersonal skills such as humility, respect, diplomacy, and flexibility among others. Building on what Gibb (2014) suggests, the development of interpersonal skills, then, are based on a large amount of “real-world experience” and engagement in practice, a meaningful form of involvement within the community and a helping with the day-to-day events and needs of people, while also receiving feedback from a “community of practice,” individuals who have engaged with the specific community before or who have already developed a sense of proficiency regarding interpersonal skills and their performance (p. 457).

Bourdieu (1990; 1997), in his attempt to dismantle subject-object dualisms that abound in social science literature, proposed an important two-way relationship between the notions of habitus and field. The field, or in our sense community, exists only insofar as social agents possess the dispositions and set of perceptual schemata that are necessary to constitute that field and imbue it with meaning (Bourdieu, 1997). At the same time, by participating in the field, agents incorporate into their habitus the proper embodied know-how and ways of being that will allow them to constitute the field. Habitus thus manifests the structures of the field, and the field mediates between habitus and practice (Bourdieu, 1990).

In our context, this is to say that as community-engaged scholars learn and embody modes of being within a given community, including the practice of interpersonal skills, they become a part of that community and in turn co-transformers and collaborators in the process. This notion of practice in community-based scholarship and service learning, then, as central for the development of community relationships, habitus, and interpersonal skills, is entirely opposed to the notion of objective or overtly cognitive social research where a community is conceptualized as some form of “other” (Kajner, 2015). As such, we argue that
interpersonal skills are core to effective, creative, co-creative community-based research and engaged scholarship, and their development is necessary in contexts where hard cognitive research has been associated with harmful aspects of de-contextualization and de-personalization for political, ethical, and/or economic purposes. In our contexts at the CE Office within Saskatoon’s inner-city, these concepts manifest in relation to Indigenous and Western forms of knowing and how community engaged scholars are learning to develop a two eyed way of seeing that acknowledges the values and benefits of each system (Martin, 2012). This approach is a cultural form of competence that is developed through embodied practice and the practical engagement with and willingness to learn from a way of being that may be different from one’s own.

Students wanting to build capacity in these areas also need a space and contexts (i.e., field) within which such learning can occur. For us, this need for space and context manifests most directly in the CE Office in Saskatoon’s inner-city neighborhoods. As such, we would also argue for the value of various forms of embedded CE Offices that can support, cultivate, and promote the interpersonal skills required for successful community-engagement and service-learning. Post-secondary institutions would do well, then, to invest more resources, spaces, CE Offices, and time in preparing students and new researchers with the interpersonal skills and practical, embodied reasoning that allows them to meaningfully engage in community research with many various cultural groups in general, and with Indigenous peoples in particular.

Conclusions

As Thompson and Clark (2013) observe, “building and sustaining an excellent research program demands a range of interpersonal and cognitive skills of leaders and team members” and that “if you cannot work effectively with other people, do not resolve conflict well, or prefer to work alone, your research program may well appear superficially sturdy but will not be built to last” (p. 1,012). As we have illustrated, the interpersonal skills discussed here are best developed over time and with dedicated practice, institutional support, community spaces for reflection, and involvement/immersion within a community context. But this does not mean that these skills are in any way less important than those needed to develop an interview guide, code a transcript, or aggregate results. Yet, we would go so far as to suggest that without having the interpersonal skills to build a successful relationship, there would be no interview to analyze, no hard data to crunch.

Indeed, in recent years the literature attesting to the importance of interpersonal skills for various domains of scholarly activity has risen (Arrazattee, Lima, & Lundy, 2013; Conville, 2001; Eyler, Giles, & Astin, 1999; Franz, 2009; Franz, 2015; Kajner, 2015; Weerts & Sandmann, 2010). Hackman and Kautz (2012), for example, argue that not only is it becoming clear that standardized achievement tests do not capture interpersonal skill competencies in any meaningful way, but that the presence of such skills are even more predictive of workplace and academic successes than overtly cognitive skills alone. Overall success in life, Hackman and Kautz (2012) contend, “depends on personality traits that are not well captured by measures of cognition. Conscientiousness, perseverance, sociability, and curiosity matter” (p. 452). Echoing this, Tough’s (2012) best seller, How Children Succeed, contrasted the “cognitive hypothesis” that “success today depends primarily on cognitive skills—the kind of intelligence that gets measured on I.Q tests” with a new view that success has more to do with interpersonal skills such as perseverance, grit, curiosity, optimism, and self-control (p. 19). The place-based reflections offered by those working and learning at the CE Office in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan add weight to these sentiments and highlight an important need to continue building interpersonal skills that are necessary for meaningful scholarship to occur and flourish. The interpersonal skills discussed here, reflect important aspects of community-engaged scholarship crucial for high-quality, high-impact ethical work to emerge and can lead to the formation of positive, productive, and long lasting relationships with Indigenous community partners in particular, or community partners spanning different cultural and social worlds more generally.

References


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Facilitating Research and Collaborative Learning in a Somali Community

Connie L. Clark and Bernita Missal

Abstract

Due to an increasingly diverse world, healthcare researchers should consider collaborative research within a cultural community in order to provide holistic care for all patients. One of the key steps in cultural research is establishing relationships with leaders within that cultural community. Because the Somali group is such a large cultural group in the state of Minnesota, two Caucasian nurse researchers from an academic institution used several methods to connect and build trust within the Somali community in preparation for a study designed to discover and understand the birth experience of immigrant Somali new mothers. Through the process of conducting research within the Somali community, several lessons were learned and a number of surprises were revealed. Following the research, a continued relationship with the community resulted in collaborative learning opportunities. This collaboration is of mutual benefit to healthcare providers and the cultural community.

The Midwestern state of Minnesota has an increasingly diverse population. The face of the state is changing and it is home to numerous cultural groups including persons from Somalia (Minnesota Compass, 2015). Currently, within the United States, Minnesota is home to the largest Somali community outside of Somalia (Gulaid, Ahmed, Mukhtar, & Ashkir, 2014). As of 2014, there were approximately 34,000 Minnesota residents of Somali origin (Gulaid et al., 2014); some sources report there are 50,000 or more Somalis now living in Minnesota (Stratis Health, 2015). However, Somalis believe there may be many more Somalis living within the state. Within Minnesota, the largest population of Somali immigrants resides in Minneapolis/St. Paul, a large metropolitan area.

The standards of nursing practice include provision of holistic care that “addresses the needs of diverse populations across the lifespan” (American Nurses Association, 2010, p. 38). Some diverse communities lack holistic care due to lack of knowledge among healthcare providers. Ahmed, Adam, Clark, Wesaw, Gollust, and Nanney (2015) emphasize that “the community’s voice is combined with the research” to bridge this information gap (p. 61). It is essential that researchers learn from the cultural group their perspectives of care, and in particular what is important to them in relation to health and illness throughout the lifespan. Leininger’s Culture Care Diversity and Universality theory suggests the role of the researcher is to maintain openness and willingness to learn from participants. She states: “the researcher remains an active learner about the people’s world by becoming involved in and showing a willingness to learn from the people” (McFarland & Wehbe-Alamah, 2015, p. 49). Researchers need to form partnerships with the community so that the purpose of the research aligns “with an action of value to the community” (Foley, Raphael, Adolphe, Wu, Tamene, Rubin, & Yusef, 2010, p. S142).

Connection with the Community

Because the Somali group is such a large cultural group in the state of Minnesota, it was important to talk with members of this group to obtain information that can be applied to healthcare practices, specifically, childbirth experiences (Missal, Clark, & Kovaleva, 2015). The starting point of research within a cultural group is to connect with the community. Abdirahman Yusuf, co-founder and executive director of Somali Development Center in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts, states: “It is important that researchers work together with us to help our [Somali] communities before we can even begin to participate” (Foley et al., 2010, p. S139). Ahmed et al. (2015) also emphasized the importance of engaging with partners in the community in research for underserved groups including Somalis.

Research within a cultural group requires connection with the community. This occurs specifically through establishment of a trusting relationship with a community leader. This leader can provide cultural insight and feedback concerning the aim and design of the study, endorse the research study, and facilitate access to the community (Berg, 1999). Yusuf states the leader in the Somali community can answer the potential participants’ question: “Why do these people want to know
these things?’ ...and “to address what this research is going to do for them” (Foley et al., 2010, p. S141). Establishing a trusting relationship with the community leader may take time and multiple contacts. Schaffer (2009) explains that “it takes time to determine what issues are of interest to the community; a cultural guide may be needed” (p. 85). Realizing that this process may be lengthy will encourage researchers to remain committed and tenacious in beginning a research study.

Once community leaders are found and trusting relationships are established, they can provide the opportunity to gain access to the community, including suggestions for recruitment and potential participant names and contact information. When initiating contact with potential participants it is essential that researchers also establish trust with them and demonstrate cultural sensitivity. Williams, Utz, Jones, Hinton, Steeves, and Alexander (2011) found that in cultural research it is important to adapt “a culturally sensitive approach to recruiting” (p. 7). This includes establishment of trusting relationships (Williams et al., 2011). In their review of the literature, George, Duran, Norris (2014) found that among minority research participants, mistrust was the most common barrier, appearing in 73% of the studies across the qualitative and quantitative studies they reviewed.

For the purpose of providing holistic care, two Caucasian nurse researchers from an academic institution used several methods to connect and build trust within the Somali community in preparation for a study designed to discover and understand the birth experience of immigrant Somali new mothers (Missal et al., 2015). To expand their knowledge of the Somali culture, the researchers attended a daylong conference on Somali adult literacy training. The researchers also met with three different Somali leaders in the large metropolitan area: A businesswoman, a philanthropist, and a Somali women’s advocate/educator, and had contact with additional leaders including meeting with a suburban literacy class at a community center to present an overview of the research plan and gain endorsement.

Networking was vital to making these connections within the community. A physician known to the researchers, who was interested in providing perinatal cultural care to Somali women, introduced the researchers to the women’s advocate/educator, who connected the researchers to several participants and became their cultural expert and mentor. Wells and Cagle (2010) explain that community members provide rich knowledge of cultural values and behaviors, help to identify potential study participants, and can identify ways to return study findings to benefit the community.

Following connection with community leaders, the researchers began recruitment of recommended participants. George et al. (2014) discuss recruitment of study participants and report that “recruitment of minorities can require additional investments of time and resources to learn what methods may work in distinct communities to improve community acceptance of clinical research and thus improve participation” (George et al., 2014, p. e16). Recruitment of every participant of the study of childbirth experiences of Somali women occurred through a person with a known relationship to that participant (Missal et al., 2015).

The Somali leaders provided names and contact information for the Somali women in the study. These women were telephoned to request their participation and to schedule a time for the interview. Snowball sampling occurred as these women suggested friends or acquaintances for the study. Twelve immigrant Somali women who had given birth in the United States participated in the study. In the majority of cases, interviews took place in the women’s homes. One took place at a university and one in a community center. Two participants were interviewed together, and the others were interviewed as individuals.

The interview topics included the following: description of the new Somali mother’s childbirth experience, the role of family and friends in providing support, the place of cultural and religious beliefs and practices in the childbirth experience, and the nurse’s role in the new mother’s childbirth experience. The interviews were semi-structured and therefore additional questions emerged throughout the interview related to how the nurse could be of support to the new Somali mother.

The literature highlights the need to approach a community with “respect, honor, and cultural humility” (Foley et al., 2010, p. S142). Schaffer (2009) discusses that “the humble researcher recognizes the expertise of community members and seeks out and listens to the voices of the community” (p. 87). The researchers demonstrated this by entering the community as learners and acknowledging the women as experts in their childbearing experience. During data collection and analysis the researchers returned to the participants and cultural expert
to gain validation of the accuracy of their findings describing the women’s childbirth experiences. “Lincoln and Guba considered member checking a particularly important technique for establishing the credibility of qualitative data” (Polit & Beck, 2010, p. 499).

The findings of the women’s childbirth experience study (Missal et al., 2015) were communicated to practicing nurses in order to provide holistic care to their patients. In addition, the researchers returned to the Somali community to communicate the results to the participants and other interested women.

Findings

Through analysis we confirmed patterns and themes, specifically six themes. The first theme was the limitations of support due to separation from family. In Somalia the new mother has the full support of extended women relatives who care for her and the baby for the first 40 days and provide guidance on care of the newborn. This support includes food preparation, entertaining guests, and completion of household chores. One woman stated: “[In Somalia] all that she [new mother] does is feed the baby and sleep, that’s it. In America nobody gets that time. When we got out, we went to a department store. That is very strange.” Another stated, “Something bad will happen to you if you step out of the house during the first 40 days.”

The family support is not always available for the immigrant mother. One woman stated: “[I] don’t have a family here. Think about family and get sad.” One woman explained that the role of older women in Somalia included educating new mothers. She stated: “I think if you lived with someone older like your mom or auntie they would tell you to do this or that.”

The second theme was the importance of cultural and religious beliefs and practices. Traditional foods throughout the perinatal period, such as porridge, are important to give strength and add comfort. One participant said:

With my first child, my sister made it [porridge] with goat kidneys and with bread and she brought it to the hospital. “No, I am going to eat hospital food,” and she was like: “No, you are a new mother and you are going to get hungry in the middle of the night.” And 4:00 in the morning came and I was so hungry and I had my porridge and I was so grateful.

The third theme was the desired relationships with nurses. Some indicated they had positive experiences and others reported relationships that were not as helpful. One woman stated: “One nurse was the best. She was coming to visit me often. She taught me about the baby and to care for the baby. She was nice. She was talkative.” Another woman stated: “One of the nurses was very nice, but the others just ordered the pain medication and never came back to see how the pain was and to see the results.”

The fourth theme was the fear of cesarean section (C-section). This is a common fear among Somali women. Sometimes the woman is blamed by the family if a C-section is needed. One woman stated: “My husband believes in natural birth.” Another said: “All I did when I heard about the C-section was pray. I just prayed. I am a good person and I don’t bother anyone. Mother and father please help me.”

The fifth theme was the value of education for Somali women. Several of the participants were attending formal educational programs or obtaining a childcare certificate. One new mother stated: “I decided I needed to go back [to school] when I couldn’t help a neighbor’s child with second grade English. I became a better mother. For me – I had to go out. Mother needs to be educated and to help the family. . . . In order to interpret . . . and to understand what is going on. . . . They will be raising their children.”

The sixth theme was the presence of postpartum blues/depression. One participant stated: “So I was crying the whole night and I had postpartum blues and I was calling my husband all night.” Another participant stated: “I had 100 percent postpartum blues. It was just me and baby for two months.”

Partnership with the Community

Following the study, the possibility of an ongoing educational partnership was discussed between the nurse researchers and the community advocate/educator. This leader facilitated a meeting between the researchers and the community women to discuss this idea and possible educational topics of interest to the women. It was anticipated that this collaborative learning relationship would further enhance the relationship between healthcare and the Somali community. Wells and Cagle (2010) contend that relationships with community members can “support sustainable future clinical-academic partnerships” (p. 8). Simon, Ragas, Willis, Hajjar, Dong, and Murphy (2014) also discuss that “involving the community
in discussion and research has secondary benefits such as the fortification of personal relationships between the community, health practitioners, and the research team” (p. 65).

The outcome of meetings with the community leader, community members, and researchers was the birth of a partnership: Healthy Infants and Mothers Interdisciplinary Learning Opportunity (HIMILO). In the initial discussion of this partnership, the following guidelines were agreed upon. Group norms were established: (a) listen to each other, (b) look at strengths and challenges, (c) feel comfortable, (d) establish trust, and (e) feel free to ask questions. Numerous topics and potential speakers related to women’s health were identified as foci for future meetings, with suggestions from the community leader, the nurse researchers, and the Somali women. It was agreed that experts within the healthcare community would be invited to meet with HIMILO to discuss specific topics. The logistics of the meetings were discussed such as time, place, frequency, and communication.

One of the specific topics that came out of the findings from the Somali immigrant childbirth experience study (Missal et. al, 2015) was that Somali women delay going to the hospital when in labor due to their fear of C-section. Therefore, a perinatal physician was invited to speak to the women about this topic and readily agreed to speak. He gave an overview of C-section, including purpose, outcome, and patient involvement. The women were given an opportunity to ask questions and there was valuable interaction and discussion among the physician, the women, and an accompanying nurse midwife.

Another HIMILO gathering with the Somali women occurred when the nurse researchers presented the findings from their Somali immigrant childbirth study. The women were eager to hear about the study and confirmed the results. Women began to share related stories from their own childbirth experiences.

Through these gatherings the researchers have continued to build trusting relationships with the community. Somali women have shared about their families and demonstrated interest in the researchers’ families and experiences.

Although there have been formal presentations of topics, there have also been times of lightheartedness and laughter. This supports Simon et al’s (2014) discussion of the secondary benefits of research within a community: building personal relationships between the research team and community members.

In addition to meeting within the Somali community this partnership facilitated the participation of the community leader and the researchers in a panel discussion at the academic institution for interested faculty on the topic of community partnerships. Both the community leader and the researchers presented their perspectives of the importance of the partnership between a community and academic institution, identifying the benefits, such as mutual understanding and learning.

**Lessons Learned and Surprises Encountered from Research within a Somali Community**

**Lessons Learned**

Through the process of conducting research within the Somali community the researchers gained much insight and several lessons were learned. Some lessons became evident as the research was conducted, while others were revealed upon reflection (Table 1).

One of the first lessons learned was the necessity of networking with community resources and programs that would provide access to the Somali community. Networking takes time and develops over multiple conversations through varied channels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Collaborative Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking with community resources and programs gains access to a community</td>
<td>A key leader is needed to develop and continue the community learning partnership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networking takes time and multiple conversations through varied channels</td>
<td>Community collaboration develops over weeks and months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring community access can be a lengthy process</td>
<td>Academic partners need to be continual learners when in a cultural community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual trust between researchers and community leaders is essential</td>
<td>Flexibility accommodates the busy schedule of working mothers in all cultures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snowball sampling is essential in obtaining participants in cultural research</td>
<td>It is beneficial to conduct cultural research with two researchers</td>
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Table 1. Lessons Learned During Community Research and Collaboration
Recognizing that community access may be a lengthy process allows a researcher to persevere and plan accordingly. This networking included explaining the value of this research to the community. Foley et al. (2010) emphasized that it is important for the researcher to identify what the research is going to do for the community. Ahmed et al. (2015) also emphasized the importance of engaging with partners in the community research.

Once access to the community had been gained, a second lesson learned was that mutual trust between researchers and community leaders is essential to enter the community. In order to have access to potential participants from the Somali community the researchers needed to have a trusted person who could introduce them to the community. The community leaders needed to understand the research purpose and be assured that any report would give accurate, truthful findings. They needed to trust the researchers before they would give names and contact information of potential participants. Because the researchers were trusted by the community leaders, they were given access to the community. This confirmed the findings of Williams et al. (2011), who found that within cultural research it is important to have a culturally sensitive approach to recruiting and establishing a trusting relationship.

A third lesson learned related to conducting research within a cultural community was the importance of snowball sampling. Although the researchers were aware of the value of snowball sampling, in this study its importance became very apparent. Contact with one participant led to information and introduction to another potential participant. After a participant found she could trust the researchers she was willing to provide contact information for a friend. George et al. (2014) discussed the need to learn what may work for recruitment in distinct communities. In this study (Missal et al., 2015), we found that snowball sampling was the most effective in the Somali community.

A final lesson in this study was that it is beneficial to conduct research with two researchers. For example, in data collection most participants requested to not be audio-taped, thus the interviews required copious written notes. Both researchers took extensive notes while engaging with the participants. Verbatim notes from the interviews could then be compared after the interview. The efforts of the two researchers established trustworthiness of the study. An additional benefit was the rewards experienced in working collaboratively on research. Travel to and conduction of interviews is more enjoyable with a partner. A final benefit was the momentum gained from the encouragement of a partner. Setbacks could be discussed and brainstormed together.

**Surprises Encountered**

In addition to lessons learned, conducting research within the Somali community also revealed a number of surprises (Table 2). The researchers offered to meet participants for the interview where they preferred and they were very open in inviting us into their homes. The researchers were consistently greeted warmly by the participants as they welcomed them. Often children were present and interacted with the researchers. It was soon discovered that these children enjoyed looking in the researchers’ purses, sitting on their laps, and playing around them as researchers talked with the mothers. The researchers began to bring a small toy for the children to play with should they be present. The researchers experienced hospitality by the invitation to participate in drinking Somali tea together. This participation by the researchers was consistent with the important cultural practice of sharing Somali food and tea (Missal et al., 2015) and facilitated more in-depth conversation.

A final surprise was the willingness of the women to share their stories with detail. Though the researchers wanted this to happen, they did not know if the women would be comfortable enough to share until this openness was experienced. The women seemed eager to reflect and to tell their stories to the researchers. Experiences were shared with detail and animation. Not only were there lessons learned and surprises discovered in the research process, there were also lessons learned and surprises in the collaborative learning experience that followed.

**Table 2.** Surprises Encountered During Community Research and Collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Collaborative Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The expression of hospitality to the researchers</td>
<td>Participants’ desire to know about the researchers and their families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness of the women to share their stories</td>
<td>The cultural practice of hospitality to the academic partners</td>
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</table>
Lessons Learned and Surprises Encountered in Collaborative Learning

Lessons Learned

Following completion of the research study, creation of the collaborative learning partnership, HIMILO, began. One of the lessons learned was that although the Somali community has a desire to partner with healthcare providers and academia to learn and have a positive community impact, a key leader is needed for this to happen (refer to Table 1). This leader needs to have a vision for how to both develop and continue the partnership. The researchers collaborated with such a leader prior to, during, and following the research study. This collaboration is essential for a partnership to develop.

Another lesson learned was that community collaboration in any setting does not happen quickly but rather develops over weeks and months. The researchers not only met with the community leader several times but also with Somali women to learn their areas of interest and preferences for meeting time, location, and frequency. This collaboration included brainstorming for an appropriate name for the partnership with the resulting title of HIMILO.

Another lesson learned was that the need to be a continual learner when in a cultural community. The researchers have continued to learn from both the community leader and the women as they share their stories, concerns, and areas of interest. Informal conversation prior to the start of a meeting and more formal conversation during meetings have led to deeper understanding of the Somali community. For example, one concern of the mothers is the acculturation of their children, especially the influence of the western culture on Somali teenagers.

A further lesson learned is that flexibility accommodates the busy schedules of working mothers in all cultures. The researchers, who are from a time-oriented culture, learned how to adapt to an event-oriented culture. Meetings with the women began when the majority had arrived rather than at a predetermined time. In the Somali culture, the event itself is more important than time (Adair & Jama, 2013).

Surprises Encountered

In addition to lessons learned from the collaborative learning, there were surprises encountered (refer to Table 2). One of the main surprises was that the meetings were more informal than formal. The women desired to know about the researchers and their families and in turn shared about their own families. It was evident that the women enjoyed gathering with one another and with the researchers by the rich conversation and laughter over shared Somali food, such as samosas and sweets. Another surprise was the women’s sensitivity to the researchers related to the cultural practice of hospitality. During one of the HIMILO meetings, while some of the Somali women prayed in one area of the room others purposefully visited with the researchers so they would not be alone.

Recommendations for Research Within the Somali Community and Establishment of a Collaborative Learning Community

The experience of conducting research and establishing a learning partnership in a Somali community has resulted in several recommendations (Table 3). Since the Somali community is a cultural setting that limits audio or videotaping, one recommendation is to have two researchers during interviews and to compare transcripts immediately after each interview. A further

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<table>
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<th>Table 3. Recommendations for Future Research and Establishment of Collaborative Learning</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Research</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use two researchers for data collection when audio taping is not accepted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop sensitivity and accommodation to cultural practices that may be different than the researchers’ own culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule regular blocks of time for data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate with cultural expert to validate and enhance understanding of findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Return to the community to present results and findings</td>
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recommendation for research within the Somali community is to develop sensitivity and accommodation to cultural practices that may be different from the researchers’ practices by having flexibility in time, setting, and progression of data collection.

Another recommendation is for researchers to deliberately schedule regular blocks of time throughout and at the conclusion of data collection to meet for data analysis. Data analysis in qualitative research is time consuming and will not occur if researchers wait for the most opportune time.

An additional recommendation in regard to cultural research is to collaborate with a cultural expert to validate and enhance understanding of the findings of the research. A final recommendation related to the research is that dissemination of findings should include a return to the community to present results that may benefit the community.

In addition to recommendations related to the research process there are recommendations related to establishing a collaborative learning experience. These include fostering the relationships that have begun through research; the value of these relationships cannot be underestimated. It is recommended that researchers meet with the key community leader to learn how to move beyond research to community involvement. They need to learn from the community leader and members what is important to them without bringing their own agenda. An additional recommendation for a collaborative learning experience is to investigate any available funding to help with expenses such as publication, speaker, and facility costs. Organizations that support the cultural community should be accessed for possible available funds.

Conclusion

In summary, due to an increasingly diverse world, healthcare researchers should consider collaborative research within a cultural community in order to provide holistic care for all patients. One of the key steps in cultural research is establishing relationships with leaders within that cultural community. Researchers should go beyond the study to further the relationship with the community in collaborative learning opportunities. This collaboration will be of mutual benefit to health care and the community by establishing trust, developing mutual understanding, and providing culturally sensitive care.

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**Professing in the Local Press: Professors and Public Responsibilities**

Geraint Osborne and Shauna Wilton

**Abstract**

This research examines the role of professors and print media within small communities, the town-and-gown relationship between universities and the broader communities they inhabit, and the nature of the public discourse on important social issues on community, provincial, national, and international levels. Since 1996, professors at a small Canadian liberal arts and sciences university have contributed to and supported an op-ed column in a local newspaper serving a small rural and conservative city. Using survey research and personal interviews, this research attempts to understand the motivations of these professors to write columns and explores their understandings of what it means to be a public intellectual. This case study contributes to the literature on the sociology of intellectuals, and especially the study of academics and their roles as public intellectuals within modern universities and the broader communities they inhabit and in which they are engaged.

**Introduction**

On November 6, 1996, a new feature designated “Educated Guess” appeared in the then independently owned weekly *Camrose Canadian* newspaper in the small rural city of Camrose, Alberta and its surrounding area. The inaugural column, entitled “The Public Intellectual,” announced that the weekly column would be maintained by professors working at the local liberal arts postsecondary institution, Augustana University College, in an attempt “to revive the tradition of the public intellectual,” and “bring to the Camrose public some of the ideas and knowledge” that were being generated by “Camrose’s own university.” Moreover, the column stated that it explicitly hoped to breach the wall “separating the intellectual from the public” and in so doing, help strengthen town-gown relations in the small conservative city (Janz, Bateman, & Milbrandt, 1996). A week later, a letter to the editor entitled “Hail the Intellectuals,” signaled the beginning of what would become a tenuous relationship between the university and community, at least as it would be played out in the pages of both the *Camrose Canadian* and later the *Camrose Booster*. It read:

It is consoling and comforting to knoweth that we haveth in our midst the “three wise (intellectual) persons.” Our quality of life and standard of living, no doubt, is so much enhanceth by their enigmatic presence. Let us plebeians, in conjunction with our City’s Fathers, set aside a week, nay a month, next summer to rejoice our treasure and blessing. We could dust and donneth our togas and sit on the lush river bank in wonderment (bewilderment?) as we heareth the sages impart the wisdom of the world and of life. Perhaps we may beholdeth the waters of Mirror Lake parted? Could this arrogance deservedly garnereth the distinction: “Piled Higher and Deeper?” (Bondar, 1996, p. A7)

So much for strengthening town-gown relations! With this inaugural column and its response, a troubled dialogue began and, for better or for worse, the column has been a mainstay of the Camrose local newspapers for the past 19 years. During this time, professors from the social sciences, humanities, fine arts, and sciences have contributed columns focusing on a wide range of topics and social issues. While not every column has generated a public response, some have created a genuine interest and encouraged a dialogue between the university faculty and community, as well as within the community itself.

Our research examines the role of professors and print media within small communities, the town-and-gown relationship between universities and the broader communities they inhabit, and the nature of the public discourse on important community, provincial, national, and international issues. The motivations and views of the professors who contribute to and support the column are analyzed through a survey and interviews exploring their understandings of what it means to be a public intellectual (although many dislike the use of this term, finding it pretentious). Case studies
such as this have a long and impressive record as a sound methodological approach in the social sciences. They are particularly noted for their ability to initiate the process of discovery (Mitchell, 1983; Yin, 2003a, 2003b). While researchers are limited by the generalizations they can draw, case studies are nonetheless especially useful for intensively examining and understanding a single case, engaging in theoretical analysis, and generating insights and hypotheses that may be explored in subsequent studies (Vaughn, 1992; Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000). As such, this case study contributes to the literature on the sociology of intellectuals, and especially the study of academics and their roles as public intellectuals within modern universities and the broader communities they engage and inhabit.

The Sociology of Public Intellectuals

While the modern notion of the intellectual has its roots in the work of the humanist scholars in the Renaissance era, the sociology of intellectuals as a field of study did not really begin to take shape until the Dreyfus affair (1894–1906), during which leaders of the anti-clerical and pro-republican camp, many of whom were teachers, students, and writers, protested the conduct of the Dreyfus trial and were referred to in the press as les intellectuels (Eyal & Buchloz, 2010; Brym, 1987; Drake, 2005).

Since then, the sociology of intellectuals as a cohesive field of study has had its ebbs and flows, often being subsumed into other fields of study such as the sociology of knowledge, the sociology of science, and the sociology of professions (Kurzman & Owens, 2002; Li, 2010). Despite its peripheral nature, a great deal has been written on the sociology of intellectuals and the role of the public intellectual. The field comprises a diverse yet rich body of research that has focused on a wide range of topics, including historical examinations of intellectuals (Jennings & Kemp-Welsh, 1997; Judt, 1998; Wolin, 2004), efforts to define intellectuals (Mannheim, 1936; Coser, 1970; Bourdieu, 1988; Said, 1994; & Farganis, 2005), debates of the class nature of intellectuals (Benda, 1928; Gramsci, 1971; Mannheim, 1993; Shils, 1972; Mills, 1963; Foucault & Deleuze, 1973; Coser, 1970; Bourdieu, 1993; & Bauman, 1987), studies of the role of intellectuals in society and politics (Brym, 1980; Goldfarb, 1998; Said, 1994; Eyerman, 1994; Kowalchuk & McLaughlin, 2009; Lilla, 2001; McGowan, 2002; McLaughlin & Townsley, 2011), and examinations of the disappearance of public intellectuals in contemporary societies (Jacoby, 1987; Posner, 2001; Furedi, 2004; Jennings, 2005; & Collini, 2006).

Despite the richness of the field, the concept of a public intellectual is difficult to pin down, with definitions ranging from the narrow to the more general. The traditional sociological definitions of the intellectual tend to refer to intellectuals as a group defined by their primary occupational activity of developing and disseminating ideas or by their class positions and relationships with other social groups. For Mannheim (1949), the intellectual is a key player in the shaping of the modern social order and a “watchman in what otherwise would be a pitch-black night” (p. 143). Similarly, Habermas (1989) argues that public intellectuals are defined by their sense of duty to intervene on “behalf of rights and progress that has been delayed” (p. 73).

For Collini (2006), the term public intellectual refers to “those few academics who enjoy a significant media presence and who use the opportunity to address current political and social issues” (p. 231). Others view the media presence as less important than the actual daily process of being an academic in a democratic society. For example, Hacker (2010) maintains that most academics are public intellectuals if their research focuses on substantive issues that matter to others, have the ability to clearly communicate ideas, and have sufficient interest in devoting time and energy to the process of educating others. Similarly, Fallis (2008) argues that all academics are public intellectuals because they disseminate knowledge publicly when teaching in the classroom, through publishing and disseminating their research, and especially when they write and speak to explain their discipline and their research to the public. Misztal (2007) understands the term public intellectual to include those “scientists, academics in the humanities and the social and political sciences, writers, artists, and journalists who articulate issues of importance in their societies to the general public” (p. 1). As “democracy’s helpers” public intellectuals require both “creativity and courage” which are the foundational features of their authority to speak out on broad issues of public concern.

This more political conception of the public intellectual has been advocated by Said (1994), among others, who views an intellectual’s mission in life as breaking down stereotypes and advancing “human freedom and knowledge” (p. 17). This mission often requires intellectuals to adopt the role of the outsider who questions social
institutions, struggles on behalf of disadvantaged groups, and actively disturbs the status quo. The role has a particular edge to it in that intellectuals must raise embarrassing questions, confront orthodoxy and dogma, and "represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug…. the whole point is to be embarrassing, contrary, and even unpleasant" (p. 11).

For the purposes of this research, a public intellectual is defined as a person who is trained in a particular discipline, is a member of a faculty of a college or university, who embraces the outsider role identified by scholars such as Said, and decides to communicate with a larger audience outside of the world of academia either on their own initiative or by invitation. Obviously, there are local, regional, national, and international audiences or publics available to the public intellectual and their success at reaching each is dependent on a range of factors, most notably the quality of their expertise, their public communication skills, and their desire to engage in the pursuit in the first place.

This case study seeks to get at this desire; to understand what motivates academics to become public intellectuals, even on a small scale, such as working on a small liberal arts and sciences university campus and engaging the public through writing in local newspapers. Little research has been devoted to understanding what actually motivates intellectuals, especially academics, to engage the public outside the university walls. This research seeks to fill this void.

Methodology

This research began in 2010 with an archival search to locate the original columns and letters to the editor between the years 1996 and 2009. To understand the motivations of professors to write columns, we use both a survey and a number of personal interviews that were conducted face-to-face and/or through email. Professors and non-academic staff at Augustana Campus were given a survey with five closed-ended and five open-ended questions. A total of 43 respondents answered the survey. The vast majority (N=39) were academic staff while the rest (N=4) were non-academic staff. Of the professors who responded to the survey, 41% had been employed at Augustana for 0–5 years, 20.5% for 6–10 years, 2.6% for 11–15 years, and 35.9% for over 15 years. In addition, the survey invited respondents who had written columns to be interviewed to discuss their views and experiences in more detail. Fourteen column writers consented to personal interviews.

The research focuses on two social groups located in a particular social environment. These are the professors working in the local university, the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta, and the general public living in the city of Camrose and the surrounding rural Albertan area. Obviously, these two social groups are diverse, particularly in their social, political, economic, and religious views, but the columns and letters to the editor suggest that these groups fall into two opposing camps: the cosmopolitan secular left versus the rural religious right. The following section describes in greater detail these social groups and their social contexts in order to illustrate the nature of the public discourse created by the newspaper columns.

The Social Context: Augustana Camrose and Conservative Alberta

Camrose, a small Canadian city, is situated in Central Alberta about 90 kilometers south of Edmonton amidst some of the richest farmland in the prairies. The relatively small city, which originally developed along the railroad around the turn of the 19th century, today has a population of approximately 18,000 people. The original settlers came primarily from Scandinavian countries, such as Norway and Sweden, but many also came from the United States. In December 1906, Camrose was incorporated as a town. In 1955, Camrose became a city and has continued to expand, even as the significance of the railroads waned. It now stretches along Highway 13, serving a surrounding population of approximately 140,000, and is a major stop for travelers along that road (Farley, 1947; Hambly, 1980).

As the community has grown from village to town to city, so has its need for modern communications. In 1906, Camrose opened its first newspaper, The Camrose Mail. This was replaced in 1908 by The Camrose Canadian, which is still published to this day on a weekly basis with a circulation of 14,730 readers. Camrose is currently served by two other local papers: the weekly Camrose Booster, established in 1952, with a circulation of 13,331 readers in 21 communities, and the small daily Camrose Morning News, which publishes 3,000 papers per day with delivery nightly to over 350 spots within the city and some of the surrounding rural area. Camrose also has its own local television station, Community Ten, which is primarily used for advertising and community service programming, including local church services and religious programming, and is home to two
radio stations, CAM-FM and CFCW, the latter of which has the proud distinction of being Canada's first full-time country music station (Dulmage, 2013). With the advent of the Big Valley Jamboree country music festival, an increase in commercial building and development, and the establishment of a resort casino, Camrose has become even more oriented toward tourism and hospitality, consequently leading to the expansion of the city's accommodation market. In addition, Camrose has become a retirement destination for the many surrounding rural communities, with seniors now comprising 20% of the population (City of Camrose, 2011). The city has an active promotional campaign to attract seniors, describing the city as a “senior friendly community.”

What draws many to Camrose is perhaps its rurban nature, a combination of positive rural and urban qualities (Pahl, 1968; Bonner, 1997). In promotional material from the office of the economic development coordinator, Camrose is presented in the following way: “We’re the perfect size to enjoy all of the educational, recreational and entertainment facilities of a thriving city, yet we remain small enough to appreciate the convenience and security of a rural way of life” (Telford, 2012, p. 2). In another brochure, Camrose is presented as “an oasis with all the amenities” and “a healthy alternative to other cities in the province that are feeling the strain of massive growth” (Kryzanowski, n.d.). While Camrose is an example of a rurban environment that attracts a diverse range of citizens, its political context is distinctively homogeneous. Camrose is located in the heart of rural Alberta and its citizens share many of the unique political views and social values held by the people of the province. What comes to mind when one thinks of Alberta? Certain “Wild West” stereotypes take shape: cowboys, farmers, and evangelical preachers, and perhaps we can add another more recent, more industrial stereotype, that of the oil rigger. These stereotypical characters lend support to the popular view of Alberta as being rugged, conservative, Christian, and redneck (van Herk, 2001; Holt, 2009). But to what extent are these stereotypes reflected in a unique Albertan political culture?

Political culture refers to “deeply-rooted, popularly-held beliefs, values, and attitudes about politics,” (Wiseman 1996, p. 21). The political culture of Alberta is unique from the rest of English-speaking Canada as it is, and always has been, based on socially and fiscally conservative views. Albertans and their government have traditionally supported free market initiatives such as lower taxes and fewer regulations on business (Fraser Institute, 2002; Norrie, Owram, & Emery, 2002; Wallace, 2002) and opposed progressive reforms such as changes to the definition of marriage to include same-sex marriage (Rayside, 2008; Lloyd & Bonnett, 2005; Banack, 2012).

In federal elections, Conservative candidates generally receive an overwhelming majority of the vote in their electoral districts, or ridings as they are known in Canada. Rural Alberta is clearly Canada’s most conservative region, and has been for the better part of the past 80 years. Most elections have seen the right-wing party of the day win all or most of the ridings in Alberta, often by massive margins. This region was the birthplace of the populist Reform Party in 1989 and the base of support for the Reform and Canadian Alliance parties from 1993 to 2000 and the former Progressive Conservative Party before them (Laird, 1998). The former Conservative Party of Canada had retained massive support in Alberta for advancing neo-liberal, conservative politics, winning virtually every riding in this region by some of the largest margins in the nation (Parliament of Canada, n.d.). While the Conservatives lost the 2015 election, they continued to receive overwhelming support from their constituents in Alberta. The hegemonic status of conservative politics in Alberta makes rural Alberta easily the least competitive region in the country and results in little public debate on major issues. When ideological issues are debated, such as health care and same-sex marriage, Albertans tend to take a hard conservative stance. Often, they represent a brash voice in the Canadian political system, speaking out against liberal social and fiscal values. Much of the political culture of Alberta hinges on the idea that Ottawa is an enemy of the province (Archer, 1992; Wesley, 2011). The peak of this sentiment emerged during the National Energy Program in 1980, in which the Federal Government sought to nationalize energy prices and increase taxation of oil and natural gas. This program was seen as a direct attack on Alberta’s oil and gas industry and autonomy. The program led to public and political outcry best symbolized by the bumper stickers stating “Let the Eastern bastards freeze in the dark.” Another example of the so-called “Alberta divide” appeared in 2001, when six prominent Albertans (including Stephen Harper prior to becoming Prime Minister) penned the “Alberta Agenda,” which asked Alberta Premier Ralph Klein to protect the material and human resources of Alberta from the then Liberal
Government in Ottawa and develop provincial institutions similar to Quebec, such as a provincially run pension plan and police force (Harper, Flanagan, Morton, T., Knopff, Crooks, & Boessenkool, 2001). This was in order to restrict the influence that the federal government had in Alberta. By controlling these matters in the province, Alberta would give less control of the province to the federal government.

As such, provincial political leaders have represented a feeling in Alberta of fighting the oppressors. When Albertans find a leader that defends them against Ottawa, and represents their socially conservative interests, they stand by them. Alberta's tendency to view Ottawa as an enemy has resulted in a quasi-single party governance. This caused an attitudinal shift in voters toward provincial elections. Instead of voting for an official opposition in the provincial legislature, Albertans tended to vote overwhelmingly for socially and fiscally conservative parties because they viewed the federal government as the opposition to Alberta as a province (Wesley, 2011). In a major deviation from past elections, the left of center NDP party was victorious in the recent 2015 provincial election. Historically, when Albertans have changed governments it has been a rejection of a long standing conservative party for another conservative party. Only time will tell if the recent drastic change in provincial governance reflects a significant change in social, economic, and political values.

Despite the political move to the left in the recent provincial election, Albertans continue to support their conservative values at the federal level. Nowhere is this more the case than in the federal riding of Crowfoot, within which Camrose is located. Within the heart of rural Alberta, the riding of Crowfoot is one of Canada's largest geographical ridings and Camrose is one of the biggest municipalities within it. In times of economic booms and even recessions, the Conservative support in Crowfoot has been resolute. Since its inception in 1966, the Crowfoot riding has elected Progressive Conservative, Reform, Canadian Alliance and Conservative MPs, all by wide margins, in many cases garnering over 80 percent of the vote (McLean, 2005).

Alberta conservatism is often associated with religion. However, according to the 2001 census, Alberta is second to only British Columbia among all Canadian Provinces with respect to the percentage of citizens who declared they had no religious affiliation whatsoever (Statistics Canada, n.d.). Moreover, only British Columbia and Quebec contained a smaller percentage of citizens who regularly attended religious services at least once a month than Alberta, although there are pockets of high attendance in Alberta (Clark, 2003) such as Camrose. Not surprisingly, the 2001 census distinguished Camrose as a conservative and largely religious community with 85% of residents identifying as Christian, while 14% had no religious affiliation. In addition, to its 23 churches, Camrose hosts the Canadian Lutheran Bible Institute, a local monthly Christian paper, “Crosswalk,” and a Christian bookstore. With a significant religious presence, Camrose is considered to occupy the northern portion of the contentiously labeled “Bible Belt” which is assumed to run south to Drumheller (home of the Big Valley Creation Science Museum) and Lethbridge (home of Miracle Channel, the first over-the-air religious TV station in Canada).

What makes Camrose unique among other similarly sized prairie communities is the presence of a post-secondary education institution. Augustana Campus was for the first 75 years known as Camrose Lutheran College (CLC) and the founders of CLC were primarily interested in preserving Norwegian language and culture and in strengthening Christian belief (Johansen, n.d.). This emphasis on strengthening Christian belief meant that for many years the college was theologically conservative. Full degree-granting status was attained in 1984 and the college became a university college in 1985, when its first B.A. degrees were granted. The college changed its name to Augustana University College in 1991 in order to attract a more diverse student body. In 2004, faced with financial pressures, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (ELCIC) agreed to conveyance and the college merged with the University of Alberta to become a separate faculty and satellite campus of the university, now known as the Augustana Campus of the University of Alberta.

In 1991, Augustana University College founded the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in the Liberal Arts (CIRLA) based on the liberal arts belief that university education is best typified as a dialogue between itself and other groups in society and, also, within its own walls. From an interdisciplinary perspective, CIRLA aimed to address the place of the university in society, the usefulness of university education, and the tension between differing views of the university. In order to meet its mandate, CIRLA supported the publication of Dianoia: A Liberal Arts Interdisciplinary Journal, sponsored a number of international
conferences, and maintained a yearly colloquium series. Finally, in 1996, CIRLA faculty initiated a weekly column in the local, and independently owned, Camrose Canadian newspaper entitled, “Educated Guesses.” Interestingly, this coincided with a broader “upswing in interest in public intellectuals in English Canada” in the late 1990s (McLaughlin and Townsley 2011, 345). While not specifically mentioned in the inaugural column, one of the primary goals of the column, in the words of one of the more conservative authors, was to “break down the wall of suspicion between Augustana and the wider Camrose community. My own political sympathies are probably closer to those of Camrosians than to those of my colleagues, so I was probably more comfortable than other colleagues in writing to the Camrose readership. I thought that this might help build the bridge” (personal interview 1).

Despite its rocky reception, the column continued unabated for six years, generating what can best be described as a moderate interest from the Camrose public. According to another initiator of the column, “there was very little response to the columns, either in the letters to the editor of the paper or in letters directly to an author of a column. I would occasionally hear from someone that they had read a column, but usually there was silence. I did wonder sometimes whether anyone was reading them” (personal interview 2). In 2002, the Camrose Canadian was taken over by Sun Media, a Quebecor company, which regarded the “Educated Guesses” column as a waste of important advertising space and dropped it accordingly (personal interview 1).

Fortunately, the other weekly paper in town, the Camrose Booster, independently owned and operated, decided to adopt the column under the new name “Second Thought.” The paper was launched by Bill and Berdie Fowler in 1952. An alumna of Camrose Lutheran College and a recipient of an honorary doctor of laws degree from the University of Alberta, Berdie Fowler wanted the column because for her “it adds a unique dimension to the editorial content of our paper” (personal correspondence, September 3, 2004). In her opinion, the column “stimulates thought, and also helps to strengthen the Augustana-community partnership” (personal correspondence, December 15, 2005). During the column’s run in the Booster, Fowler remained an enthusiastic supporter of the column, seeing its full potential. For her:

...a column from Augustana helps to connect the institution with the community and serves to strengthen the partnership aspect of the relationship…. They are usually timely and always thought-provoking, encouraging the reader to think again…. It, hopefully, helps to diminish the prevalence of tunnel vision on which too many important decisions tend to be based (personal correspondence, May 29, 2004).

And so the column survived and continues to be published to this day, although now on a fortnightly basis.

Between 1996 and 2013, a total of 377 columns were written which generated 142 letters to the editor. While contributors from a number of disciplines write on a wide range of topics, such as same-sex marriage, drug policy, evolution, euthanasia, music, religion, and sports, the vast majority of columns have been devoted to national and international politics. In the minds of many contributors, the column is a tiny voice from a bastion of progressivism that struggles to be heard in the heart of conservative Alberta (survey results). The column continues because of the willingness of the Camrose Booster to devote space to a discussion that underscores the importance of cooperation between town and gown. The column also survives because of the willingness of the faculty to take time from their teaching, research, and service commitments to write columns. But some interesting questions need to be asked. Why do the faculty continue to write? What motivates them and what impact do they think the column actually has on the reading public?

Professing Publicly: Why Professors Write Columns

Generally, evidence from the survey and interviews suggests that for most faculty the column is seen as a way to “give a public face to the institution” and “promote positive town-gown relations” (survey respondent). Most faculty members think that the column is valuable in that it “provides an academic angle on issues otherwise absent in the local papers” (survey respondent). In particular, many respondents thought that the column “challenges the conservative bias” that they felt is held by most of its readers and the area in general (survey respondent).

Out of the respondents, 59% had written for the “Second Thought” or “Educated Guesses” columns, with 31.7% having written from two to five columns, and 4.9% having written over five columns. This corresponds with the historical analysis of the columns, which found that between one-third and one-half of faculty at a given time have contributed a column and suggests a widespread commitment to
the column among faculty. Given the nature of the modern university, with its emphasis on research, why would professors devote valuable time away from their research, teaching, and service commitments?

The main reason for not writing columns, not surprisingly, is lack of time, followed closely by a feeling that their areas of research interest would not be suitable for a column or of general public interest. Other reasons included being new to Augustana and the community, a preference for engaging in the community in other ways, and finally, a simple lack of desire to contribute in this particular way. The main reason that faculty gave for writing columns was that they had something to say that they thought was interesting and relevant to current events. As one participant stated, “I wanted to say something to the Camrose and area population about a topic that I thought was important. I was under no illusion that this would reach, or even convince, everybody, but I wanted to share my opinion and interpretations of those topics” (personal interview 10). This was echoed by another participant: “My motivation…is to educate or enlighten the readers about research or share a differing interpretation of public events that is informed by my scholarly pursuits…. In essence, I’m trying to get members of the public to think more critically about events that are occurring in the world around them” (personal interview 9). Others mentioned that they wrote the column after being encouraged to do so by the editors or other colleagues. What is most interesting, however, is that most participants believed that academics, as public intellectuals, have a significant responsibility to engage in issues of societal importance and that the column was one accessible and meaningful way of doing so. In terms of what motivates this sense of responsibility, three themes were identified by the participants: the importance of giving back to the public, being a leader and expert, and breaching the ivory tower and improving town-gown relations.

Community Service: Giving Back to the Public

Some participants saw themselves as public servants because their extensive education and current teaching and research are publicly funded. As such, 95% of survey respondents agreed that they have a responsibility to share their knowledge and expertise with the public. These sentiments are clearly expressed by one participant who wrote, “We have one the best jobs in the world and given that a great deal of public money went into our education, writing columns is a way to give back to society” (survey respondent). Similarly, for another, “Academics are citizens, who may have particularly valuable expertise, and should be as active as possible in their communities and society at large. I think the fact of public funding puts an added onus on publicly-funded academics to be publicly engaged” (survey respondent).

This feeling was reiterated in the interviews. For example, one participant stated:

I think that it is important that scholars share their understanding of our world with our fellow citizens. As academics, we have been given the privilege to deeply reflect on and investigate our world. But along with that privilege comes the responsibility to share our knowledge with our fellow citizens (personal interview 13).

For another participant, in addition to the economic obligation the fact that academics have the luxury of spending their lives “attempting to understand the world around them,” means that academics are “obliged to serve the best interests of society” and “have a moral obligation to share our insights and knowledge” (personal interview 6). Similarly, another participant was “frustrated at the narrow arenas of academic discourse” and thought that “The ‘Second Thought’ columns offer a way of fulfilling our responsibilities as public intellectuals…connecting with the communities they serve” (personal interview 3). One participant saw it as their duty to engage the public: “Another purpose is to fulfill our duties as academics in offering opinions on critical issues of our day” (personal interview 10). The particular culture of Camrose seemed to add to the obligation one participant felt: “In our circumstances in this community, we have enormous responsibility for this type of public engagement. If not us, who? Certainly not the politicians who as previously noted are anti-engagement” (personal interview 11).

Leaders and Experts

In addition to giving back to the community, 71% of survey respondents indicated that writing columns was connected to being “educated and enlightened” or having a certain degree of “expertise” on a topic and occupying a “leadership” position in society (survey respondent). As one participant explained, public intellectuals:

...attempt to intervene in public debates or create them, beyond the already public
debates proper to their occupation or discipline, so as to bring their expertise and/or their opinion to the service of society and to have an influence either on political decisions or on their society’s culture. Academics have responsibility to raise important issues, offer informed opinions, put current events into context, and to ensure important ideas, concerns, and interpretations are not forgotten (personal interview 7).

This notion of responsibility was shared by another participant: “We have a responsibility to use our education, knowledge and skills for the betterment of society. These columns are one way that professors can reach out to the public and provide leadership” (survey respondent). Thinking of students, another participant saw the columns as “an opportunity to model community engagement to our students, especially those engaging, or thinking of engaging, in community service learning” (personal interview 14).

For another, the fact that the campus was located in a small rural community was an added consideration: “I believe that academics have a large responsibility, especially in a small community that features a university campus, for publicly engaging in social issues. We have access to research, data, and students that allow us to reveal, discuss and inform” (survey respondent). For another participant, an academic’s work and teaching are supposed to “have a bearing on society outside the campus.” As this participant elaborated, this was particularly the case:

…when our species is under threat from global warming and overpopulation and environmental degradation, it would be irresponsible of us to act as though all that mattered is what goes on, on campus, or for us to divorce campus life and thinking from the rest of society. Our students should leave campus understanding the major issues in our society, having strategies to deal with them and make changes, and we can model that through community engagement (personal interview 4).

Others recognized the importance of reaching out to a public not necessarily familiar with academic journals: “We have a great responsibility. Most people don’t read academic journals, so this is an important way to engage with people” (survey respondent). Another believed that in addition to informing people, it was necessary to “clarify issues and ask questions differently” and “intervene specifically in our domain of specialization so as to allow members of the community to freely form their opinion” (survey respondent). Another participant elaborated:

It is incumbent on us to apply our scholarly knowledge to the current issues facing us today in a manner that is accessible to all. Academic journals are an excellent forum for peers, but the jargon we use to quickly share ideas amongst ourselves must be interpreted in a public forum for those not at the forefront of the research” (personal interview 13).

Some participants argued that not all the disciplines had the same opportunity to engage the public. As one put it, “It is very important for academics to contribute informed opinion in public contexts, but not all disciplines have an equal contribution to make, since some disciplines have more to say about socially important issues than others” (survey respondent). For another, it was important to remain objective and avoid trying to persuade people what to believe or not believe:

We have to be careful not to abuse our position on ethical issues. For many issues, the sides are defined by ethical perspectives, which can neither be proven correct or incorrect. Where we can play a role is informing the public about scientific knowledge, the public then needs to use that information in its own decision-making. It is not for us to tell people what they should or should not believe. This is especially important for debates/issues along religious and political ideology lines (survey respondent).

These sentiments were echoed by another participant, who thought that while it is important to “embrace the concept of the public intellectual,” there is a need to do so mindfully “as educators rather than as missionaries,” which “requires humility and honest respect of where people are coming from” (personal interview 3). However, another participant addressed the issue of representing minorities:
I especially find it important to represent minority views, as the local papers, even in their locally produced editorial content but especially in syndicated content, tend to present opinions that reflect the local “common sense.” In doing so, I hope I can help those whose view is more often in the minority to formulate their own views, and that they can feel represented (personal interview 7).

Bridges, Towers, and Town-Gown Relations

Finally, in addition to giving back to the community by putting their academic expertise to public use, 97% of professors surveyed were motivated to write columns in an attempt to “avoid town-gown divisions” and “dispel ivory-tower stereotypes.” As one participant explained:

Academics are often paradoxically considered both leaders in their field and community at the same time as living within ivory towers. We need to shed the latter image and be active and engaged within our community (survey response).

For one of the original editors, the column was an important and much needed bridge between the community and the university. As he put it:

I noticed on arrival in Camrose...a real tension between Camrosians and Augustana types. It started for me with the realtor who linked us to the house we bought. He complained that the professors made a bundle of money and implied that they were aloof. This from a guy who got my business! There were notable exceptions but this was the general sense I got. When I coached and played hockey and soccer, thereby schmoozing with the “hoi-polloi,” I discovered that conversations often went silent when I answered questions about where I worked (personal interview 1).

Similarly, another participant wrote:

I believe “Second Thought” allows us to build and maintain bridges and contacts between the campus and the broader community, especially as professors and students tend to remain isolated from other [citizens]. It forces professors to think about the community and about their involvement in the community; it reminds the community that there are people among them who devote their life to study, and that many of their concerns have to do with questions of social importance (personal interview 7).

Another participant thought that while the university had been doing a better job at showing how it contributed to the community, they still felt very much like “the other” within Camrose. As the participant further explained:

…I often feel that I am looked at or treated differently when people know who I am and what I do. For example, when talking to other parents (generally moms), or volunteering for the pre-school or at a play group, I try to not hide, but not reveal, my job as I feel it creates a divide and makes people uncomfortable around me. When they find out, people say things like “Oh, I’ll have to watch what I say now” or it just kills conversation generally. I also think that many people see us as elitist or intellectual, which is not a good thing in rural Alberta (personal interview 6).

Indeed, for another faculty member, to expect some form of intellectual dialogue in Camrose was unrealistic. As they saw it:

The university is, and always will be, perceived as “the other” and quite marginal to the interests of the town fathers and those interests are largely economic. Inasmuch as the university has a huge economic impact on the community, the town will always have a polite toleration of the university, but beyond that it will always be perceived with a sense of indifference to postsecondary education. Why would you need to spend money on higher education when the farm and the oil fields make you money so much faster (survey respondent).

As such, it is not surprising that another participant argued that professors at Augustana should choose their publics since there “are more publics beyond Camrose that are much more worthwhile engaging; they are more open to thoughtfulness on
issues” (survey response). Similarly, for another the column should ideally break the two solitudes of town and gown, but

I sometimes wondered if it did the opposite. The most “engaging” were those that aroused the most negative response, most hostile anti-intellectualism, or most dismissive anti-Augustana sentiment. I am not sure whether or not dialogue was achieved. Of course, one cannot know what impact the columns may have had outside the letters to the editor. Nevertheless, there is a case to be made that articles that elicited the most negative response were the most successful, for anything that disturbs the comfortable and self-reinforcing surface of a community can be productive, especially for those living beneath the surface of the community (personal interview 3).

Clearly, tensions exist between Augustana and Camrose, as they do between most universities and the communities they inhabit, and so reducing these tensions is seen as one of the reasons why Augustana professors are motivated to write the columns. As one participant explained:

Ideally, I think the column serves as a connection between campus and the wider community, allowing us to share our knowledge and research with the general public. In practice, I am not so sure that is really how it works. I think that sometimes the column serves to widen the divide between campus and the town by demonstrating the more liberal/ left-wing biases of faculty, which are not well represented in the general population—especially on issues of social change or values. That divide is apparent, such as [on] women’s issues, gay rights, even economics. At the same time, the column still serves as a way to expose people in the town to a different perspective on issues, whether the reader is receptive or not (personal interview 6).

Some of the participants acknowledged that university professors had multiple roles in the community that helped reduce tensions. As one participant explained:

Since many communities know Augustana faculty in many roles (coaching, volunteers, committee, and board members), I think those view Augustana faculty as real people who are contributing to the community and therefore the relationship is positive. On the other hand, if that kind of relationship has not been experienced, I would say that Augustana faculty are seen as intellectuals that study inconsequential topics and teach students “liberal” ideas that are not helpful in our economy. I expect that there is a continuum between these two possibilities (personal interview 11).

Similarly, for another participant:

Lots of Augustana faculty are themselves members of the community and make reputations for themselves as people and professors in multi-dimensional ways: as good teachers, as skilled volunteers, as parents and neighbors. While community people—and staff for that matter—don’t necessarily know what range of things professors do, and why, I do think that there is less inclination on Main Street than there was when I came to see faculty as uninterested in Camrose (personal interview 12).

For others, there was a danger of being negatively perceived when writing columns for public consumption. For example, when asked about how professors are perceived by the Camrose community, one participant replied:

Tree-hugging, gay-loving, impractical eggheads. This is an exaggeration of course. Others respect us. I think if there were more columns by people explaining what they do, what their research is about, and why they do it, why it’s interesting and important, that would help the community know us better. And maybe it would help the researchers/teachers themselves (personal interview 8).

This is often easier said than done. As one participant put it, “The challenge is to write in a manner that is not intimidating to the general public so they see the column as a learning opportunity without being intimidated” (survey response). Similarly, another participant argued:
…if articles are not well written, or are written too obscurely, it makes the faculty look bad and confirms the opinions of those who think we are communists in ivory towers with no practical knowledge of the real world. So the articles need to be good (thoughtful, logical, geared to the audience), or we risk alienating readers who are also our community members and potential students, [their] parents, and donors (personal interview 4).

Despite the perceived difficulty involved in writing public-friendly articles that was held by some participants, most saw the column as an important vehicle for community engagement. As one participant argued:

I think this public engagement is vital and necessary…. Unfortunately, it's something that academics don't always do a good job of addressing and seems to be prioritized lower than our teaching and research obligations (survey response).

Concluding Remarks

The primary responsibility of the university professor is to further the particular mission of the university. This responsibility typically consists of teaching undergraduate and graduate students, engaging in research and creative work, and providing service to their institution. Academics at Augustana who write columns in the local papers do so largely out of a sense of another responsibility, one that consists of providing knowledge and insight, leadership and service, and breaking down barriers of intellectual elitism to a public that contributes financially to their chosen vocation. In a broader sense, they are contributing to democratic life by sharing knowledge and, ideally, creating a public space for a safe and civil discussion of the most contentious public issues. As Fallis (2008) argues: “Society finances the research at universities and, therefore, the university, with its enormous privileges, has an obligation to make this knowledge as accessible as possible, to disseminate it as a public intellectual” (p. 22). This idea is shared by Stein (2007), who argues that in addition to helping students become good citizens, universities have “a broader obligation to the public: to share knowledge, explore issues and create safe space for debate and discussion of public issues” (p. 7). Exploring issues often requires academics, particularly those in the social sciences and humanities, to engage in social criticism and foster public debate and discourse on important political and social issues.

Augustana professors have certainly embraced the role of the public intellectual, as identified by the authors previously mentioned, be it only on a local community scale. The columns have been appearing in the local newspapers for 19 years and while most columns do not elicit a response from the community, from time to time some do. Occasionally, those columns that coincide with important and significant social and political issues, such as same-sex marriage, resonate with the public and contribute to public discourse. The debates can be negative when comments from the community turn personal and perhaps town-gown relations suffer when professors seem to confirm stereotypes, but for the most part the debates are positive for the community as they provide alternative perspectives and a safe arena for public discussion and the sharing of ideas. As Berdie Fowler commented:

I hope the column serves to strengthen the town-gown relationship, not put it at risk. If thought-provoking columns lead to respectful dialogue, that is a healthy thing. Sadly, the recent gay/lesbian/sexuality issue has, in some cases, brought forth letters that are less than respectful of differing opinions. Nevertheless, within limits of course, we know that peoples who have freedoms to speak their minds live more peacefully than those whose views are suppressed (personal correspondence, April 7, 2005).

The columns demonstrate to the public the type of thinking and work that goes on in universities and the relevance they have for modern democratic societies. The debates that the columns foster allow Augustana professors to contribute in some small fashion to the public sphere and democracy. Engaging the public can be difficult given the limited amount of time at the disposal of the professor. Teaching, research and service commitments, as well as basic family obligations, do not leave much time for other activities. Indeed, for many academics caught up in grant writing and the publish-or-perish philosophy of academia, writing for the public is taboo—a waste of precious time. This is why Barnet (2005), among others, argues that the role of the public intellectual should be more rigorously established in modern academic life, which requires rethinking what it means to be an academic, and accepting public
responsibilities beyond the university. This is very much a central theme in Burawoy's call for a "public sociology" where there is a greater engagement by sociologists with civil society in the development of research that is more accessible, relevant, and useful to non-academic audiences (Burawoy, 2005).

In times of economic downturn, dominated by neoliberalism, universities are increasingly under attack and are being held more accountable (Côté & Allahar, 2011). It could be argued that now, more than ever, academics need to be more visible, more vocal, and demonstrate to the public the value of higher education and the relevance of the critical thought it fosters. As Graydon (2011), argues, academics engaging the public through the media and sharing their “research-gleaned insights and analysis” may go a long way in combating the popular view of professors as being “lazy, overpaid irrelevancies who sip sherry, neglect students, and have no right to complain about an four-month holiday” (p. 13–14). Moreover, such public engagement can have a genuine impact. As Hacker (2010) asserts, “the best public intellectuals ground their advocacy in true expertise” and “take carefully derived, sometimes highly technical research findings and translate them into insights that can guide public policy and public discussion” (p. 657). Indeed, given the current anti-intellectual anti-evidence stance of recent governments in Canada, now is not the time for academics to be shying away from public engagement and social and political criticism. Academics have a responsibility to conduct research, demonstrate to the public the relevance of research for public policy and to criticize irresponsible or harmful government policy that ignores the evidence provided by research. This responsibility can be realized through teaching, but also more broadly through professing in the media, whether it is international, national, or local in scope.

References


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Community Engagement in Academic Health Centers: A Model for Capturing and Advancing Our Successes


Abstract

Academic health centers (AHCs) are under increased pressure to demonstrate the effectiveness of their community-engaged activities, but there are no common metrics for evaluating community engagement in AHCs. Eight AHCs piloted the Institutional Community Engagement Self-Assessment (ICESA), a two-phase project to assess community-engagement efforts. The first phase uses a framework developed by the University of Rochester Medical Center, which utilizes structure, process, and outcome criteria to map CE activities. The second phase uses the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (CCPH) Self-Assessment to identify institutional resources for community engagement, and potential gaps, to inform community engagement goal-setting. The authors conducted a structured, directed content analysis to determine the effectiveness of using the two-phase process at the participating AHCs. The findings suggest that the ICESA project assisted AHCs in three key areas, and may provide a strategy for assessing community engagement in AHCs.

Community engagement has come to the forefront of academic health centers’ work because of two recent trends: the shift from a more traditional treatment of disease model of health care to a population health paradigm (Gourevitch, 2014), and increased calls from funding agencies to include community engagement in research activities (Bartlett, Barnes, & McIver, 2014). As defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), community engagement is “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people” (CDC, 1997, p. 90). AHCs are increasingly called on to communicate details of their community engagement efforts to key stakeholders and to demonstrate their effectiveness.

The population health paradigm values preventive care and widens the traditional purview of medicine to include social determinants of patients’ health (Gourevitch, 2014). Thus, it has become increasingly important to join with communities in population health improvement efforts that address behavioral, social, and environmental determinants of health (Michener, Cook, Ahmed, Yonas, Coyne-Beasley, & Aguilar-Gaxiola, 2012; Aguilar-Gaxiola, Ahmed, Franco, Kissack, Gabriel, Hurt, Ziegahn, Bates, Calhoun, Carter-Edwards, Corbie-Smith, Eder, Ferrans, Hacker, Rumala, Strelnick, & Wallerstein, 2014; Blumenthal & Mayer, 1996). This CE can occur within multiple contexts in AHCs (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Kastor, 2011).

Introduction

While AHCs are under increased pressure to demonstrate the effectiveness of their community-engaged activities, there are multiple challenges to developing effective evaluation methods for CE in AHCs (CDC, 1997; Rubio, Blank, Dozier, Hites, Gilliam, Hunt, Rainwater, & Trochim, 2015). Simple concepts like CE can be difficult to define (Rubio, et al., 2015). Demonstrating the impact of community engagement on population health outcomes is problematic (Szilagyi, Shone, Dozier, Newton, Green, & Bennett, 2014), and leadership-level knowledge of an AHC’s community-engaged activities within their own institutions may be limited (Eder, Carter-Edwards, Hurd, Rumala, & Wallerstein, 2013). This paper describes our work to develop replicable processes that evaluate ongoing community engagement efforts within AHCs from an institutional level, and assesses the levels of community engagement resources, as compared to best practices.

The University of Rochester Medical Center (URMC) created the Institutional Community Engagement Self-Assessment (ICESA) project, a two-phase pilot that creates a map of an AHC’s community engagement efforts and measures
existing institutional capacity for supporting community-engaged activities. Phase 1, the URMC Framework model (Szilagyi, et al., 2014), uses a health services research approach (Starfield, 1973) to evaluate an AHC’s community engagement program. Phase 2 involves the completion of the ICESA developed by Community Campus-Partnerships for Health (CCPH) (Gelmon, Seifer, Kauper-Brown, & Mikkelsen, 2005). For this pilot, the URMC solicited participation from AHCs that were seeking, or that had already been awarded Clinical and Translational Science Awards (CTSA) from the National Institutes of Health, National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences. These awards fund medical research institutions to speed the translation of research discovery into improved patient care and strongly encourage the inclusion of community-engaged activities toward this goal (Westfall, Ingram, Navarro, Magee, Neibauer, Zittleman, Fernald, & Pace, 2012). Eight institutions participated in this pilot project.

The purpose of the project is not to assess the content of each institution’s framework and CCPH Self-Assessment, nor to make comparisons across participating institutions, but to assess the effectiveness of the process. Specifically, does the two-phase process help AHCs identify and map current community engagement efforts, identify institutional resources and potential gaps to set future strategic community engagement goals, and assist institutions in describing their community engagement efforts to internal and external stakeholders?

Methods
Below, we provide an overview of the ICESA two-phase project, a description of the project scope and team composition, a review of the data sources, and a description of our analytic approach.

Table 1. URMC Framework of CE Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Goals</th>
<th>Evaluation Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local Community Impact:</strong> Improve the health of the community served by the AHC</td>
<td><strong>CE Activities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Health Center Impact:</strong> Increase the AHC’s capacity for CE, its value to the community and community/trust in the</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National/Global Impact:</strong> Increase generalizable knowledge and practices</td>
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</table>

Overview of the ICESA Two-Phase Project
Phase 1. Institutional partners were asked to form teams and to apply the URMC Framework (Szilagyi, et al., 2014) that was developed in 2013 and categorizes an AHC’s community-engaged activities around three levels of impact: on the surrounding local community, on the AHC, and on population health through generalizable knowledge and practices (Kastor, 2011). The Framework’s aim is to document and assess the structure, process, and outcomes of major community-engaged activities, including large-scale, multicomponent efforts (which may be longstanding and can span many disciplines) designed to achieve each community-engaged goal. The Framework does not attempt to provide quantifiable measures, but instead contextualizes an AHC’s current community-engaged activities to provide a baseline for evaluation and tracking progress over time (Table 1).

Phase 2. In the second phase of the project, ICESA partners were asked to complete the CCPH community-engaged Self-Assessment (Gelmon, et al., 2005). This instrument, created in 2005 and subsequently refined, assesses the capacity of a higher educational institution for community-engaged scholarship, and identifies opportunities for action (Gelmon, Lederer, Seifer, & Wong, 2009; Gelmon, Blanchard, Ryan, & Seifer, 2012; Gelmon, et al., 2005). Using the self-assessment has helped identify variation in capacity for community engagement, as well as focus on areas for development (Gelmon et al., 2009).

The CCPH Community Engagement Self-Assessment contains six dimensions, each with multiple elements. The six dimensions are: definition of community engagement, faculty support for and involvement in community engagement, student support for and involvement in community engagement,
engagement, community support for and involvement in community engagement, institutional leadership and support for community engagement, and community-engaged scholarship.

Within each dimension, four levels of commitment to community engagement and community-engaged scholarship are noted. Table 2 illustrates how each element is described.

The results of the CCPH Community Engagement Self-Assessment highlight which best practice resources the institution possesses to focus its efforts toward community-engaged activities, any gaps in best practice resources available at the institution, and opportunities for future improvement.

To ensure similar methodology across the sample, we asked that team members at each AHC work to come to consensus on a single rating for each CCPH Assessment dimension.

Combining the URMC Framework with the CCPH Community Engagement Self-Assessment offers a unique opportunity to both compile current efforts and examine gaps in institutional resources, policies, and infrastructure for community engagement compared to best practices.

Project Scope and Team Composition

Seven of the eight AHCs focused on community engagement across all of their mission areas, as defined by each AHC; one team focused exclusively on community engagement as applied to research. All eight teams excluded considerations of undergraduate programs that sit outside the AHC.

Each institutional contact from participating AHCs served as a team leader, and that leader assembled a local project team comprised of faculty, administrators, and staff from his or her institution. Based on lessons learned from the prior Framework project conducted at the URMC (Szilagyi et al., 2014), project leaders assembled five to ten people who were explicitly familiar with community engagement efforts occurring at their respective AHCs. Where possible, team leaders were encouraged to solicit a broad representation from across departments, but the priority was to include team members most familiar with the community engagement efforts of the AHC.

The content produced by the two-phase project reflected highly detailed, internal information on AHC community engagement programs and policies. Given that the ICESA project focus was on an internal assessment of AHC community engagement capacity, team leaders agreed that community partners would not be included on the project teams. Instead, the project leaders recommended that community partners be provided with a report on the findings, give feedback and suggestions on the report, and be included in community engagement planning efforts. This decision was supported by consultants from CCPH, who agreed that the Phase 2 CCPH Self-Assessment is, by design, internally focused on the AHC. To that end, approximately 18 months after the conclusion of Phase 2 of the project, team leaders were asked to complete a short survey describing their plans for sharing with their community partners the results of their institutions’ two-phase process.

Data Collection and Analysis

A multi-faceted evaluation used qualitative data from the following sources:

Table 2. Example of CCPH CE Self-Assessment Dimension and One of Its Elements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension VI: Community-Engaged Scholarship</th>
<th>Level One</th>
<th>Level Two</th>
<th>Level Three</th>
<th>Level Four</th>
<th>Notes:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Directions: For each element (row), choose the stage that best represents the current status of community-engaged scholarship in your Academic Health Center (AHC).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unable to assess. (Please explain in Notes section.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 6.6 Institutional Leaders’ Value of Community-Engaged Scholarship</td>
<td>The president, chief academic officer, trustees, and deans do not support community-engaged scholarship as an integral form of scholarship at this institution.</td>
<td>The president, chief academic officer, trustees, and deans do not support community-engaged scholarship as an integral form of scholarship at this institution, although some may express individual support for this form of scholarship.</td>
<td>The president, chief academic officer, trustees, and deans support community-engaged scholarship as an integral form of scholarship at this institution, but they do not visibly and routinely support this form of scholarship through their words and actions.</td>
<td>The president, chief academic officer, trustees, and deans support community-engaged scholarship as an integral form of scholarship at this institution and demonstrated this support through their words and actions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Choose the stage that characterizes your AHC — 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ Unable to assess ☐
• The Phase 1 URMC Framework and Phase 2 CCPH Community Engagement Self-Assessment comments and notes from the eight participating AHCs. The open comment and note fields provided additional information.
• Team Feedback Survey. All team leaders reported their experiences using the Phase 1 URMC Framework, Phase 2 CCPH Community Engagement Self-Assessment, and overall assessment of the effectiveness of the ICESA project.
• Additional Qualitative Data. These data included email communications and notes from both one-on-one phone calls and monthly project leader conference calls.
• Supplemental Survey. Approximately 18 months after Phase 2 of the project, team leaders completed a short, online survey in which they were asked details about their plans for sharing their institutions’ results of the two-phase process with community partners.

The project directors took a structured directed approach to content analysis. In contrast to an inductive, open coding approach, the initial coding in a structured directed approach is based on predetermined categories (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The predetermined categories were represented by three process evaluation questions. The project directors compiled the notes and comment fields from the data sources listed above into a single document. Separately, and on individual copies, they highlighted all comments that aligned with either a positive or negative answer to each process evaluation question. Individually, they labeled each comment as to the process evaluation question addressed, and further subcategorized those comments conceptually related within each category. Any text that did not fit in this initial categorization scheme was given another code and analyzed to determine if it represented a new category. The project directors came to consensus on which data provided evidence (or not) for each process evaluation question and agreed-on subcategories. All results of the content analysis were shared with the other team leaders for feedback, discussion, and agreement. Agreed-upon changes were made; all project team leaders reached consensus on the coding. Additionally, there were questions on the Feedback Survey that directly addressed the process evaluation questions. Those results are included below.

Results
Does the ICESA Two-Phase Process Help AHCs Identify and Map Current Community Engagement Efforts?

The evidence for this question is found in the following sources: the completed URMC Framework from all eight participating institutions; the answers to questions on the feedback survey; and the categorized open comments made by project team leaders.

All eight teams completed the URMC Framework. Four institutions modified the Framework to suit their individual purposes by modifying the names of column headings (N=1), or by adding columns or rows (N=3), increasing the granularity of the data captured. On the feedback survey, responses to “Overall, how useful was the Framework in documenting/understanding your CE program?” showed that all eight project leaders found it useful, half noting it as “very useful” (N=4) and half as “somewhat useful” (N=4).

Project team leaders were also asked about the utility of the URMC Framework and the ICESA two-phase process as a whole for identifying and mapping current community engagement efforts. Eight team leaders provided comments affirming the usefulness of the two-phase process (N=8). Open comments were more descriptive and organized into three subcategories. The first subcategory is centered on “mapping” or visualizing the community engagement programs at participating institutions. Representative comments from team leaders include “extremely helpful in mapping and understanding the CE efforts that were happening across the academic health center” and “helped us see all of our CE activities and creates a baseline for planning activities moving forward, and for tracking our successes.”

The second subcategory includes comments made by team leaders about the modifications they made to the URMC Framework, mentioned above.

There were also suggestions for how to improve the use of the URMC Framework; the final subcategory highlights the difficulties some teams had in utilizing the URMC Framework and their suggested changes for future use. Five team leaders made suggestions. In summary, team leaders indicated that in Phase 1, more guidance on the URMC Framework, with examples given, would have been welcomed, particularly to assist those not familiar with health services research and in describing the purpose of the URMC Framework. One team leader remarked that “The framework was a little confusing. It wasn't obvious on how to...
Table 3. Does the Two-Phase Process Help AHCs Identify and Map Current CE Effort? (URMC Framework)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Project Leader’s Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mapping CE Efforts                               | • Helped us see all of our CE activities and it creates a baseline for planning activities moving forward, and for tracking our successes  
• Helpful in assisting us to identify gaps  
• A mechanism to catalog CE work  
• Extremely helpful in mapping and understanding the CE efforts that were happening across the academic health center |
| Adaptability of the URMC Framework: Implemented  | • Separated out activities and evaluation criteria by department/office/center, and added a locations column  
• Added columns for school, lead contact and audience served  
• Used 3 original goals, but modified and added some  
• The URMC model was very useful in helping us begin this conversation. However, we had to revamp the model to guide our conversation in a way that worked for us  
• We had a lot of discussion about what the column headings would be and what information would fit for each one |
| Challenges in Using the URMC Framework and Suggested Changes | • Would have been helpful to the institution to include source/PI to know/remember where to get the data  
• Assessment of quantity vs. quality of programs could be helpful  
• Perhaps adding some step by step on how to walk through the process. A series of questions to ask the team to elicit the information. Once we got started the process seemed to flow. Getting started was the tough part. Maybe even a facilitator to work through that can objectively place items in the right areas or push the group to consider other aspects of CE  
• Difficult to differentiate between structure, process, outcomes  
• Had trouble determining who to bring to the table  
• Somewhat difficult to assure that they had accurate data on all existing programs and research projects related to CE  
• The framework was a little confusing. Once we walked through it a bit it became much easier! |

Complete it at first. Once we walked through it a bit it became much easier!” Other suggestions for improvement included providing additional guidance on identifying site team members and adding a facilitator to work with each institutional team (Table 3).

Does the Two-Phase Process Assist in Identifying Institutional Resources and Potential Gaps in Order to Set Strategic Community Engagement Goals for the Future (CCPH Community Engagement Self-Assessment)?

Whereas the URMC Framework was the primary tool for identifying and mapping community engagement efforts, the CCPH Community Engagement Self-Assessment was designed to prompt consideration and assessment of available institutional resources for supporting community engagement and identification of potential institutional gaps.

Seven teams completed the CCPH Community Engagement Self-Assessment. The team leader of the eighth reported that, given their AHC’s size and number of programs, the team members questioned their ability to accurately determine level of AHC institutional capacity for community engagement work across the six dimensions.
When asked on the feedback survey “Will this process help you, or others at your institution, set strategic goals to further CE efforts at your institution?” all eight team leaders responded “yes.”

Additional evidence related to this question came from open comments on the feedback survey and comments made in project meetings. These were categorized into two subcategories: descriptions of the types of institutional gaps that were identified by teams and evidence that the ICESA project supports strategic community engagement goal setting (Table 4).

Goals for the Future

Seven team leaders commented on potential institutional gaps identified by the project. Comments included statements such as “It became clear that while there are abundant resources to support CE scholarship, there are significant barriers to promotion, communications, and utilization of these resources” and “While engagement activities are occurring (in some cases, individual centers and institutes are doing this well), there is little emphasis on what the community needs. The activities are driven more by institutional priorities.”

Project team leaders also provided feedback, either in the follow-up survey or project meetings, suggesting the two-phase process has helped or likely will help inform future community engagement planning. All eight team leaders expressed plans, variously, to use the results from this project for identifying priority areas, developing strategies, or setting community engagement goals in the future. One team leader reported that the community engagement task force at her institution has already utilized the results from this project to help set strategic goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Project Leader’s Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Examples of Gaps Identified</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Somewhat difficult to assure that they had accurate data on all existing programs and research projects related to CE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• While engagement activities are occurring (in some cases, individual centers and institutes are doing this well), there is little emphasis on what are the community needs. The activities are driven more by institutional priorities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The lack of resources remain a challenge in getting CE plans fully implemented.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It became clear that while there are abundant resources to support CE scholarship, there are significant barriers to promotion, communication, and utilization of these resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We found the framework helpful in assisting us to identify gaps. During our discussion about our gaps we figured out that not many of us are measuring the effectiveness of different approaches of community engaged research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• It is an area that is talked about and referenced but has never been quantified.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This assessment quantifies some of the challenges, identifies areas of improvement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• We learned that the institution has definitions and recommended practices in place but those are interpreted differently across the various schools.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Strategic Goal Setting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• This assessment quantifies some of the challenges, identifies areas of improvement. It really sets the stage for discussion.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The documents from the process will be referred to when setting goals for the various projects, departments, etc. that involve CE that we are involved in at our institution.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• CCPP tool had less utility but a modified version of it could be helpful in future plans for moving forward.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The CE task force has set strategic goals to further CE efforts, partially based on the results from this process.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The results will help to identify priority areas to focus on and develop strategies to address.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Does the Two-Phase Process Assist Participating Institutions in Describing Their Community Engagement Efforts to Internal and External Stakeholders?

On the feedback survey, team leaders were asked “How will you, or others at your institution, share the results of this two-phase process?” All eight team leaders indicated that they will share the results. Seven teams will share the results with their CTSA leadership, four teams intend to share the results with their community partners, and three with departmental leadership. In open comments, one institution reported that it has plans to share the results with the leadership of each school across the AHC, and one institution reported plans to publish and present the results locally and nationally.

In the follow-up Supplemental Survey, conducted 18 months after completion of the project, team leaders were asked: “Have you already shared the results of your ICESA with your community partners?” One team replied “yes,” indicating that the results had been included in oral presentations, committee meeting discussion, and in written reports. Seven teams responded “no.” Those seven teams were asked the follow-up question: “Do you intend to share your ICESA results with community partners? Six teams replied “yes”; one team leader indicated that the team would not share the results with community partners, citing the difficulty of contextualizing the results across broad community partnerships. The six teams that indicated plans to share the results with community partners were asked the follow-up question: “How do you intend to share your results with your community partners?” Five teams indicated that the results would be presented for discussion and feedback to their community advisory boards. Two teams plan to share the results for discussion at upcoming meetings with community partners, and one team plans to follow their presentation at their community advisory board and partnership meetings with key informant interviews to elicit feedback. Team leaders were also asked: “How will you, or others at your institution, use the results of this two-phase process?” All eight team leaders indicated that they will use their results. Seven indicated they will use the results in their CTSA reporting. Six teams now plan to identify additional outcome or impact measures. Five indicated that they will use their results to increase the visibility of community engagement work within their respective institutions. Four plan to use the results to create programs or initiatives to address gaps in their community engagement efforts. Two team leaders plan to use the results in their CTSA renewal application.

Open comments from the feedback survey and project meetings were categorized into two subcategories: ways in which the ICESA project increased communication with stakeholders during the project, and how team leaders expect the project will help them describe their community engagement efforts to internal and external stakeholders going forward. Representative comments can be found in Table 5.

All eight team leaders indicated that they intend to share the results with internal stakeholders and four team leaders indicated that they will also share the results with community partners. Four of the eight team leaders made comments about the ways in which the ICESA project will help them with these communications; for example, one team leader said that participation in the project “gives very specific information for reporting to the community and institution” and another said it “quantified a very difficult construct that can start a conversation with University leaders.” In addition to setting the stage for institutional conversations about community engagement, the two-phase process and results also provided an opportunity to engage with community partners and other external stakeholders about institutional capacity for community engagement and opportunities for growth and innovation.

Discussion

Overall, our findings suggest that the ICESA two-phase process helped participating AHCs identify and map current community engagement efforts, identify institutional resources and potential gaps in order to set strategic community engagement goals for the future, and describe their community engagement efforts to internal and external stakeholders. All team leaders from the eight participating institutions found implementing the ICESA project in an AHC to be beneficial. One unanticipated finding, however, is the extent to which the participating institutions modified the URMC Framework to suit their purposes. Institutions added columns and rows, or made changes to the column headings in the Framework that did not fundamentally alter the character or use of the tool, but which increased its utility for those institutions. This adaptability suggests that it acts as a heuristic tool; the use of the Framework became an iterative process guided by each team’s subjective and emergent needs.
Table 5. Does the Two-Phased Process Assist Participating Institutions in Describing Their CE Efforts to Internal and External Stakeholders?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Project Leader’s Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Increased Communication With Internal Stakeholders | • Team members learned quite a bit about each other’s areas.  
• A representative from the University’s Office for Public Engagement participated in this assessment process.  
• Allowed for conversations and thus awareness across offices with common and unique CE missions that didn't know of each other or work together.  
• The thoughtfulness that surrounded the framework was invigorating. To me the best part of the process was the conversations about CE that resulted  
• It also provided an opportunity for the team to develop working relationships as several of the team members had not known each other prior to the project initiation  
• All extremely helpful to create common language across 3 schools in our Health Sciences  
• The greatest benefit of the project was the opportunity to gather people for whom CE is a major part of their job, but who had never had the chance to meet or spend time with their CE colleagues |
| Supporting Strategic Goal Setting    | • This assessment quantifies some of the challenges, identifies areas of improvement. It really sets the stage for discussion  
• The documents from the process will be referred to when setting goals for the various projects, departments, etc. that involve CE that we are involved in at our institution  
• CCPH tool had less utility but a modified version of it could be helpful in future plans for moving forward  
• The CE task force has set strategic goals to further CE efforts, partially based on the results from this process  
• The results will help to identify priority areas to focus on and develop strategies to address |

Two additional experiences suggest another way that the Framework acts as a heuristic tool. One team leader reported that it was difficult to be sure her team had captured all CE activities from across the AHC. Another was concerned, while pulling together her team, that she may not be aware of some CE-active faculty in other departments (refer to Table 1). From an instrumental standpoint, the inability to exhaustively capture all CE activities across departments and schools in an AHC, or to know where to look for CE faculty in a given department could seem like a process failure, but from an epistemological standpoint, bringing those potential gaps to the foreground is one of this project’s goals. One project leader reported that in the process of making inquiries of other departments to identify CE-engaged faculty members to join the team for this project, she met a faculty member who was heretofore unknown to her; they are now considering future collaborations. Another project leader reported that, as a result of utilizing the URMC Framework, senior leadership at her institution are now interested in creating an online capture system for eliciting CE activities information from across the AHC in a more institutionally supported manner.

At this time, there are no plans to repeat this project as a national, multi-institutional effort; this is appropriate to the focus of the project on institutional self-assessment. As next steps, the project leaders recommend participating institutions share their results with their community partners and repeat this two-phase process at a regular interval, to be determined by their individual needs. The challenges participating teams experienced in using the URMC Framework, and their recommendations for changes, should be well-considered in future implementations of ICESA, by both our participating teams, and others who may utilize the process.

References


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Length of College Service Experience Effect on Future Life Over Time

Susan Gamble, Allison Nichols, Margaret Miltenberger, Kelly Hicks, and Shirley Wilkins

Abstract

The college experience offers many opportunities for students to become engaged in service activities. Most studies about these activities have been conducted on populations of students who have either just completed their service activity or just graduated from college. Inconsistent findings on how the length of service activities during college influence choices later in life have left researchers unsure of the value in lengthening service opportunities. To determine if the length of service makes a difference on benefits associated with service, an online survey of 277 former college student volunteers ranging in age from 21 to 71 was completed. Findings showed a positive effect with the length of service on future service attitudes, dispositions, and behavior. The study found that as the length of the time period volunteers served for one organization in college increased, the more likely they were to give service later in life, value giving service to others in need, and believe they could make a difference in their community.

Introduction and Literature Review

General Benefits of Service in College

In general, the benefits of service in college have been well-documented. They include both short- and long-term outcomes for students and communities. The development of citizenship and social responsibility in college students has re-emerged as a central part of higher education (Jones & Abes, 2004). Performing volunteer work as a college student has been found as a predictor of student involvement to promote volunteerism post-college (Sax, 2004).

Many studies document an increased sense of citizenship as an outcome of doing service in college (Kahn, Westheimer, & Rogers, 2000; Reinke, 2003). Astin, Sax, and Avalos (1999) found that volunteerism in college results in students becoming more socially responsible and more dedicated to community service. Two studies specifically found that service learning is a predictor of political engagement (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Denson, Vogelgesdang, & Saenz, 2005). Tennenbaum and Berrett (2005) found that service learning involvement increased students’ social awareness, including increased understanding of how to become more involved in one’s community and increased awareness of community needs.

Another benefit of service experiences is the development of personal efficacy. Personal efficacy is a core belief that one’s actions can make a difference through challenging goals. Patterson and Kelleher (2005) stated that psychological research suggests that one’s self-efficacy beliefs serve as a filter through which a person evaluates past experiences and makes judgments about decisions when trying to decide on future accomplishments. As a result of these past experiences, self-efficacy beliefs define a person’s sense of personal mastery and confidence in abilities to make an impact. According to Phillips, Harper, and Gamble (2007), personal efficacy—the belief in one’s abilities—paves the way for future community involvement. These findings agree with findings of Astin, Sax, and Avalos (1999) that “being a volunteer during college…is associated with a greater sense of empowerment in the years after college” (p. 197). The amount of service time carries additional benefits beyond those benefits associated with the type of service performed, especially in the areas of civic responsibility and life skill development. (Astin & Sax, 1998).

These findings are strongly supported by similar study results of the national taskforce reviewing the eight-year impact of service with AmeriCorps. Taskforce researchers found that:

The most important civic impact on [AmeriCorps] members is, perhaps, a sense of empowerment or self-efficacy—a strong belief that one can make a difference. In addition, State and National and NCCC [National Civilian Community Corps] members have greater confidence in their ability to work with local...
government to address community needs” (Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Policy Development, 2008, p. 18.)

Effect of the Length of College Service Activities on Future Outcomes

The commonly held definition of service learning includes that it lasts at least a half of a semester (Eyler, 2000), however, there are few studies that address the impact of the service duration on the outcomes related to service in college. Conrad and Hedin (1982) found that experiential education experiences lasting for at least a semester were associated with better outcomes. Mabry (1998) found that service hours are positively associated with academic learning. In their 1998 study, Astin and Sax included a variable related to service duration. They asked respondents to indicate the number of months they had devoted to service participation in the past year.

The length of service showed significant effects on 34 of their 35 outcome measures. After controlling for type of service activity, length of service had an impact primarily on civic responsibility and life skills. There was some impact on knowledge gained related to increased knowledge in the discipline area related to the service. In a 1999 study, Astin, Sax, and Avalos found that the number of hours a student spent volunteering in their senior year or last year of college had a significant effect on whether they volunteered five years later. In a qualitative study based on intensive interviews, Stelljes (2008) found that an intensive service commitment led to long-term commitment to improve social conditions. Knapp, Fisher, and Levesque-Bristol (2010) found that programs that involved students in at least seven weeks and 30 hours of service had the strongest positive effects on the impact of college service. According to a meta-analysis on service learning effects, Conway, Amel, and Gerwien (2009) concluded that larger changes in participant outcomes were associated with more hours and a greater length of service.

Although not related directly to length of service, some studies have looked at the quality of the service commitment as a proxy variable for intensity of the commitment required to perform the service. Morton (1995) developed three separate paradigms of service: 1) charity, 2) project, and 3) social change. The first paradigm, charity, is defined as a short-term volunteer activity focused on providing resources to the community. The project paradigm requires a longer commitment because participants engage with the program itself and complete a specific task, such as creating a community garden. The social change paradigm requires the most commitment as it involves community building and leadership. Based on Morton's research, Weerts, Ciabrera, and Meyas (2014) developed classes of civic behaviors in college that also reflect varying time commitments: (a) super engagers; (b) social cultural engagers; (c) apolitical engagers; and (d) non-engagers.

Studies That Focus on College Service Participants Over Time

Most studies of the impact of service on college students are conducted at the end of the service activity, at the end of the college experience, or shortly after graduating. A few studies have surveyed or interviewed former students who participated in service activities. One study by Jones and Abes (2004) followed up on a report by Jones and Hill (2001) entitled “Crossing High Street Study.” In the Jones and Abes study, students were interviewed less than one year after they had completed a service learning course. The results showed that the students had “produced only a snapshot of understanding about themselves” (Jones and Abes, 2004). In the follow-up study by Jones and Hill, different students in the same class as the earlier study were interviewed two to four years after they completed the course. The follow-up study found the following themes: (a) service to others becomes integral to self; (b) there is a shift in the nature of commitments including career decisions; and (c) there is an increased open-mindedness about new people, experiences, and ideas, including an interest in critical thinking and viewing their situation from multiple perspectives. Another longitudinal study by Denson, Vogelgesang, and Saenz (2005) followed entering college students in 1994 through their college years and into early adulthood. This study found that respondents who participated in service learning during college, as compared to those who reported no service learning in college, tended to be more politically engaged in the post-college years.

Background

Most of the members of the research team in this study participated as faculty coordinators in the Energy Express program and their experience became the impetus for the study. Since the inception of the West Virginia Energy Express in 1993, an eight-week “print rich” summer literacy program, AmeriCorps members have completed a post assessment. The assessment included questions
related to helping people in the community to bring about change. Benefits of this program include: (a) having a strong attachment to one's community; (b) caring about larger political and social issues affecting the community; (c) keeping informed about what can be done to meet community needs; (d) making a difference in the community; (e) partnering with other community groups; (f) conducting community needs assessments; and (g) reflecting on service experiences. Documented outcomes of the program with college-age volunteers have also included improved ability to work with children, attitudes toward service, and confidence levels in their ability to make a difference in the community (Phillips, Harper, & Gamble, 2007).

The evaluation of Energy Express led the researchers to ask whether the benefits of the Energy Express experience for college students continued as they moved through adulthood. Two themes guided the research project—the factors that influence future commitment to service and the life choices that are impacted by participation in service activities in college. The research team considered these factors that may influence future service: (a) involvement in service activities in high school; (b) amount of service (hours, days, months, years); (c) duration and intensity of the service experience (doing the same service activity over a long period of time); (d) service involving direct interaction with people versus indirect service activities, such as office work, construction; (e) reflection on service activities; and (f) service with the Energy Express program versus other service choices. Future life qualities and decisions the team thought might be impacted by service in college included: (a) choice of graduate school major; (b) choice of career; (c) selection of life partner; (d) parenting style; (e) use of expendable income; and (f) decision to continue to give service. A quantitative study was designed to explore the following questions: (a) what are the factors related to service in the college years that influence future commitment to service, and (b) what are the impacts of service during the college years on later life?

Research Questions Discussed in this Paper

In this paper, the research team is reporting findings related to one factor that influences future service—duration of the service activity. Future studies will discuss other factors and other life qualities. The research question is: Does the duration of the service activity for one organization have an impact on one or more life quality characteristics?

Methodology

An online survey questionnaire was developed by the research team with several categories including demographics, attitudes toward service, length of service in college, effect on life decisions, college majors, changes in area of study, career choice, parenting behaviors, and current volunteer activities. A pilot survey was conducted with 26 participants. The survey was then revised and submitted for the approval of the West Virginia University (WVU) Institutional Review Board. It was approved as an exempt study.

The survey sample was drawn using listservs from various groups associated with colleges in West Virginia that facilitate student service activities. Targeted groups included Energy Express AmeriCorps alumni, West Virginia 4-H All Stars, Bonner Scholars program alumni, Volunteer WV participants, alumni of WVU sororities and fraternities, members of the West Virginia state 4-H camp volunteer listserv, and WVU Campus Compact participants. It is not possible to accurately estimate the completion rate because each organization sent surveys to their own listservs and the final total number is unknown. However, 172 Energy Express alumni responded. This represents 13% of the total number of Energy Express alumni since the program began and for whom the team had forwarding emails. Respondents with no service experience in college were not expected to access the survey; however, if they did, they were instructed to exit the survey so results included only those who participated in college service activity.

The data, which was collected online, was entered into an Excel database and was re-entered into SPSS (statistics software) for further analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the population and frequency of answers on various questions. Pearson Chi Square and linear regression statistical tests were used to analyze the relationship of the demographic variables with the impact (life quality) variables.

These findings focus on the relationship between the length of time respondents said they served with one college organization and the following life decision variables: (a) making the decision, post college, to give service to others; (b) beliefs about whether or not they have made a difference in their community; (c) using skills learned in college to give service today; and (d) participating in a service activity during the past year that was not a part of their regular job assignment.
Limitations
The limitations of the study were that the researchers were unable to define the size of the sample due to the use of various listservs to reach a wide range of college graduates. In addition, the majority of respondents served for multiple months or more than a year, so there was a lower representation from those who served for shorter time periods. The population was also overwhelmingly white because of the predominant population of West Virginia. A more diverse population would increase the generalizability of the study results.

Respondents
Participants in the survey were former students who participated in service while in college. Targeted groups included Energy Express AmeriCorps alumni, 4-H All Stars, Bonner Scholars, Volunteer WV, the state’s Commission for National and Community Service, and WVU’s Center for Civic Engagement, Department of Social Work, Campus Compact, and Human Resources and Education alumni, sororities/fraternities, and state 4-H camp listserv. The largest group of respondents (62%) served with Energy Express.

There were 277 participants who completed the online survey during winter 2013. Participants’ ages ranged from 21 to 71, with a mean age of 30.96. The largest portion of respondents fell in the 21–29 age group. Of all participants, 80% were under the age of 38. On average, this is 15 years post-graduation for the typical college student. Ninety-six percent of the participants were white, which corresponds to the racial breakdown of 93.6% for the state (United States Census Bureau, 2015, retrieved from www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/pst045216/54,00). Participants completing the survey were predominantly female (81%), while 19% were males. Approximately 67% of respondents volunteered while in high school, and 70% do not have children younger than 18 years of age.

The majority of respondents (88.7%) earned a college degree. The level of educational completion ranged from 4.7% no certificate or degree, 3.6% with a certificate, 2.5% associate degree, 42.2% bachelor’s degree, 36.5% master’s degree, and 10% doctorate or professional degree.

Most respondents (90.1%) served for multiple months or one year or more, thus participating in long-term service opportunities. Only 10% served for a time period that was less than multiple months as shown in Table 1.

Findings
Results from the survey showed statistical correlations between the length of service given and future service-related behaviors and attitudes.

Decision to Serve People in Need
A Pearson Chi Square analysis found a significant relationship between the length of service for one organization while in college and the respondent’s decision to serve people in need later in life (Value = 41.094, df = 16, and asymp. sig. (s-sided) = .0001). More than half of respondents who served for a period of more than one week but less than a month (55.6%) and for one year or more (53.3%) said that their college service experience had a great effect on their decision to serve those in need later in life. The number of respondents in each of these two groups was significantly more than expected, however, there were only five respondents in the group that said that they served more than one week but less than one month. There were 70 respondents in the group that served for one year or more. In contrast, as indicated in Table 2, only 25% of those who served for one day or less than a week with one organization and 21.4% of those who served for several days to one week with one organization, said their service experience had a great effect on serving those in need later in life. This was significantly less than expected (refer to Table 2).

An ANOVA was performed using “giving service to people in need” as the dependent variable and “longest time period you have served with one organization or vocational school” as the independent or predictor variable. The results indicate that there is a significant relationship between length of service and effect on later life decisions to serve others in need. As the length of service went up, the effect on giving service to people in need also went up. Nearly 5% of the increase in respondents serving people in need later in life can be attributed to the length of time

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<tr>
<th>What is the longest period of time you served with an organization?</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One day or less</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several days to one week</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than one week but less than a month</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple months</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year or more</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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Table 1. The Longest Time period Served With an Organization
they served with one organization while in college. This finding (refer to Table 2) is significant (p<.02).

**Belief That I Can Make a Difference**

An ANOVA was performed using the statement “I can make a difference” as the dependent variable and “longest time period you have served with one organization while in college or vocational school” as the independent or predictor variable. As the length of college service increased, the more likely respondents were to strongly agree that “they can make a difference in their community.” As shown in Table 4, nearly 2% (1.6%) of the reason respondents agree that they can make a difference in their community can be attributed to longer periods of service. This finding is significant (p=<.05).

**Participation in Service That Is Not a Part of One’s Regular Job Assignment**

An ANOVA was performed using answers to the question “Have you participated in service in the past year that is not a part of your regular job assignment?” as the dependent variable and “longest time period you have served with one organization while in college or vocational school” as the independent or predictor variable. As the length of college service increased, the more likely respondents were to say that they currently participate in service that is not a part of their regular job assignment. As shown in Table 5, nearly two percent (1.9 percent) of the reason that respondents say they currently participate in service activities that are not a part of their regular job assignment can be attributed to longer periods of service. This finding (Table 5) is significant (p=<.02).

**Model for Predicting the Length of Time of a Respondent’s Service Activity in College**

A multivariate regression analysis was conducted with the length of time a respondent spent in a service activity with one organization as the dependent variable. The three predictor or independent variables included: (a) whether or not the respondent participated in a community service activity in the past year that was not part of the respondent’s regular job assignment, (b) how strongly a respondent disagreed or agreed with the statement “I can make a difference in my community,” and (c) the strength of the effect that the respondent said his or her service in college or vocational school had or will have on his or her choice to give service to people in need. Increased length of service activity in

| Table 2. Relationship of the Effect of Service on Later Life Decisions to Serve People in Need and Length of Service in College |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Served one day or less | Served several days to one week | Served more than one week but less than one month | Served for multiple months | Served for one year or more at one time |
| Those who said | n % | n % | n % | n % | n % |
| No effect | 0 0.0 | 1 7.1 | 0 0.0 | 7 6.3 | 2 1.50 |
| Slight effect | 1 25.0 | 2 14.3 | 0 0.0 | 5 4.5 | 1 0.08 |
| Moderate effect | 2 50.0 | 0 0.0 | 1 11.1 | 23 20.7 | 12 9.20 |
| Good effect | 0 0.0 | 8 57.1 | 3 33.3 | 39 35.1 | 46 35.10 |
| Great effect | 1 25.0 | 3 21.4 | 5 55.6 | 37 33.3 | 70 53.40 |
| Totals | 4 100.0 | 14 100.0 | 9 100.0 | 111 100.0 | 131 100.0 |

| Table 3. Analysis of Variance for the Longest Period of Served at One Organization While in College and Believe That I Can Make a Difference |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | DF | F | MS | ρ |
| Independent variable: Later life decision to serve others in need | 1 | 14.244 | 14.011 | .000 |
| Residual | 267 | .984 | .267 |
| Total | 268 |

| Dependent variable: Longest period served at one organization while in college |
|---|---|---|
| R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
| .225 | .051 | .047 | .992 |

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Discussion of Findings

Findings from this study contribute to the literature on the relationship of duration of service on the continuing effects of service in college. Most studies have measured benefits of service either immediately after the service activity or right after college graduation. This study measured effects on former college volunteers post-graduation ranging in age from 21 to 71 years. Overall, the study affirms that the benefits of participating in college service last over an individual's lifetime. Furthermore, the longer a person serves with one organization, the more likely the act of service will positively influence his or her life. Findings showed a positive correlation between length of service given to one organization and the following factors:

1. An attitude that service is a meaningful part of one's life.

The results showed that those who served for a longer period of time in one organization were more likely to say that the service had a great effect on their decision later in life to serve people in need. This life value affects their personal view of themselves. Youniss and Yates (1997) found that several years after completing a high school service-learning course, students continue to

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<th>Table 4. Analysis of Variance for Longest Period Served at One Organization While in College With Decision to Serve Others in Need</th>
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<tr>
<td>df</td>
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<tr>
<td>Independent variable: Belief that I can make a difference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<th>Table 5. Analysis of Variance for Longest Period Served at One Organization While in College and Participation in Service That Is Not a Part of Their Regular Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>df</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in service that is not part of the regular job assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<th>Table 6. The Length of Time Served With One Organization While in College and three Predictor Variables</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation in community service activity in the past year that was not part of a regular job assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength of agreement with I can make a difference in my community</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strength of effect of service in college or vocational giving service to people in need.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dependent variable: Longest period at one organization while in college</td>
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*p < .10
***p < .02

College for one organization resulted in more positive responses for each of these three variables. Together, these variables predicted (Table 6) 7% of the model (R square = .084; Adjusted R Square = .070).
identify the course as “clear landmark” in the development of their identity. A meta-analysis (Conway et al., 2009) found that service learning does tend to produce positive changes in academic, personal, social, and citizenship outcomes. There is additional evidence that personal outcomes change as a result of service (Billig, 2002; Eyler, 2000; Yates & Youniss, 1996).

Findings from a qualitative study based on intensive interviews suggested that the care for others nurtured during the service was an enduring and integral part of an individual’s construction of identity (Jones & Abe, 2004). Researchers found that the integration of this capacity into participants’ sense of self was evident as they consistently discussed the importance of service to others. This act of giving service heightened their desire to serve those in need. Astin and Sax (1998) found that the “habit” of volunteering persists over a relatively long period of time. The short-term effects of volunteer service participation during the undergraduate years persist beyond college and are not simply short-term artifacts. The positive attitude developed toward service results in additional service time later in life. The findings discussed in this article also showed a positive correlation consistent with the results from previous studies.

2. A belief that he or she can make a difference in one’s community.

The results of this study indicate that a longer service duration affects an individual’s belief that he or she can make a difference in their community. This belief is a form of personal-efficacy, also known as self-efficacy. Bandura (1994) defines self-efficacy as people’s beliefs in their ability to influence events that affect their lives. Those with a tenacious self-efficacy are likely to change realities for more positive outcomes. One’s sense of self-efficacy can play a major role in how one approaches goals, tasks, and challenges and is at the center of Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory. A study that investigated students’ commitment to future community involvement, efficacy, and empowerment found that self-efficacy fully mediates the relationship between one program characteristic, total hours of service, and students’ commitment to future civic involvement (Knapp, et al., 2010).

Being a volunteer during college is associated with a greater sense of empowerment in the years after college (Astin & Sax, 1998). Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee (2000) also noted that the students gained a “sense of empowerment that they can have an impact” through their involvement in the community. Results from the Knapp, et al., (2010) study suggest that the enhancement of students’ social empowerment is even more important than enhancing students’ self-efficacy in bringing about high levels of commitment to future civic engagement. Analysis of the findings from the Knapp study revealed that higher levels of commitment to be engaged are mediated by students’ experiences of social empowerment. This feeling of empowerment is often coupled with a heightened sense of civic responsibility (Astin, et al., 2000). A sense of empowerment undergirds the belief that one can make a difference in one’s community.

3. A lifestyle of continuous service to the community.

Recent literature shows evidence that the length of service positively affects a person’s likelihood to perform community service later in life, including political involvement (Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Denson, Vogelgesang, & Saenz, 2005). One study showed that the number of weeks and total hours that students volunteered were both related to high levels of commitment to later community involvement (Knapp, et al., 2010). The study discussed in this article reinforces those findings, not just with current college students, but with individuals who completed their college service activities years ago. This study found that as the length of college service increased, the more likely they were to report current participation in service unrelated to their regular job assignment. These findings are similar to the Astin and Sax (1999) study, which showed that both the number of weeks and total hours that students volunteered related to high levels of commitment to later community involvement.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Length of service commitments in college can have both a personal impact, as well as an impact with the community. There is evidence that a longer service commitment of multiple months and beyond can be a life-changing experience that influences future decisions. The study concurs with the recommendation that “it is important to extend students’ service time so that they accumulate more and deeper experiences of working with and for others” (Knapp, et al., 2010). This ultimately strengthens the fabric of local communities, because participants also develop a loyalty to the service provider and to clients. The findings also support the concept of intentionally mentoring students to choose longer and more in-depth service opportunities.

As an example, the Energy Express developed and implemented by the researchers offers a longer

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service commitment of eight weeks for AmeriCorps members. Because these Energy Express AmeriCorps members participate in service for more than two months, they are more likely to give service later in life. Service with Energy Express can influence both the individual’s attitude toward service and future service given with local communities.

Length and quality of contact by the service organization with the volunteers during their college years and after they leave college, may have an impact on their attitudes toward service and participation in service later in life. Although this was not studied, Energy Express program records show that one-third to one-half of the volunteers return each year. A volunteer listserv is maintained to send messages to former volunteers to cement relationships and reinforce loyalty. Organizations may benefit from keeping in touch with volunteers, offering new opportunities to serve, and giving them opportunities to serve once they have graduated. Service-learning efforts that focus on building relationships encourage students to come back and maintain contact.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

There are several topics where further research would be beneficial including:

- What are the benefits of including reflection activities in long-term service activities in college?
- Do the numbers and types of service activities make a difference in long-term benefits?
- Does the consistency of type and supervision of service activities over the course of a student’s college years make a difference in long-term benefits to the student and the community?
- Are college volunteers more or less involved in engaging their own children in service?
- Do the amount and quality of contact by service providers with student volunteers during and after college have an effect on the value former college volunteers place on service over their lifetimes?

**References**


Jones, S.R., & Abes, E.S. (2004). Enduring influences of service learning on college students’


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Abstract

Students in service-learning courses often make well-intended but deficit-oriented comments about the communities with whom they are working. While service provides opportunities for student learning (e.g., developing civic commitments and academic skills and increasing awareness of discrimination), service can also reinforce deficit-oriented thinking. Further, students from marginalized backgrounds in service-learning classrooms can be negatively affected by deficit-oriented comments. Possible theories to confront such challenges include asset-based models of community development, critical service learning, and structural explanations for inequities. Teaching cases are a pedagogical device for supporting students in putting complex theories like these into practice. This article presents a teaching case—grounded in these critical theories—that can foster students' abilities to develop responses to typical scenarios they might encounter at service-learning sites that are informed by structural understandings of social and racial inequities. Further, the case can be part of a classroom environment conducive to the learning of all students.

Introduction

“I’m so glad we get to work at the MLK Afterschool Tutoring Program so that I can give these children the help that they can’t receive at home.”

“I like helping out at Urban School because I can teach children to value education.”

“I have so many ideas for how to help the community, I can’t wait to start!”

As a professor of service-learning courses, I often hear my students make well-intended but deficit-oriented comments like these about the communities, families, and students with whom we work. Statements like these disregard community members’ own ideas for addressing social issues or are based on inaccurate assumptions that the families with whom we work do not value education. In our inequitable society, service-learning courses can provide an excellent opportunity for students to develop political, social justice, and civic commitments (Astin, Vogelgesang, Misa, Anderson, Benson, Jayakumar, Saenz, & Yamura, 2006; Schamber & Mahoney, 2008), hone personal and academic skills (Eyler & Giles Jr., 1999), and increase awareness of discrimination (Hochschild, Farley, & Chee, 2014). However, engaging in service can also reinforce deficit-oriented thinking like prejudices and stereotypes (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), particularly when programs fail to question the policies or practices that have produced an inequitable status quo (Cipolle, 2004). And when students from traditionally marginalized racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds in service-learning classrooms encounter such deficit-oriented statements from their peers or professors, they can be negatively affected (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Yep, 2011).

There are many possible avenues for confronting these challenges in service-learning classrooms, such as presenting material on asset-based models of community engagement (Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014; Hess, Lanig, & Vaughan, 2007; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), engaging in critical service learning (Mitchell, 2008; Rhoads, 1997), and focusing on structural explanations for inequities (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Gordon da Cruz, 2013; Lopez, Gurin, & Nagda, 1998). Faculty leading service-learning courses can also work to pay close attention to how students of color and lower income students are impacted by these pedagogical choices and the comments of their peers (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Yep, 2011). One particularly helpful instructional practice includes teaching cases, which can be used to support all students in understanding how to put complex academic content and theories like the ones mentioned above into practice (Smith, Malkani, & Dai, 2005; Stanford University Center for Teaching and Learning, 1994).
To this end, in this article, I present a teaching case that can serve as a pedagogical device for supporting postsecondary students in questioning their assumptions and thinking critically about inequities. The case is a tool for shifting thinking away from deficit-based ideas, such as “social problems exist in needy communities,” toward asset-based ideas like “social problems exist in democracies that disproportionately fund public education, health care, and other human services, and the impacts of these democratic problems are often most readily seen in predominantly racial minority and low-income communities. People in these communities have multiple ideas and strengths for addressing public issues and maybe I can work with them to implement solutions.” By developing this understanding, students can then perhaps stop saying “I have so many ideas for how to help the community” and instead claim, “I learned so much in my service placement about how to change public policies and cultural practices that unfairly result in non-dominant communities getting less access to resources.” Thus, through the teaching case, instructors can foster students’ abilities to develop explanations and responses to typical scenarios they might encounter at service-learning sites that are informed by structural understandings of social and racial inequities. Further, the case can be one part of creating a classroom environment that is conducive to the learning of all students.

Before presenting the teaching case, I first outline theoretical background on the pedagogies and content referenced previously—asset-based community development, critical service learning, inequality content, and service-learning classroom experiences of non-dominant students—all of which informed the development of the teaching case. In this first section, I integrate analyses of how these pedagogies and theories motivate the three dilemmas presented in the case. Next I provide the methodological basis for using the case method in order to support students in grasping these concepts. Following, I offer detailed ideas for how to use this teaching case in service-learning classrooms. Finally, I include the case itself, Understanding and Addressing Inequities in a Social Change Seminar, along with a series of discussion questions to guide student reflection.

**Background on Critical Pedagogies in Service-Learning Settings**

Service-learning courses generally include experiential learning, an individual reflection component, service to the community, and the integration of that service with academic learning (Eyler & Giles Jr., 1999; Jacoby, 2003; Mitchell, 2008; Rhoads, 1997; Seider, Rabinowicz, & Gillmor, 2011; Stanton, Giles Jr., & Cruz, 1999). Service-learning usually requires a balance between promoting students’ personal development, knowledge, and skill acquisition and supporting the development of communities and community organizations (Furco, 1996; Hatcher & Bringle, 2012; Seider, Gillmor, & Rabinowicz, 2011). Yet traditional service-learning is often based on a deficit model of communities in which students are thought of as advantaged and providing necessary services to communities, and communities are thought of as disadvantaged recipients in need of help (Eby, 1998; Hess et al., 2007; Mitchell, 2008). Not only is this characterization of communities inaccurate, it can have multiple negative impacts, such as acting as a barrier to relationship-building amongst community and university members, harming community members’ emotional well-being, and creating an obstacle to uncovering and addressing actual causes of social problems.

Many in the service-learning field therefore critique traditional service-learning approaches and instead encourage more asset-based or critical methodologies (see e.g., Davis, 2006; Mitchell, 2008). Such methods recognize the expertise of community members and can simultaneously support both community development and student learning. Students in service-learning classrooms may be more likely to avoid deficit-based assessments of communities and gain deeper understandings of structural inequities. Students of color or those from other marginalized backgrounds may experience more supportive, respectful learning environments if they are subjected to fewer disparaging, uninformed comments about their home communities. Finally, all students can gain a more nuanced perspective about the variety of ways in which they can civically engage to fight injustice.

**Asset-Based Community Development**

Asset-based approaches focus on discovering the capacities, skills, and assets that are located within and benefit communities (Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). These approaches are based on a foundational belief that communities can create sustainable growth from the inside. One way to carry this out is through asset-mapping, which involves mapping the assets of: (a) households of community residents to discover individual talents
and productive skills, (b) community associations (e.g., religious, cultural, athletic, or recreational groups), (c) private businesses, and (d) public institutions. Then community members, sometimes in partnerships with university members (e.g., faculty and students in service-learning courses) or non-profit organizations, can collaboratively analyze the maps to consider how these embedded assets can be used for community-building purposes (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). It is important to note that an asset-based approach does not intend to “minimize either the role external forces have played in helping to create the disparate conditions of lower income neighborhoods, nor the need to attract additional resources to these communities” (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 6), but rather to recognize the importance of community expertise, capacities, and local control in rebuilding communities.

Critical Service Learning

A second approach to service learning, which also recognizes community expertise but instead focuses more explicitly on critical perspectives, redistributing power, and broad-scale change for justice, is called critical service learning. Rhoads (1997) proposes eight principles for guiding “critical community service”; among these principles are attention to fostering critical consciousness, engaging in larger struggles to improve social conditions, and creating a more liberatory form of education. More recently, Mitchell (2008) reviewed the literature to outline aspects of critical service learning, finding that it: (a) emphasizes social change and social justice and makes the connections between service-learning and social justice intentional and explicit, (b) works to redistribute power in society, (c) develops authentic relationships between higher education institutions and communities served, (d) encourages reflection on and analysis of the structural causes that create the needs for service, (e) embraces the political implications of service, and (f) balances the outcomes of student learning and social change. Critical service learning simultaneously helps students develop democratic competencies through partnership with community members, while also preparing students for the complex work of engaging for justice in a diverse and inequitable world.

Structural Causes for Inequity

One of the tenets of critical service learning cited by Mitchell (2008)—an analysis of the structural causes of inequities that create the need for service—is an approach in and of itself recommended by multiple researchers for assisting students in justice-oriented community engagement (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Gordon da Cruz, 2013; Lopez et al., 1998; Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez, 2003; Sleeter, 1996). Including course content on and analyses of the structural causes of inequities is based on the premise that institutions within societies treat different groups of people unequally, resulting in life opportunities and accomplishments being more challenging for some groups to attain than for others (Lopez et al., 1998). Inequity course content and analyses are intended to support students in understanding how structural arrangements—such as laws and policies—in the political system and the economy, as well as cultural traditions and practices [e.g., extending job opportunities to those in one’s own social network (DiTomaso, 2013)], produce or reinforce group-based inequities. Research by Kluegel and Bobo (1986) supports the importance of including such content in postsecondary classrooms because they found that simply having higher levels of formal education did not increase the likelihood that individuals would offer structural attributions for socioeconomic inequality.

Oftentimes, students engaging in service are not aware of the societal causes of the inequities they encounter in low-income communities of color. This can lead to comments like the one at the beginning of this article in which a student places the blame for children not receiving tutoring support on their home environment. A structural critique of the need for homework tutoring would include an analysis of the policies, laws, or cultural practices that led to that need. Student comments with structural analyses could include: “I’m so glad that I can work at this afterschool tutoring program, since the local elementary school does not have adequately funded bilingual education classes,” or “I’m so glad that I can work at this afterschool tutoring program and provide the individualized instruction my tutees don’t get during class time, since the local elementary school has such large class sizes.” Each of these comments includes an analysis of a policy or practice that led to the need for a child requiring tutoring, as opposed to placing the blame squarely on the parents of children in under-resourced schools. Faculty using service-learning approaches in their classrooms can provide their students with experiential activities and literature that support them in developing these structural-level explanations for the inequities that they are very likely to encounter when doing service.
For many students, doing service is an opportunity to enter a community different from the one in which they grew up. Often, college students have more racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic privilege than the communities in which they will be performing service. Thus, service can be a chance to learn about and from people from different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, or cultural backgrounds than their own. However, there are also growing numbers of students who are entering communities similar to their own during service placements. These students may face obstacles to their learning in the classroom and find themselves performing an additional service by educating their peers (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Yep, 2011). In the words of a Latino student in a service-learning classroom who frequently had to listen to disparaging comments and deficit-based assumptions about his community, “I do more service in this class than I ever do at my site” (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009, p. 172). In racially and ethnically diverse service-learning classrooms, often students come with different levels of awareness of race and racism, privilege, and how it feels to be viewed as an “other” (Mitchell & Donahue, 2009; Yep, 2011; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Teaching one’s peers about these topics is a service that students of color are often performing within service-learning classrooms.

However, listening to students from more privileged backgrounds make disparaging comments about their communities can enact an emotional toll on students of color in the classroom and thus create an obstacle to their learning (Caplan & Ford, 2014; Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Such comments are one example of microaggressions: “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostility, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). The perpetrator of a microaggression is frequently unaware that their comment has a negative message; nonetheless, such comments can be psychologically taxing on students of color, leading to such impacts as self-doubt, frustration, or isolation (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

Both Mitchell and Donahue (2009) and Yep (2011) suggest several pedagogical strategies to make service-learning classrooms more welcoming for students who experience marginalization by their peers. For example, Mitchell and Donahue (2009) suggest valuing students’ of color double consciousness and creating classroom environments in which they have the opportunity to assist students from more privileged, often white, backgrounds in uncovering dysconscious racism (King, 1991). Double consciousness describes constantly looking at oneself and measuring one’s identity and worth both through the eyes of the marginalizing white majority and also through the perspective of one’s own strong and vibrant home culture (DuBois, 1903 cited in Mitchell & Donahue, 2009). Dysconscious racism is an impaired consciousness in understanding issues of race and racism (King, 1991). It is a distorted understanding of racial inequity that locates the cause in African-American culture or as an inevitable result of slavery, without attention to current policies that continue to perpetuate or create new inequities. Students of color own double consciousness—or the ability to see the world through multiple lenses that recognize power, privilege, marginalization, and numerous perspectives—that can be utilized to support all students in understanding the ways in which deficit-oriented views of communities of color are limited and distorted.

While students from marginalized backgrounds often have the capacity to perform service in the classroom through educating their peers, some also question whether it is fair to expect these students to take on an educator role and place more emphasis on strategies the professor can take to simultaneously meet the needs of students from both dominant and non-dominant racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds, such as through the use of critical multicultural pedagogies (Yep, 2011). Yep (2011) suggests strategies such as general classroom agreements that encourage students to make multiple attempts to understand others’ perspectives, balancing air time, and refraining from insulting other students. Yep also forwards multiple strategies in which students learn from one another, such as de-escalating racially tense conversations through having students anonymously write questions on note cards and randomly re-distributing the note cards so that other students can answer these questions. Another strategy entails having students discuss readings or dilemmas in small groups of three with assigned roles of notetaker, facilitator, or presenter so that students are more equally distributing listening and speaking roles. A further strategy involves having students name and analyze contradictions they encounter at their service sites in the
form of observations and developing a research question to investigate the observations. For example, the observation that “Teachers are disciplining only black students even though all students are acting out” led to the research question, “Why are there higher rates of discipline for black students than working-class white students?” (Yep, 2011, p. 115). Through such pedagogies, Yep (2011) aims to engage all students in analyzing systems of power and privilege and move away from critiquing one student’s comments about a service site or community to engaging all class participants in critical analyses of systems of oppression that are reflected in their service placements.

Applications to the Teaching Case

The literature on asset-based understandings of community, critical service learning, and supporting structural analyses of inequity motivated two of the dilemmas—those of Steven and Tanya—in the teaching case presented below. In Steven’s dilemma, he makes a deficit-based assumption about why students are not showing up for his tutoring sessions, claiming that “they don’t care.” When I teach this case, I aim to support students during our classroom discussion in uncovering possible asset-based and structural reasons why the students might not be attending their tutoring sessions with Steven. In Tanya’s dilemma, [motivated by Remen’s (1999) story of service], students often leave Edgar (the client with a disability) out of their proposed actions for addressing the dilemma. When discussing the case, I encourage students to consider what unique expertise Edgar might offer and how he could play a role in action-strategies for responding to the dilemma.

The literature on experiences of students from racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically non-dominant backgrounds in service-learning classrooms and critical multiculturalist pedagogies motivated the case’s third dilemma, which involves Mateo. Mateo, a multiracial bilingual student, experiences much of the frustration and disillusionment that Mitchel (2008) and Yep (2011) also observed with their students in service-learning classrooms. When reading the case, students are encouraged to place themselves in Mateo’s shoes, as well as consider what the professor of the class could do differently in order to mitigate these learning obstacles for Mateo.

Methodological Basis

To facilitate experiences and discussion in service-learning classrooms that can support students in understanding and applying theories like structural thinking about inequity and asset-based community development, I utilize the case method. But what precisely is a case? Generally, a case: (a) is based on a real event or series of events that could reasonably take place, (b) tells a story, (c) has conflicts that need resolution, and (d) has more than one viable solution (Stanford University Center for Teaching and Learning, 1994). Pedagogically, a case can be used to encourage discussion at three possible levels (Barnes, Christensen, & Hansen, 1994). First, students can analyze the case from an observer or outsider perspective, isolating relevant facts and discussing core dilemmas. Second, students can be given a role in the case to play and asked to argue for one resolution based on their knowledge of the interests of that role. Third, students can be asked how they would handle the dilemmas in a case as if the case were a real-world scenario.

Teaching with the case method is frequently used in the fields of medicine, law, and business and, more recently, in the fields of teacher education and educational administration (Diamantes, 1996; Merseth, 1991; Smith et al., 2005). Across these fields, two of the most fundamental purposes of case-based learning are to encourage the use of and assess the extent to which students are able to put academic theories into practice to address complex real-life problems (Barnes et al., 1994; Smith et al., 2005; Stanford University Center for Teaching and Learning, 1994). Teaching cases are also often used to: (a) illustrate that problems or dilemmas are constructed as opposed to facts (i.e., show that there are multiple interpretations of situations), (b) broaden students’ appreciation for multiple perspectives (Smith et al., 2005), (c) support students in learning to identify problems, key players, and situational aspects that influence dilemmas, (d) engage students as active participants in the learning process, and (e) create classroom environments in which both students and teachers can teach and learn (Kleinfeld, 1988, cited in Merseth, 1991; Barnes et al., 1994; Merseth, 1991; Smith et al., 2005).

Teaching cases have numerous benefits for student learning. For example, the use of cases is thought to promote critical analysis and problem solving (Barnes et al., 1994; Merseth, 1991), the ability to take deliberate action, and the capacity to see multiple perspectives and empathize with those who are culturally different from oneself (LaFramboise & Griffith, 1997). Further, in one study that examined 65 educational psychology

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students’ perceptions of how teaching case methodology impacted their learning, students self-reported that case discussions gave them the opportunity to see perspectives they otherwise would not have seen, put theories into practice, and feel engaged in class discussions (Smith et al., 2005).

In courses with students from diverse backgrounds and with varied life experiences, there is a wealth of knowledge upon which to draw in the classroom. By utilizing the case method, students are able to learn from the wisdom of their peers. I developed the teaching case below with the overarching purpose of cultivating students’ abilities to put critical service-learning theories into practice as they navigate issues at their service sites and in the classroom.

Suggestions for How to Use the Teaching Case in the Classroom

To use this case as a teaching tool, I ask students to read the case in advance of our discussion and jot down their ideas to the discussion questions. In class, I split students into three groups with each group focusing on a different dilemma. Generally, I am able to accommodate students’ preferences for the dilemma on which they would like to work. Professors can also consider assigning students to consider a particular dilemma; in this case, I recommend taking care to form groups in which there are a diversity of perspectives represented and also making sure not to ask students to speak for an entire racial or socioeconomic group (e.g., in a predominantly white classroom, I would not assign all of the students of color to work on the Mateo dilemma). I give students time to discuss their specific dilemma and discussion questions in their small groups. Then, I instruct students they must collaboratively—as a group—agree on action steps to take to address their dilemma. Next, student groups each have time to present their ideas to the class.

Following each presentation, classroom peers are encouraged to ask questions, respectfully critique their peers’ action steps, and offer their own insights on possible actions to take in response to the dilemma. If asset-based solutions to the dilemmas that value community expertise are not proposed by students, I pose questions to the class that allow them to bring in these ideas. For example, in the case of Tanya, I might ask, “What role do you think Edgar should play in responding to this dilemma?” Or, in the case of Steven, I might ask, “What evidence does Steven have that his tutees don’t care? Is there any other way to interpret this evidence?” Finally, I ask questions that encourage students to incorporate class readings that might provide a theoretical basis for taking particular actions. For example, if students have read Mitchell’s and Donahue’s (2009) article on students from non-dominant racial and ethnic backgrounds in service-learning classrooms, I might ask, “How could the theory of double consciousness help us to understand how Mateo might be feeling right now?” Overall, my goal is to create an environment in which students can critically reflect on how they might respond to a dilemma, learn from one another’s diverse experiences, and utilize class readings on asset-based models of community engagement, critical service learning, or structural explanations for inequities to inform their thinking. In short, utilizing the teaching case in service-learning classrooms is one way to support postsecondary students in developing knowledge and skills to civicly engage for justice in a diverse and inequitable democracy.

The Teaching Case: Understanding and Addressing Inequities in a Social Change Seminar

It’s just another Wednesday evening service-learning seminar for the students in Professor Sanchez’s social change course. During the week, students work at various service sites in the surrounding community, some volunteering in public services for people with disabilities and others at the local alternative high school, tutoring students for their GED exam. Every Wednesday the students get together for two hours and each seminar begins with a success story. A student will share something positive about their service experience during the week: something they are excited about, proud of, or that they learned. Then one or two students share a dilemma that has come up for them at their sites. In the next part of class, students strategize in teams about how to navigate the dilemmas their classmates raised.

Professor Sanchez warmly greets each student by name as they enter. The students in the social change course come from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences; some have access to white privilege and class privilege, and others come from backgrounds that are more similar to those of the alternative high school students: primarily students of color and students whose families are from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The students know the routine; they drag the well-used couches into a loose circle and all find their seats.
“Who would like to start us off with something positive?” Professor Sanchez asks the class.

Tanya, a white student from a middle-class background with an interest in disability issues, raises her hand. Tanya has been volunteering with Edgar for three weeks now and basically what happens is she helps him out with chores around the house that he can't do because of his disability and then they eat a meal together. I have to help him eat his food because of the tremors he is experiencing in his hands right now. This past week I forgot to bring my gloves. The service center tells us that when we assist folks with eating, we should be wearing rubber gloves for sanitation, but I forgot mine. I knew Edgar had to eat, so I just washed my hands and helped him anyways. Before I left, Edgar called for me to wait. He wheeled his chair out into the hall and said he just wanted to say an extra thank you. I asked him why. He told me that he was so used to people putting gloves on before they fed him and it had somehow felt more human and closer to have me simply hold his fork. I hadn't even thought it was a big deal. I actually felt guilty for not following protocol, but it turned out that not following protocol helped Edgar feel closer to me. Edgar doesn't say a lot, so when he told me that, it was a really moving experience for me. It also made me wonder if there's anything else I do to follow protocol that might impact someone negatively.

“Thank you for sharing your story, Tanya.”

“But I still have a dilemma,” Tanya said. “What do I do next week when I go back? There's always an attendant from the public service center there too. Should I follow protocol because I'm supposed to? Or should I not because I know that Edgar feels better when I don't?”

“Okay, that will be our second dilemma. Let's split off into teams and think about the issues that Steven and Tanya have raised.”

During the team strategizing session, Mateo walks over to Professor Sanchez. Mateo is a bi-lingual biracial student who grew up in a low-income neighborhood. He is passionate about issues of social justice. He was really excited about his placement at the alternative high school. He has been one of the top students in the class; he has received great feedback from his service site and he frequently shares nuanced perspectives with his classmates in response to the dilemmas they discuss in seminar. And so Professor Sanchez is surprised when Mateo tells her, “I just wanted to let you know that I’m thinking about dropping the course.”

“But Mateo, why? The students you tutor would miss you! And I would miss you. Your comments are integral to our class discussions.”

“Oh, don’t worry,” Mateo explains. “I’ll keep doing my service; that’s not the reason. I’m just kind of sick of sitting in class and listening to dilemmas like Steven’s. I’d rather be out at the site tutoring more students.”

Professor Sanchez nods. “That is a tough dilemma. How about for today you join a team and think about the dilemma that Tanya raised and I will consider your dilemma. Maybe after class we can touch base again?”

Mateo agrees to join a student team and Professor Sanchez sits back down to puzzle over all the dilemmas.

**Discussion Questions**

**Dilemma 1: Tanya and the Gloves**

1. What are the benefits of Tanya choosing to wear gloves next week when she eats with Edgar? (For Tanya? For Edgar? For the public service center?)
2. What are the benefits of Tanya choosing not to wear gloves next week when she eats with Edgar? (For Tanya? For Edgar? For the public service center?)
3. Are there any risks associated with Tanya wearing/not wearing gloves? For whom?
4. Based on your analysis, what would you recommend to Tanya that she should do?
Dilemma 2: Steven and the Lonely Tutoring Sessions
1. Steven told his classmates that the students he's tutoring are not coming to their sessions because the students “don't care.” Please come up with several additional possible reasons why the students with whom Steven works are not coming to his tutoring sessions.
2. Name three concrete actions Steven could take next week to address his concern. (Please keep in mind these actions could involve multiple different people in the scenario.)

Dilemma 3: Professor Sanchez and Mateo: Navigating Student/Educator Roles
1. Why do you think Mateo might be “sick of sitting in class and listening to dilemmas like Steven’s”?
2. What are the benefits of Professor Sanchez encouraging Mateo to stay in the class? (For Professor Sanchez? For Mateo? For the rest of the class?)
3. What are the benefits of Professor Sanchez encouraging Mateo to continue his service, but to drop the class? (For Professor Sanchez? For Mateo? For the rest of the class?)
4. What might Professor Sanchez do differently in class to create an environment conducive to Mateo's learning?
5. Based on your analysis, at the end of class, what would you recommend Professor Sanchez should say to Mateo?

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Celebrating C3’s Creativity: Stakeholder Engagement in Evaluation of the Chicago Conservation Corps

Kristen A. Pratt

Abstract
The Chicago Conservation Corps (C3) recruits, trains, and supports a network of volunteers interested in leading sustainable community-based service projects. This project served as a developmental evaluation of the program, utilizing community-based participatory action research as a methodology. Collaboratively, C3 volunteers, partners, and staff decided to conduct a participatory media project, collecting feedback from a wide range of program stakeholders to address the question of C3’s greatest successes and areas for improvement. More than 100 stakeholders submitted feedback through videos, photos, stories, poems, and other creative outlets. Several co-researchers were then engaged in analyzing these submissions to find themes and stories that have since guided the implementation of the program. This study found that C3 successfully builds diverse, expansive networks and educates people regarding pro-environmental behaviors, empowering people to build and maintain sustainable communities. It also serves as an example of community engagement in program evaluation.

Introduction
The mission of the Chicago Conservation Corps (C3) is to recruit, train, and support volunteers as they lead environmental service projects in their communities (https://www.volunteermatch.org/search/org201584.jsp). Since the program’s inception in 2006, a vast network has formed, bringing together Chicago residents with a passion for environmental issues, teachers and students from Chicago Public Schools, city agencies (e.g., the Chicago Departments of Transportation, Streets and Sanitation, and Water Management), more than a dozen official partners representing the environmental non-profit field in Chicago, and innumerable community-based organizations engaged by the program’s volunteers. Collectively, this group has implemented hundreds of community-based projects that have not only positively impacted the quality of life in their neighborhoods, but have also addressed varied environmental issues including air quality; energy conservation; water quality and conservation; waste reduction, reuse, and appropriate management; food access and quality; climate change mitigation and adaptation; and a myriad of other topics.

Research Context
When this study was conducted in 2012, C3 was a program of the City of Chicago. In May 2011, Rahm Emanuel started his term as Chicago’s first new mayor in more than 20 years. Combined with the city’s budgetary crisis, this change in administration led to significant changes across the city, including the dissolution of the Chicago Department of Environment (in which C3 was originally housed). At the time of this study, C3 was temporarily being administered through the Chicago Department of Transportation while a request for proposals went out to determine which local non-profit organization would take over stewardship of the program on July 1, 2012. The city was offering three years of funding (2012–2015) to help the program get on its feet in its new home. Uncertainty about C3’s future administration and structure called for a multi-stakeholder developmental evaluation of the program. The evaluation provided an opportunity to reflect on the program to date and to consider values and vision for the future. This evaluation required consideration not only of straightforward performance measures, but also of less easily expressed/more qualitative elements of the program. The hope was that, by engaging C3’s varied stakeholders in this evaluation, everyone would take ownership of the resultant vision and remain invested in the long-term. In other words by engaging volunteers and partners in creating a vision, C3 hoped the stakeholders would be more committed to carrying out the vision and not just leaving it in the hands of C3’s future staff, who were unknown at the time of this study.
This action research project sought to engage the program’s stakeholders in the primary question of: How can we improve the Chicago Conservation Corps program and continue its successes? Using this question to guide our efforts, we aimed to uncover descriptions, directions, and dreams that would lead to a clear vision of the program at that time and into the future, encompassing everyone’s collective values and goals. Key sub-questions included:

1. How can different stakeholders be engaged in determining C3’s successes and areas for improvement?
2. What makes C3 successful?
3. What can we do to improve the program?

The Stakeholders

C3 engages a broad and diverse array of stakeholders in its projects. The program from 2006–2012 was managed by three staff members who were responsible for: recruitment of volunteers; leading trainings and other events; providing project support and troubleshooting assistance; conducting outreach; connecting partner organizations with volunteer efforts and vice versa; and liaising with high-ranking City of Chicago staff (e.g., representatives from the mayor’s office) who provided “big picture” direction and oversight of the program.

As the urban environmental leaders “on the ground” making significant, positive impacts in their communities, volunteers are one of C3’s most essential groups of stakeholders. Without their involvement in this program, there would be no program.

At the time of this project, we worked with more than 400 adult volunteers through our Environmental Leadership Training program. These community-based volunteers plan and implement projects in their communities based on self-identified needs and interests. “Leaders” complete 20+ hours of training and a community-based sustainability service project. Before they complete their projects, we call them “trainees.”

As of 2012, we also worked with more than 100 teachers in Chicago Public Schools. These teachers led conservation clubs that focused on sustainability service in their schools and communities. It is estimated that more than 1,500 youth were engaged in these clubs annually.

C3 volunteers (e.g., leaders, trainees, and teachers) self-select for participation in our program, generally because of interest in environmental issues. However, they come to the table with varied levels of education, skill sets, and environmental awareness. As a whole, our volunteers are also very culturally and socioeconomically diverse, and represent every one of Chicago’s 50 wards.

C3’s partner organizations also comprise an essential component of the programming by providing expertise and access to resources. They often serve as “green professors” at trainings or as specialized project liaisons, working directly with volunteers. They are also prominent figures in Chicago’s environmental movement; their opinions and input figure in greatly to C3’s reputation in this community. Representatives from these organizations are in frequent contact with C3 staff and volunteers and have expressed willingness in the past to share feedback as C3 has rolled out new projects and activities. Their contributions to this evaluation were meaningful not only because of their involvement with and understanding of C3, but because of their shared perspective with much of the local environmental community.

Eighty-seven of 475 stakeholders expressed interest in participating in this project. This group was comprised of 40 leaders, five trainees, 26 teachers, two students, eight partners, and six current and former staff members (who are also active leaders). In total, 42 people participated in at least one of the research planning meetings or events. Of these participants, 55% were leaders, 7% were trainees, 14% were teachers, 10% were partners, and 12% were current or former staff. This group of co-researchers represented the diversity of our program, including representatives from across the city with varied experiences with the program (e.g., different lengths/types of engagement, volunteers versus paid professionals).

Methodology

Considering Appropriate Research Methodologies

While C3 collects feedback from volunteers regularly with regard to trainings and volunteers’ individual projects, we had never collected input on the program as a whole from all of our stakeholders, focused upon a specific question (i.e., successes and areas for improvement). Therefore, there was much to be learned from existing research with regard to the identification and measurement of success and the engagement of diverse stakeholders in this type of evaluation.

The evaluator, Michael Quinn Patton, defines the goal of developmental evaluation as “guid[ing] adaptation to emergent and dynamic realities in complex environments” (Patton, 2011, p. 1). Complex environments are characterized by a high
level of uncertainty and disagreement. In other words, the “correct” path is unclear and stakeholders have differing views on how to proceed. There are no rules and lots of different opinions. (Remember these conditions were certainly a part of C3’s culture at that time given the uncertainty of the program’s future.) In these situations, Patton recommends an evaluation design that is “flexible, emergent, and dynamic” (2011, p.100). It is not just “bean counting” or assessing existing variables. It is an attempt to determine a baseline understanding of the situation; guiding visions and values; initial conditions and environment within which future action will occur; and much more (Patton, 2011). Participatory Action Research (PAR) is often used as an evaluation approach for developmental evaluation, and so community-based participatory action research (CBPR) was chosen as the research method for this project (Patton, 2011).

CBPR has been defined as a collaborative approach to research that equitably involves all partners in the research process and recognizes the unique strengths that each brings. It begins with a research topic of importance to the community and has the aim of combining knowledge with action and achieving social change. (McNall, Doberneck, & Van Egeren, 2010).

PAR principles as defined by the action research visionary, Orlando Fals Borda, aligned well with the goals of this research. We sought to “build on strengths and resources within the [C3] community” and “facilitate collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research” (Fals Borda & Rahman, 1991 pp. 8–9). Most importantly, we sought to build and share knowledge about C3’s successes and areas for improvement and empower C3’s stakeholders, because we recognized that “community involvement can enhance the quality of research” (McNall et al., 2010, p. 259). Further, “when research is designed and conducted in collaboration with communities, those communities are more likely to use the findings to develop their own solutions to their problems” (McNall et al., 2010, p. 258). In other words, by engaging C3 stakeholders in this type of research, we conducted high-quality research that encouraged continued engagement in the long-term.

It is also important to note that this was not just a matter of involving community members; the level of involvement was key. “In PAR, research is not conducted on community members, youth, or other parties usually excluded from knowledge making; rather, research is conducted with community members or youth, challenging conventional distinctions between researcher and the researched” (Smith, Rosenzweig, & Schmidt, 2010, p. 1,116). PAR methods require that the research participants (i.e., C3 staff, volunteers, and partners) be treated as co-researchers throughout the process.

While somewhat unconventional in the research world, this necessitated that the research methodology be determined collaboratively with the help of C3’s stakeholders. These co-researchers were also responsible for helping with the collection, analysis, and presentation of the data. As the primary researcher, I was responsible for facilitating this work, but was not responsible for carrying out every cycle of the research independently; in fact, that would have been quite contrary to the goals of PAR. It is especially important that the evaluator “acts as a process facilitator and creates social conditions for genuine dialogue: openness, engagement, and inclusion” (Baur, Arnold, Van Elteren, Nierse, & Abma, 2010, p. 235).

In this participatory action research project, stakeholders were engaged at every level, but given our research questions, there was a significant focus upon diverse and creative ways of collecting stakeholder feedback. Baur et al., (2010, p. 243) suggests that “storytelling is a good way for stakeholders, particularly those with more silent voices in a marginalized position, to share their experiences with others.”

Similarly, methods like photovoice, videovoice, and participatory video provoke in-depth sharing of information and creation of knowledge from a diversity of stakeholders on a diversity of subjects. “Photovoice is a participatory method not of counting up things but of drawing on the community’s active lore, observation, and stories, in terms both visual and oral” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 382). It “recognizes that…people often have an expertise and insight into their own communities and worlds that professionals and outsiders lack” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 370). Not only does this method bring out great knowledge and information, it also invites participants to become potential “catalysts for change” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). It “goes beyond the conventional role of needs assessment by inviting people to become advocates for their own and their community’s well-being” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 374). Photovoice is also becoming a common methodology to address environmental issues, providing another connection to C3’s work (Powers & Freedman, 2012).

Based upon the existing literature, an assessment of C3’s successes and areas for improvement

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required methods that allowed all stakeholders, including volunteers, to feel empowered; were flexible, dynamic, and emergent and used PAR methods; and offered varied opportunities for stakeholder expression.

**Data Collection Methods**

Action research is a cyclical process; each cycle is defined by a pattern of planning, acting, and reflecting, which then leads into the next cycle. The methodology for this project will be outlined under this premise and can be seen in graphic form in Figure 1.

**Cycle 1: The data collection method.** Four hundred seventy-five C3 leaders, teachers, and partners (all of whom were actively involved in the program) were invited to participate in a research planning meeting as a part of an evaluation/visioning process for C3. Eighty-seven of these stakeholders expressed interest in participating in the process and were considered the “research team” for this project and kept apprised of all goings on.

Sixteen attendees joined us for our first meeting, at which the purpose of this research project and the methodology that would be used were explained, emphasizing that I would not be the primary decision-maker; instead, we would all be co-researchers. The group was excited to be involved in the project. We then proceeded to address our first sub-question: “How can different stakeholders share their feedback on C3’s successes and areas for improvement?”

I presented some brief examples of data collection methods (e.g., photovoice, videovoice, surveys, narratives, interviews, etc.) as many stakeholders would not have been exposed to these methods. We then commenced a brainstorming process in which small groups were asked to consider how they might feel most comfortable sharing their views and opinions about C3. These lively groups recorded their ideas on worksheets, then presented their favorites to the other attendees.

Once all of the ideas had been shared, a full group dialogue commenced and the team came to a compromise around the idea of the C3 Multimedia Project. C3 stakeholders would be invited to submit videos, photos, PowerPoint presentations, narratives, or other forms of media that the research team hoped to analyze. We shared this idea via email with the stakeholders who were not in attendance, then scheduled our second meeting.

One week later, we hosted our second meeting including 25 participants representing every defined group of stakeholders. At this meeting, we reflected upon whether or not this data collection method would engage a diverse array of participants while also fully addressing the primary research question (i.e., C3’s successes and areas for improvement). Through a facilitated group dialogue, we determined that this would work, but that intentional efforts would be necessary to overcome obstacles and avoid barriers (e.g., “the digital divide,” timeframe, opportunities to provide negative feedback through these media). We also felt that we should perhaps focus the media submissions around some smaller, more focused questions. A C3 partner suggested three focal questions, and the research team embraced them:

**Figure 1. Project Methodology**

```plaintext
Cycle 1: Data Collection Methods
- Devise research question
- Recruit stakeholders/co-researchers
- Determine brainstorming process

Reflect
- Will this work?
- Debrief email
- Identify barriers and solutions
- Refined research questions

Plan
- Create teams
- Management
- Tech
- Event Planning
- Develop tools and messages

Act
- Open house with workshop
- Administer 3 question survey

Cycle 2: Engaging Stakeholders
- Form data ladies team
- Create review sheet
- Practice using review sheet

Reflect
- What did we learn?
- Member checking
- Share final produce with research team

Cycle 3: Media Collection & Analysis
- Collect each submission
- Review each submission
- Coded data

Act
- Member checking
- Share final produce with research team
- Create review sheet
```

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• What is C3?
• What has C3 done for me?
• What more could C3 do for me?

These conclusions led to our next cycle of planning, acting, and reflecting.

**Cycle 2: Engaging stakeholders.** At the conclusion of our second meeting and throughout our third meeting (with 12 attendees), the C3 Multimedia Project Research Team devised a plan for how we would introduce the C3 Multimedia Project to our peers (other C3 volunteers and partners), while addressing the concerns raised in our first cycle. We chose to form multiple teams, each of which would have separate responsibilities. Three teams were established to accomplish near-term goals related to this research project: a Content Management Team, a Tech Team, and an Event Planning Team. All 87 participants on the research team were invited to join a team and/or recruit other C3 stakeholders for participation. In total, 25 stakeholders chose to participate in one of these three teams (with fairly even distribution across the teams).

These three teams worked both independently and together to develop messages, tools, and guidelines for the Multimedia Project. Together, they planned the Celebrate C3’s Creativity Open House. These efforts involved an additional four to five in-person meetings per team and a great deal of email correspondence, in addition to planning and collaboration using Google documents. This represented a tremendous amount of work on the part of all involved, particularly given the short timeframe (less than one month from the determination of the data collection method to the open house).

The culmination of this work, the open house, brought together 42 volunteers and partners to discuss this project. The three teams led different workshops in which, for example, participants were introduced to the three main focal questions, or had the opportunity to learn how to use the flip cameras the tech team had purchased that were available on loan to anyone in need. There were also opportunities to get suggestions on best practices for storytelling, interviewing, and filming. Finally, there was time and space to brainstorm ideas for multimedia submissions, and to network and/or find collaborators for a specific submission.

A video of the main information session from the open house, as well as a summary of the logistical details for the project (e.g., how, where, and when to submit media content) was emailed out to the research team the day after the event. Thirty people responded with their intent to submit something before the deadline on March 23, 2012.

As a final aspect of this cycle, everyone at the open house was asked to submit their initial brainstormed responses to the focal questions above at the conclusion of the event. This provided an additional data set: the Three Question Survey. These surveys were coded by keywords that were then grouped into emergent themes. The research team reflected upon whether or not the emergent themes were addressing our research questions to determine whether or not we were successfully engaging stakeholders as intended by our plan. We agreed that based upon: a) the success of the open house (i.e., the attendance and level of participation), and b) the fact that the initial feedback from this data set was successfully addressing our primary research question, we had been successful in engaging stakeholders in this process. We were ready for the next cycle.

**Cycle 3: Media collection and analysis.** C3 stakeholders interested in submitting content for this project were instructed to upload their submissions to a folder in a shared Dropbox account the tech team set up for this purpose. In this way, large files (like videos) could be shared electronically. By the assigned date, we received 15 submissions, including input from 118 C3 teachers (and their students), leaders, trainees, and partners. Eight of these were video submissions, four were PowerPoints including words and photos, and the rest were based on the written word (e.g., poems, narratives).

The research team and all of the attendees of the open house were invited to participate in the data analysis team. Four women (two C3 leaders, a C3 leader/partner, and one C3 teacher) agreed to lead this effort. They promptly renamed themselves “the Data Ladies” and proceeded to plan our analysis of the media submissions.

As Wang et al. asserted in their explanation of photovoice methodologies, “photographs are easy to gather but difficult to analyze and summarize because they yield an abundance of complex data that can be difficult to digest” (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 375). I would suggest that this is true of most types of multimedia data.

Our project, in many ways, follows traditional photovoice and videovoice methodologies, except that we worked with multiple forms of media on a very tight timeframe and, as a result, were unable to engage all participants in suggested methods of participatory analysis—independently selecting and contextualizing, then collaboratively codifying.
In other words, participants first identify for themselves what information to share (i.e., “select”), then tell stories that clarify why the information is being shared (i.e., “contextualize”), then finally work together to identify emerging themes across each participant’s information and stories (i.e., “codify”) (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 380). We had asked all submitters to select and contextualize their submission independently; it was then up to the Data Ladies to codify what they saw. As peers of all of the submitters, we hoped that the Data Ladies would be able to offer representative feedback. While this was not a methodological ideal, it was a suitable adaptation given the realities we faced (Wang & Burris, 1997).

In order to make the data easier to digest, we devised a two-stage process of codification. First, we reviewed all of the submissions and, avoiding interpretation, “sorted” the data into three categories, guided by our three focal questions (“What is C3? What has C3 done for me? What more could C3 do for me?”). Each submission was reviewed by three separate reviewers; myself and two others selected at random. Quotes and descriptions from the submissions were entered into review sheets with one submission represented per sheet. This provided a common format for all of the data, simplifying the second stage of codification in which themes were uncovered.

The Data Ladies and I met once before the review process began to practice reviewing a few submissions and make edits to the review sheets. Then, each Data Lady worked independently on her reviews over the course of one week.

Once I received all of the review sheets (three per submission), I created an Excel spreadsheet for each category (e.g., one spreadsheet for “What is C3?”, etc.) and copied all of our data (the quotes and descriptions each of us highlighted in our review processes) into the corresponding spreadsheet. Given the fact that we all represent different perspectives (and in keeping with our collaborative research methodology), I did not omit anything offered on the review sheets. I functioned from the assumption that we each had valid interpretations to offer.

I read through each collection of data (i.e., the quotes and descriptions on each spreadsheet) and took note of any themes that emerged for each question. I then read through each quote/snippet of information and asked myself, “Does this first theme match this piece of information?” If it did, I placed the assigned number for the corresponding theme next to the snippet of information. I repeated this process for all of the themes, resulting in a spreadsheet with three columns: the name of the submitter, the quote/snippet of information, and the corresponding theme. If a single quote applied to multiple themes, I copied the quote in the spreadsheet; therefore, many pieces of data appeared multiple times (with different numbered themes next to them).

After all of the themes had been assigned to the data, I sorted the entire spreadsheet by theme. I then used the name of the media submitter (connected to each snippet of information) to determine how many submissions referenced each theme.

We decided that if a theme was referenced in at least four of the 15 submissions (for “What is C3?” and “What has C3 done for me?”) or two of the eight submissions (for “What more could C3 do for me?” which had far fewer responses), it was significant (Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, & Pestroy, 2004).

The data analysis team was also given the opportunity to provide their own reflections on each submission as a means of bracketing their own interpretations and expressing their opinions/making meaning of these media submissions. In the same manner described above, I compiled all of the reflections from the data analysis team in a spreadsheet, and identified key themes.

To conclude this cycle, I engaged the Data Ladies in member checking. I sent a description of our analysis process, the list of themes, and the accompanying interpretation to the Data Ladies for their feedback and approval. Slight changes were made at their suggestion, and the resultant text is included above in the Methodology and below in the Results of Data Analysis and Findings sections of this report.

Results of Data Analysis

Two data sets from this project were essential to addressing our primary research question, “How can we improve the Chicago Conservation Corps program and continue its successes?” Several themes emerged from the analysis of these data sets.

Three Question Survey

This survey, administered at the Celebrate C3’s Creativity Open House, had 30 respondents. Responses to the question “What is C3?” resulted in the emergence of 11 keywords connected to five themes (Table 1). Twenty-four respondents (80%) made a reference to the environmental or conservation focus of the program. Eight respondents
solely emphasized that people were central to the program. They used words like network, volunteers, leaders, and environmentalists, describing the program primarily by who was involved. They talked about the opportunities to collaborate, make friends, and organize. For example, one participant described C3 as “an engaged community of Chicagoans with an environmental focus.” Nine respondents emphasized C3’s training/education focus, as a place to get resources and information. They use terms like “educate” and “program.” One respondent said, “An excellent training and support program for environmental projects which support Chicago’s conservation goals.” Six of the respondents emphasized the importance of both the “people” and the “program.”

Using the terms “Chicago” and “community,” 14 respondents emphasized the local impacts of the program. They stated that this program has impacts for Chicago residents and for their communities. Four people took this question somewhat literally, misunderstanding its intent, providing a definition of the acronym “C3”—Chicago Conservation Corps.

For the second question, “What has C3 done for me?”, 10 keywords emerged, encompassing three main themes (Table 2). Ten respondents emphasized that C3 had taught them something new about Chicago, environmentalism, or community activism. One respondent said, “C3 has given me lots of knowledge about all types of things like weatherization, composting, etc.” Twenty-one respondents felt that C3 has provided a great means for accessing people and resources (e.g., partners, communities, materials), with a heavy emphasis on social networks. Respondents talked about “gathering with like-minded people,” “creating community,” and “increasing the number of amazing people in [their] live[s].” They claim that C3 got them “out of the house and into the community” and “taught them to be a leader in [their] community and connect people to these issues.”

Finally, for the third question, “What more could C3 do for me?”, the two keywords that emerged from the responses were “continue,” with seven responses, and “more,” with 10 responses. Eleven respondents suggested that C3 should continue its current efforts, by “continuing to expand upon what’s already been done” and “continuing to provide the programming and services needed to assist with the beautification of our city.” They want “more of the same.” Five respondents said that they themselves need to take better advantage of existing opportunities. One respondent said she needed to be “more self-motivated,” and another said he needed “to up [his] game to take better advantage of everything C3 offers.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicagoans</td>
<td>Chicagoans</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader/ship</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conserve/ing/ation</td>
<td>Conservation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Networks</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer/s</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[non-profit]/Clubs</td>
<td>Misunderstood</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Number of Respondents Using Keywords and Themes in Response to "What Has [Nonprofit] Done for Me?"
said that C3 should improve its outreach by “motivating more Chicagoans,” “reaching out to more neighborhoods,” “promoting itself better,” and “making the C3 group a household name.”

C3 Multimedia Project

The 15 submissions of media content for this project were first coded by focal question. Then, themes were determined under each focal question.

For the first question, “What is C3?”, six themes emerged from the 15 submissions relating to the people involved in or affected by C3 (“who”), and 13 themes emerged that relate to C3’s activities (“what”). These themes and the corresponding number of submissions can be found in Table 3.

For the second question, “What has C3 done for me?”, eight themes emerged from the 15 submissions (Table 4). For the third question, “What more could C3 do for me?”, only eight submissions provided data. Three themes emerged: five submissions suggested that C3 should offer more workshops and trainings on new topics like jobs, cycling, gardening, and waste reduction; four submissions suggested that C3 should expand and better publicize itself; and two submissions suggested that C3 should provide more materials.

Finally, the Data Ladies’ reflections on the media submissions offered further insight into the project overall. Six themes emerged, each of which was referenced by at least two reviewers and occurred across multiple submissions (Table 5).

Findings

The data analysis from both the 3 Question Survey and the C3 Multimedia Project revealed several common themes. Regarding the first focal question of “What is C3?”, both data sets revealed an emphasis on the people involved, the local focus of the program, the educational opportunities, and the conservation focus of the program; the multimedia submissions, however, went into even greater depth on these issues.
Table 5. Number of Submissions and Reviewers Adressing Common Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>No. of Submissions</th>
<th>No. of Reviewers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Comment on evident positive influence/impact of C3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to relate, connections to other submissions (e.g., “I feel/she felt the same way”)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intergenerational activities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm reflected in submission</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sincerity of submission</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representation of simple acts, everyday life</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the second question, “What has C3 done for me?”, there were also similar themes such as networking, learning, and empowerment.

For the third focal question, it seemed that the written responses offered not only more data, but also consistently addressed the same themes: the continuation of the program, the desire to participate in more C3 activities, and the need for improved outreach. The Multimedia Project offered support for these same themes, but not as consistently across all of the responses, perhaps because submitters seemed to spend less time and energy addressing this question.

Knowing that the same themes emerged consistently from separate data sets, we can now apply this information with confidence to our original research question (“How can we improve the Chicago Conservation Corps program and continue its successes?”) and ask ourselves what we have learned.

It would seem that our research participants feel that we successfully engage a diversity of stakeholders in our program (e.g., schools, adult volunteers, partner organizations, communities). The resultant network is something they consider “important” and of which they are “proud” to be a part. They not only describe C3 as a network, but describe that network as something that has benefited them.

Training and education were also featured, both as a trait of C3 and as a beneficial outcome for C3 participants. It would also seem that this training addresses a wide array of environmental subject matter. Topics that were important enough to participants that they were worthy of inclusion in their submissions include: waste reduction/ management, green space, energy conservation, and general environmental issues.

It would also seem that C3 encourages pro-environmental behavior; people feel that their involvement in C3 has helped them “make a difference.” Several respondents and submitters recognize that one manner in which they can take action is by educating others; they say that C3 has played a prominent role in preparing them to do so.

Research participants also felt that project support from C3 staff was a major characteristic of the program and had impacted them and their efforts significantly. Some even referenced the importance of C3’s materials and funding to their efforts.

Overall, it seems that C3 elicits a lot of positive feelings; research participants even offered direct affirmations of C3 like “C3 is great,” “C3 is amazing,” or “Joining C3 is the best decision I have ever made.” Several research participants also felt that their efforts were celebrated and recognized by C3, particularly referencing our annual celebrations and graduations and the praise they have received from C3 staff. One submitter even included copies of the thank-you notes he had received from C3 staff, as he held on to them and considered them a symbol of his success.

We can compare this list of successes to C3’s mission statement: “to recruit, train and support a network of volunteers who work together to improve the quality of life in our neighborhoods through environmental service projects that protect our water, clean our air, restore our land and save energy” (https://www.volunteermatch.org/search/org201584.jsp#more_info_tab).

Interestingly, it seems that the research participants addressed nearly every aspect of C3’s mission statement. If C3 recognizes alignment with its mission as a sign of success, it would seem that the program is doing very well.

Regarding areas for improvement, C3 might choose to invest more effort into the neglected aspect of the mission statement (air quality). Based upon the participants’ feedback, C3 could also offer more workshops and continuing education...
options, perhaps even soliciting suggestions for topics, as many were offered through this research process (e.g., green jobs, bicycling, home gardening). There is also an expressed desire for C3 to continue expanding and “getting its name out there.” Some of the submissions also suggested that C3 could offer additional types of project materials.

Conclusion
This participatory action research project certainly accomplished its goal of evaluating the Chicago Conservation Corps, including diverse perspectives from representative populations of C3’s stakeholders. Leaders, trainees, clubs, teachers, partners, and staff were all engaged in the design and implementation of this project. The level of engagement, combined with the analysis of the data, is indicative of the commitment of C3’s stakeholders to this program. The videovoice project in New Orleans offered its participants a $200 stipend, their own camera, and technical training in videography and editing for their participation in the project (Catalani, Veneziale, Campbell, Herbst, Butler, Springgate, & Minkler, 2012). We offered no such incentives, yet received a significant and meaningful response. Personally, the support, enthusiasm, and honesty garnered through this project far exceeded my expectations, and I was already coming from a place of great respect and appreciation for this program and its participants.

Relevancy Five Years Later
Since July 2012, the Chicago Conservation Corps has been managed by the Chicago Academy of Sciences/Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, a long-standing partner of the program during its tenure in Chicago. A significant contributing factor to the Nature Museum’s interest in stewarding C3 was their staff’s participation in this research project. Not only was the commitment of C3’s stakeholders made evident, but the findings from the research (C3’s interest in fostering pro-environmental behaviors, providing environmental training, and promoting networking across the field) showed the program’s alignment with the Nature Museum’s vision to serve as a leading voice in urban ecology and sustainability for the Midwest and Great Lakes Region. Using the clear direction indicated by this research, the museum has continued C3’s efforts, growing our leader base to more than 700 participants. The program is now fully funded through the Nature Museum; the program has successfully transitioned from city ownership without losing sight of its mission and continually engaging the program’s stakeholders in meaningful ways.

References


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project as volunteers. She would also like to thank the Chicago Academy of Sciences and its Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum for continual support of C3, including the application of these findings in the current administration of the program. She would also like to thank Dr. Diane Doberneck for her support and mentorship throughout this project and the publication of this article.

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Kristen Pratt serves as the sustainability manager for the Chicago Academy of Sciences/Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum, where she continues to coordinate the Chicago Conservation Corps. This research was completed as part of her master’s degree in Urban Environmental Leadership at Lesley University’s Graduate School of Arts and Social Sciences.
Playful Thursday Project: Community/University Partners and Lessons Learned in a Longitudinal Study

Denise Boston, Batya Ross, and Phil Weglarz

Abstract

Community/university partnerships utilizing expressive arts therapy are in a unique position to offer social and emotional support adapted to the needs and varying situations of culturally diverse children living in distressed urban neighborhoods. This three-year community-based participatory research study investigated the impact of a community/university partnership on master-level counseling students, after-school teachers, and elementary school-age students. Findings suggest that a partnership between a university expressive arts social and emotional learning initiative and a community after-school program serving low-income children and families provides noteworthy benefits for both communities. Lessons learned from this partnership can serve as a model for culturally responsive and systemic community/university collaborations.

According to Wangari Maathai, community activist and environmentalist, “There are opportunities even in the most difficult moments” (retrieved from https://www.pinterest.com/pin/266345765442835300/). Families who live in socio-economically marginalized urban communities face daunting challenges as they attempt to earn an adequate living, negotiate distressed neighborhoods, and raise their children. Despite the challenges of poverty, exposure to crime and negative risk factors, collective efficacy and social cohesion can be a buffer against concentrated poverty (Turner & Rawlings, 2005). Communities with a focus on child advocacy and family-focused services have provided purposeful and proximal processes that nurture and ensure the well-being of the child over time (Brofenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The concept of proximal processes involves interrelated systems (i.e., school, home, peer group) and the immediate surroundings that are responsible for the child’s competencies and optimal development. Allahwala, Bunce, Beagrie, Brail, Hawthorne, Levesque, von Mahs, and Visano (2013) contend that “Strong community/university partnerships are particularly important in neighborhoods facing socioeconomic marginalization” (p. 54).

In this paper, we discuss a community/university collaboration and how it was embedded in a pre-practicum course offered in a university Counseling Psychology Program. In the current study, we highlight two important areas: the formation of the community/university partnership and the lessons learned in the Playful Thursday Project (PTP). The PTP was a program designed to provide expressive arts therapy and social-emotional group services in an after-school program. PTP focused on arts intervention and strength-based approaches. The Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS-2) was used to assess behavioral and emotional strengths of 24 first- and second-grade children baseline and two years after the implementation of the intensive arts and social-emotional services delivered. According to Epstein and Sharma (1998):

Strength-based assessment is defined as the measurement of those emotional and behavioral skills, competencies, and characteristics that create a sense of personal accomplishment, contributing to satisfying relationships with family members, peers, and adults; enhance one’s ability to deal with adversity and stress; and promote personal, social, and academic development (p. 3).

The purpose of this article is to contribute to the literature on community/university partnerships. According to Jakubowski and Burman (2004), community placements provide an interactive complement to an education in the principles and practices relevant to community development. Using a master’s degree service-learning project as an example, we describe best practices and key lessons of a three-year community-based learning program. We begin with the process of establishing a long-term community/university partnership through the integration of a community service-learning component into a Counseling Psychology Program with a concentration in Expressive Arts Therapy. This paper then illustrates why and how we created this partnership that emphasized the strengths and competencies of school-age children.
Community/University Engagement

In order for community/university partnerships to be effective and purposeful, it is key to build capacity from a culturally responsive approach rooted in humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking (Freire, 1998). Curwood and her associates (2011) stress the importance of assessing university readiness at the pre-partnership stage and ensuring that academic institutions are optimally positioned to engage in effective community research partnerships. The authors define a community/university partnership as “collaborations between community organizations and institutions of higher learning for the purpose of achieving an identified social change goal through community-engaged scholarship and ensures mutual benefit for the community organization and participating students” (p. 16).

The California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS) Expressive Arts Therapy Program (EXA) formulated a valued and reciprocal relationship with the Glide Foundation Family, Youth, and Childcare Center (FYCC) two years prior to the study's implementation. FYCC is an extension of Glide Memorial Church, which is located in the Tenderloin District in San Francisco. Under the leadership of Reverend Cecil Williams and Janice Mirikitani, Glide has been the heart and soul of the Tenderloin since 1963. Together, they have built a radically inclusive church community where all are welcomed, all are equally necessary, and all are offered unconditional love (Williams & Mirikitani, 2012). FYCC is a beacon of light in the socioeconomically marginalized community and in many ways a second home and extended family to the children who attend the various programs in the center. FYCC aims to increase nutritional knowledge and access, support reading development and enjoyment, and expand cultural learning opportunities for children ages 5–10 living in the distressed inner-urban neighborhood. Research has indicated that stressful experiences that are endemic in families living in impoverished communities can alter children's neurobiology in ways that undermine their health, social competence, and academic success (Thompson, 2014). The FYCC is a community-based center that understands the needs of the children and families in the Tenderloin community and offers a nurturing, educational space for infants and toddlers during the workday and an after-school program for elementary-school-age students. The center is run by a professional team of educators and staff who provide a loving, caring, and nurturing community.

CIIS-EXA Program

The EXA program at the California Institute of Integral Studies is a master’s level counseling program that conceptualizes healing at a personal, interpersonal, and community level. The program's unique skill set has allowed expressive arts therapy to flourish to the point where it is now being presented in health-care centers, schools, counseling programs, and academic intuitions all over the world. CIIS-EXA prepares students for licensure as Marriage Family Therapists (MFT) and is rooted in the principles and practices of adult learning and development. Students may also elect to take additional coursework to gain eligibility for the Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (LPCC) license in California.

The curriculum places a high premium in the power of the arts as tools for human development, social justice, and responsiveness to the needs of children, youth, family, and individuals of diverse psychological and environmental experiences. Students actively engage in an exploration of their own filters and biases and develop competencies in applying diversity and sensitivity in their clinical practice. Knowles and Cole (2008) state that art-based research represents “an unfolding and expanding orientation to qualitative social science that draws inspiration, concepts, processes, and representation from the arts, broadly defined” (p. xi). The EXA core faculty and adjunct faculty are leaders in the field of expressive arts therapy and representative of diverse backgrounds, research interests, and global outreach engagement.

EXA and FYCC Collaboration

Our initial partnership involved facilitating an arts-based professional development training retreat, led by EXA faculty and students for FYCC administrators, teachers, and staff. The collaboration relied on a reciprocal process that was based on mutually beneficial transactions (Boyer, 1996). Additionally, the EXA program also facilitated numerous expressive arts therapy workshops with children and youth in the after-school program. The community work was a transformative learning experience for the training facilitators, students, FYCC staff, and children. Ultimately, the university’s initiatives established credibility and trust that enabled us to become a community resource for FYCC and moved us into the next phase of our collaboration—an arts-based social and emotional longitudinal research study.
According to Miller, Brown, and Hopson (2011), solidarity is cemented by the recognition that community partners share a common fate and ultimate destinies.

Research Conceptualization

In 2012, the lead investigator met with the FYCC program director, executive team, and teachers to develop a shared understanding of the three-year social and emotional after-school initiative. Since the FYCC after-school program provides learning services for children from kindergarten to fifth grade, it was decided that the expressive arts and social and emotional project would follow the first- and second-grade students over a three-year period. The teachers were trained as workshop co-facilitators with the EXA students. FYCC teachers have played a valuable role in the study due to their knowledge of the children and the considerable time spent with the children during the school year and summer session. The teachers were also trained to administer the BERS-2 (Epstein, 2004), which yields strength quotients and standardized subscale scores that can be classified into one of seven levels (ranging from very poor to very superior). The training sessions took place at FYCC and the teachers met alongside EXA student therapists once a week at CIIS for training and program planning. Parents signed consent forms that provided details about the project initiative.

The EXA program chair and lead investigator developed strategies for student recruitment, structured social and emotional learning (SEL) training, and a pre-practicum field placement experience for second-year EXA graduate students. During this initial stage of the research development process, an EXA graduate was selected to assist the lead investigator throughout the three-year study. The alumna had experience as a FYCC workshop facilitator, which made her a very good fit to work as a collaborator on data collection, record keeping, conducting interviews, administering surveys, coordinating focus groups, and research analysis. During Study Year 1, the EXA department utilized internal resources (faculty course load) for training, research administration, and oversight as well as materials (art supplies, incentives, administration) for workshop session operations. In Study Year 2, the CIIS Development Department worked in collaboration with EXA to generate outside funding to support the study and the community/university collaboration. Development staff were successful in identifying sources who provided generous funding contributions for the FYCC/EXA community/university research study. The funders extended their contribution in Study Year 3, the final year of the study and the development of the research findings.

EXA Student Recruitment

During the initial phase of the study the CIIS Field Placement Office approved the EXA pre-practicum field placement at FYCC. Once accepted as program facilitators, students enrolled in the practicum course for both semesters and attended weekly supervision classes taught by the EXA faculty supervisor. To ensure a consistent research structure over the three years, the recruitment of student PTP facilitators consisted of identifying second-year Expressive Arts Therapy graduate students who met the following criteria: (a) experience working with children, (b) community service engagement, (c) familiarity in diverse settings, and (d) completion of foundational therapeutic course work. Six students were selected for Study Year 1 (eight weeks fall semester, eight weeks spring semester). The researchers followed the same procedure for Study Year 2 with new students. In Study Year 3 four students were selected.

Each year in the three-year research cycle, new students to the study participated in an orientation process prior to instruction by the lead investigator and supervisor to their immersion into the PTP. The students also volunteered during the FYCC summer full-day program in order to learn more about the culture, engage with elementary-age children and their teachers, and meet the research study cohort group. The summer session experience at FYCC has been extremely valuable in preparing students for the PTP sessions because it provided the groundwork for child-centered engagement and collective SEL and arts-based facilitation.

SEL and Clinical Training

It was critical to train the FYCC/EXA PTP project team together in SEL skill development, arts-based and group art-based intervention, and team building applications in order to establish an intentional and fluid collaborative process. FYCC teachers participated in program development and team building at the university and provided valuable information and updates on the child participants. The purpose of the training was to: (a) outline the SEL objectives and expressive arts
techniques, (b) discuss the roles and responsibilities of the project team, (c) detail each child’s social and emotional development, (d) discuss data collection procedures, and (e) establish timelines with the investigative team, and (f) develop a work plan for the culminating student event. The pre-operational training was implemented across the three-year time frame. The FYCC teachers were also trained on the administration of the BERS-2 Teacher Rating Scale on the 24 participants during spring 2013 as a baseline assessment, and during spring 2015 to complete the PTP implementation phase. The teachers in the after-school program have a thorough knowledge of the students’ social and emotional strengths and behaviors, and are well situated in administering the rating scale. We also worked as a team to create the name Playful Thursday as a guiding reminder that along with an SEL and creative learning community, we also needed to highlight that the work needed to be guided play, imagination, innovation, and imagery.

Playful Thursday Participants

The FYCC executive directors identified the first- and second-grade classes as the focus of PTP. Many of the children started attending FYCC as infants and toddlers and several have siblings in the program as well. According to the San Francisco Unified School District School Data ethnic representation of Tenderloin Community Elementary School (TCS) for 2013–2014, 34.9% Hispanic, 13.2% African American, 26.1% Asian, 14% Caucasian, 0.8% American Indian, .08% Pacific Islander, 3.3% multiple races. The ethnic demographic of FYCC attendees is representative of the TCS. The FYCC teachers played a valuable role in identifying the selected children for the study. They assisted the lead investigator in sending the permission forms to the parents and keeping track of the students throughout the three-year period. It was decided that for the first two years of the study, every child would have the opportunity to learn skills in building self-awareness, self-management, and social-awareness, and improve attitudes and beliefs about self, others, and school. However, 24 children were selected from both the classes for the study cohort. The study group, like their peers, represented diverse backgrounds racially, ethnically, economically, and linguistically. During the third year of PTP, weekly sessions were provided only to the research cohort in a separate room setting. The PTP workshops provided a therapeutic space within which children could express feelings and thoughts related to the impact of living and attending schools in the Tenderloin. More importantly, through expressive arts theatrical exercises that emphasize different forms of play, movement, and spontaneous expression, the children developed a sense of self-efficacy and cultural awareness (Miller & Billings, 1994).

Program Development

In terms of program development, the research team utilized the lessons learned in the early encounters with children to optimize past experiences in regard to creative expression, emotional literacy, and relationship building. The previous years of innovative play techniques with the FYCC children were informative and invaluable in understanding the after-school organization, classroom structure, student population, and the Tenderloin community. However, in order to integrate a social-emotional focus, as co-researchers we wanted to explore the impact of adults in helping children identify their strengths, regulate emotions, and create new SEL teaching strategies.

The lead investigator, with the support of the research team, developed SEL and expressive arts curricula appropriate for early school-age children. In addition to describing the procedures used to implement creative strategies that assess elementary school-age children’s behavioral and emotional strengths, the present study was designed to achieve the following four objectives. First, we sought to develop and sustain a community/university research partnership adapted and implemented with strength-based data-collection activities. Second, our cross-informant SEL training and research applications enabled us to work purposefully and collaboratively. Third, we infused a parent SEL component facilitated by our trained expressive arts counseling trainees and to extend the knowledge from the classroom to the children’s home settings. The sessions were facilitated in Spanish to support our Spanish-speaking parents. Finally, but more importantly, the study pursued a Freirean collaborative learning approach based on the educational practice of enhancing community and building social capital (Freire, 1998).

The PTP was initiated at FYCC in October 2012 with a diverse population of 24 first and second graders. The PTP was integrated into FYCC’s after-school program schedule during their Thursday sessions. For three years (2012–2015), children took part in group activities (eight-week fall and spring series) that encouraged cooperation and active participation led by SEL-trained EXA
students and FYCC teachers. The four goals of the strength-based initiative were: (1) provide children with a variety of creative and innovative expressive arts techniques, (2) establish a supportive context in which children could examine positive aspects of their lives, (3) facilitate the development of children's capacity of creative thinking, and (4) encourage children to participate in group activities through the use of play and exercises specifically designed to facilitate social and emotional learning.

The BERS-2 instrument was useful in establishing a baseline of social-emotional learning standards. In addition to this assessment tool, an observation assessment form was created by the research assistant. During the course of the study, children were tracked using this individual weekly strength-based assessment approach. EXA workshop facilitators were responsible for observing an identified child and tracking their social and emotional development over the course of the workshop sessions. We also collected artwork and other materials that were produced by the children during the PTP sessions. In the initial phase of the project a narrative assessment using an approach called the Tree of Life was introduced to assist children to illustrate and share their family roots, personal strengths, and hopes and dreams for the future (Ncube-Mlilo & Denborough, 2007). Children also used emotional check-in images to explore feelings and emotional stressors. There was also an intentional effort to build trusting relationships with the children, highlight strengths, establish a playful environment, and introduce group norms. The culminating activity celebrated the children's first year with a pizza party and an awards ceremony with each child receiving certificates honoring their strengths and special qualities. This process was repeated in the second year with new pre-practicum students.

In the last year of the research study 14 children participated. Within the three years, children had left the FYCC for various reasons. Either they moved on to other after-school programs, enrolled in sports leagues, or moved from the area. The children were now third and fourth graders and in different classroom settings. One teacher left FYCC to pursue her academic aspirations, the teaching assistant remained with the workshop team for continuity, and two new teachers joined PTP. The current formation of teachers administered the BERS-2 instrument a second time with the remaining participants. Four new trained EXA student workshop facilitators were brought into the study. Again, best practices from the previous years informed the final year. Workshop sessions were designed with the focus on Goal 3: decision-making and responsible decisions. Children were placed in small groups with one lead facilitator. The art activities included creating shadow boxes that honored self and cultural background; short film based on stories the children developed around conflict and resolution; and creating a backdrop and puppets made out of Popsicle sticks.

In Year 3 we also introduced parent SEL sessions. Two of the student trainees from PTP were selected to lead the workshops. Along with their experience facilitating expressive arts groups, both students were ethnically matched to meet the needs of Hispanic parents and guardians. The curriculum replicated, in many ways, the topic areas explored in the Playful Thursday groups in the previous years. Here is one parent's response to the workshop:

I liked it a lot because I could put my feelings in the art I did, the painting we did...it was an activity about a tree...and my tree represents my culture, my roots, my family, and the people in my family who are no longer with us. This helped me a lot to get closer with my physical family...because I have my grandparents who live here, and this helped me a lot to visit them more frequently and to know how they are and be more aware of them...maybe not every day, but more often. And then, and I living in this country, I hardly visited them before, and now I do. And as for those who are gone, I send a picture, a painting, of my aunt who is now gone... and painted her angel wings (cracking voice) and because of that I feel her closer, and even though she is not here I can see this painting of her every day because it is in my room. It makes me emotional but it helps me.

At the end of the parent session, we passed out gift cards to everyone who attended. In the evaluations, parents stated how much they appreciated the time they spent creating their trees as well as the opportunity to play. They also requested that we offer more parent sessions in the future.

The culminating children's event was titled Red Carpet Hollywood. Four short films written and produced by the participants demonstrated collaboration, leadership, cooperation, and critical
thinking. A collective effort went into presenting the children's work. The workshop facilitators shared the stage as emcee, award presenters, and hosts, and developed programs and invitations. The community/university team coordinated the meal and decorations and sent out invitations to the other FYCC classes, families, and Year 1 and Study Year 2 EXA workshop facilitators. The children received awards for their film and representatives from each production created acceptance speeches, which they shared with the audience. The children were proud of their work and very surprised to see workshop facilitators from previous years. The EXA students from previous years were also amazed at the physical growth of the participants as well as the confidence and leadership skills many of the children exhibited.

Methods
This study used a community-based participatory research methodological approach that involved educators, students, and community partners with the intention of increasing bidirectional connections between academics and communities (Hacker, 2013). In 2012, we began tracking (N=24) first- and second-grade children in the FYCC after-school program. Data were collected at the time of the intervention start-up phases, at which point the BERS-2 Teacher Rating Scale instrument was administered by the FYCC teachers to identify five interrelated social and emotional (SEL) competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making. The instrument was also useful in highlighting resilience, as well as the development of strength-based intervention strategies. A weekly child assessment progress form was also created by the research assistant to monitor social-emotional development and optimize positive teacher-student interactions. At the end of the third study year, FYCC teachers administered the instrument a second time to assess (N=17) children's social and emotional development over the multi-year time span.

To obtain feedback from EXA students and FYCC teachers regarding the impact of their university and community experience, they were asked to complete a program evaluation and participate in face-to-face interviews and focus groups during the end-of-year program. The interview guide included five open-ended topics: (a) experience with social and emotional learning, (b) collaboration experience, (c) arts intervention facilitation, (d) social and emotional learning component, and (e) a wrap-up question to elicit other topics participants may want to discuss. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for accurate and detailed analyses.

Analysis
The analytic data set included responses from the entire data collection. It was imperative that we establish careful archiving of each step of the analysis to easily locate data for Study Years 1, 2, and 3. The lead investigator and assistant researcher analyzed the transcripts, BERS-2 results, observation notes, evaluations, surveys, and art projects. Distinctive meaning units were illuminated from the data analysis and codes were assigned to each unit. The results brought to our attention several key areas of interest. The first area of consideration focuses on the contextual factors related to the university and its ability and readiness to support a long-term community-based research partnership. The second area of questions is about the experiential learning practices for university students, particularly when building partnerships in low-income urban neighborhoods. The third area of note is related to the impact of arts-based intervention and proximal process of adult services. The fourth and final element of the longitudinal study is community/university sustainable collaboration. In the next area, the findings are structured to present the work in the four categories, along with our responses, lessons learned, and challenges related to each of the identified areas of interest.

Findings
Academic and Institutional Factors
Based on the lessons learned as they relate to the master level community service component, we recognized that the intentional work that went into restructuring our EXA program curriculum in 2011 made this partnership possible and ensured collaborative university readiness. As a Marriage and Family Counseling program with a concentration in Expressive Arts Therapy, the entire curriculum had been updated and restructured to be aligned with the new California Board of Behavioral Sciences Marriage and Family Therapist licensure standards. We also simultaneously revised the academic program in order to infuse multicultural content.

The core faculty members have embraced the principles and practices of multicultural counseling and social justice in their pedagogy. Our self-study in 2015 demonstrates positive student outcomes in the areas of cultural competency, community-based
research, and clinical ecosystemic perspectives. We also believe that community service learning is a salient aspect of community-engaged scholarship.

Although the EXA program has made tremendous strides linking curriculum to civic engagement, a considerable disparity still exists between well-represented (i.e., whites, female, non-Pell eligible students) and underrepresented students (i.e., immigrants, students of color, low-income) in our program. Each year our cohort has become more diverse and representative of the global community; however, in relation to the community partnership with FYCC, it has been a challenge for many underrepresented and low-income students to commit themselves to the research endeavor due to their need to work while attending school in the San Francisco Bay area, one of the most expensive cities in the country. Until our university can provide appropriate ways in which all students have an equal opportunity to take part in community service knowledge, we are very confident that our multicultural curriculum will foster cultural humility in the classroom, prepare students for the challenge of communicating and interacting with diverse populations, and create a moral and civic community.

As a counseling program, EXA is very fortunate to have the support of the institution in regard to the Glide FYCC study with faculty course load, pre-practicum field placement, and other internal resources. For the last two years, the Office of Development has been instrumental in assisting the researchers in successfully allocating funding. The first was a grant awarded to support three parent SEL workshops in Study Year 2. The one-and-a-half-hour session was facilitated in Spanish, aimed to provide Hispanic parents of children in the FYCC the tools to improve their children’s social and emotional literacy. In Study Year 3, a financial gift covered project administration, FYCC programming, and the final report of the research findings.

Impact of Proximal Process on Participants

Social and emotional learning was the central theme of the study. Research on programs focused on SEL shows that this approach can be powerful when grounded in theory and empirical evidence, and when adult stakeholders (parents, teachers, coaches, school counselors) in children’s education are actively involved in promoting and modeling their own social and emotional competencies (Brackett et al., 2009). Each year of the research, the children in PTP evolved as leaders, critical thinkers, and expressive artists. Group activities were

Experiential Learning

The community/university collaboration has enabled 25 EXA students and alumni to acquire a richer understanding of community-relevant scholarship and civic awareness through experiential learning. The PTP decreased the traditional pedagogical separations between campus and community, and students were able to immerse themselves in the everyday functioning of a community center and learned from experiences on site (Allahwala et al., 2013). The process of
designed with five core competencies associated with SEL: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making. The BERS-2 Strength Index takes into account all of the behaviors and emotions assessed on the BERS-2. A strength index 90–110 is within the average range for children. Strength Index equal to or greater than 111 is indicative of above-average strengths. Strength Indexes of 80–89 are below average and represent borderline scores. Significantly low scores are Strength Indexes lower than 70 may be indicative of poor self-concept, immature or negative feelings or perceptions of adults and peers (Table 1).

The EXA students and FYCC teachers established an educational partnership that impacted the positive development of the children, not only through the content of their instruction but also through the quality of their social interactions and relationships with the children. In the initial rollout year, the EXA facilitators were challenged in the areas of classroom management, and FYCC teachers’ roles were relegated to behavioral managers rather than co-facilitators. Over the years, extensive program training and team-building activities enabled the workshop facilitators to grow and develop as an effective collaborative ensemble. The process of integrating thinking, feeling, and behaving was a reciprocal learning process for facilitators as well as the children.

According to an FYCC teacher:

I think my experience before was pretty good. I didn’t call it social-emotional learning, we just called it behavior management because that’s what behavior is, emotions given voice…. So slowly I started to realize that addressing the emotions was the work that I spent most of my time doing whenever there [was] a conflict, whenever there was a feeling of sadness or feeling of even happiness that turned into chaos. You have to manage the happiness as well. And then George Lucas’ website at utopia came out five years ago and I started taking some concepts from [its] emotional vocabulary education. When you’re a teacher you want to be able to say this is what happiness looks like and then my work with CIIS has really brought in[to] focus a lot of these things that I was doing in silos so to speak, managing someone’s anger and giving them an expression to use and giving them a vocabulary that they can express what they want to use and talk to them about their needs, and so the study helped me put it against a larger backdrop and call it social-emotional learning.

### Community/University Reflection

Throughout the findings and the narrative assessment above, we have incorporated the insights and viewpoints of the community and university partnership in our effort to integrate a community service-learning component and long-term community partnership into the California Institute of Integral Study’s Expressive Arts Therapy master’s-level program. Together, we created an initiative that not only transformed the lives of the children and parents, but had a tremendous impact on helping graduate-level students critically reflect on their position as university representatives in the partnership (Allahwala et al., 2013). We would also like to offer the following interview comments in which FYCC’s department manager and long-term employee of Glide reflects upon his organization’s engagement in this partnership:

One of the things that we struggle with is how do we move beyond the programming for our children and families. We provide a lot of services in terms of tutoring and art, and we always thought that there was a key component missing—working therapeutically with families. And so when the relationship with CIIS came up, we thought what a great opportunity to blend what you do and what we do that would better serve the children. And as a result, we also found it was helpful for staff. So, that first retreat that we had was great in terms of working collaboratively to decide what we were going to do for the retreat, how we were going to be supportive of the staff and create opportunities for the staff to tell their stories, their own personal stories through art. We did the trees [Tree of

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Life], a lot of movement, and a lot of dancing. And some of our staff are uncomfortable with that, but your team had the ability to make people feel comfortable, and by the end of the day everyone was really into it. And that was a great start for our relationship and it’s gone forward since then.

The study has become an important part of our program, and not just for the kids, but for the staff. It’s great having someone come into the program and provide a different perspective, different teaching style, and objective, because the kids see our staff every day and sometimes it becomes very routine. And so, to have someone different come in who has an agenda about art and making a difference through art and changing people’s lives through art, brings an excitement to the classroom and also...for the teachers. So, it’s been tremendous to have a different curriculum to offer the kids who participated in the program. And it’s been wonderful; the times that I’ve walked in and seen the kind of celebration and joy that goes on in these groups is amazing. And the kids are really looking forward to it.

When first started, we were experimenting where to offer this program and tried to shift it around to different age groups, and we decided to stay with one age group and progress with them as they get older. And the new component is working with the parents, and I think that is a wonderful addition. We are a family resource center and we are charged with offering opportunities for our parents. Thank you, and your team, because you are an important part of our family, and we are really fortunate to have you be a part of that family.

Conclusion

Research-based community/university partnerships require authentic, reciprocal, and culturally appropriate consideration. In this research project, an important aspect of this relationship was the level of respect and trust displayed by both parties (Eckerle et al., 2011). The Expressive Arts Therapy program has worked diligently over the past five years to provide a learning community committed to preparing students to work in a very diverse world and view research as a way to improve health and reduce health inequities through involving the people who, in turn, take actions to improve their own health. For universities, this involves self-reflective work and a process of assessment and preparation prior to embarking on a collaborative community service-learning journey with community partners. The conceptual and cultural differences between ourselves and the FYCC teachers with whom we were working regarding expressive arts and psychosocial development complicated the collaborative facilitation during the first year of the study. In retrospect, it seems that a thorough understanding of the after-school FYCC culture was not adequately incorporated into the training and that EXA processes dominated. A greater aspect of synthesis is strongly recommended for future workshops. Also, there is no way to correlate the growth directly to the arts-based intervention and children’s social and emotional development. Further studies aiming to determine the effectiveness of SEL and expressive arts should be planned with randomized controlled study including follow-up periods.

Despite these limitations, several positive effects of the Playful Thursday intervention were observed among the students and teachers who were trained in the expressive arts therapy model, as well as among children who participated in the workshops. The after-school teachers developed a new set of SEL teaching perspectives and techniques, and the children produced innovative creative expressions of psychosocial, cultural, and empathic themes. The children came to anticipate each session with enthusiasm. They readily engaged in different activities and expressed, through storytelling, short film, and visual arts, many salient issues they were experiencing in their lives.

The community/university partnership will continue to provide SEL programming beyond the study with an evidence-based approach informed by the previous PTP project and the lessons learned along the way. Representatives from the EXA program and a teacher from FYCC presented the research findings at the 2015 International Expressive Arts Therapy Conference in Hong Kong. The presentation included our perspectives on university readiness, the potential of social justice initiatives, and the value and benefits of equitable partnerships, and the role of students in fostering and building a community-centric model.


**About the Authors**

Denise Boston and Phil Weglarz are both at the California Institute of Integral Studies (San Francisco). Boston is a professor in the Expressive Arts Therapy Program in the School of Professional Psychology and Health, and Weglarz is a core faculty member there. Batya Ross is in private practice as a psychotherapy intern and is an alumna of the Expressive Arts Therapy Program.
Engaging Florida Residents: Motivations and Impacts of Community Gardens in Tampa Bay

Jennifer Marshall, Mindy Price, Joseph England, Kate LeGrand, and Russell S. Kirby

Abstract

While the impacts of community gardens have been well documented, research has mainly been concentrated in only a few urban areas of the United States. This paper highlights the social impacts of community gardens on west central Florida individuals, families, and communities. We use theories of community engagement to explore relationships between members and their larger spheres of influence. In this study, we surveyed 75 members of eight community gardens in Tampa Bay and used geographic information systems (GIS) mapping to show spatial distribution of gardens and members. Findings highlight multilevel impacts of community engagement in social, educational, and altruistic domains. Community gardens promote community engagement among members. The impacts of community gardens extend beyond the membership structure.

“All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for).”

—Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic” from A Sand County Almanac, 1949 (pp. 203–204)

Introduction

Leopold’s description of the “land ethic” centers on respect for the community and its members therein. Land cannot be protected or productive without the cooperative commitment of the citizens who call it home. One way to understand this ethic is through the concept of community engagement, defined as “the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997, p. 9). Community engagement has been increasingly called upon to promote community capacity building (Harrow, 2001), to develop locally relevant programs and policies (Evans, 2005), and to address research and practice in health promotion (CTSA Community Engagement Key Function Committee Task Force, 2011). Community gardens may serve as a place of community engagement where a symbolic land ethic emerges (Borreli, 2008), and citizen-subjects are created through garden involvement (Pudup, 2008). Community gardens promote social interaction and collective efficacy (Teig, Amulya, Bardwell, Buchenau, Marshall, & Litt, 2009), which enables participants to promote health through improved neighborhoods and improved health behaviors (Armstrong, 2000; Altschuler, Somkin, & Adler, 2004; Cohen, Finch, Bower, & Sastry, 2006).

While there is no standardized definition, community gardens are recognized as an international phenomenon, capable of improving local food availability and providing a source of pleasure and activity (Ferris, Norman, & Sempik, 2001). Community gardens differ from private or home gardens in that they are found in public spaces and have communal ownership, use, and organization. Modeled after the British Victory Gardens and promoted in the United States during the world wars, community gardens have risen in local popularity in many urban areas (Armstrong, 2000). The growing esteem of community gardens has produced a wealth of literature on the topic. A review by Guitart, Pickering, and Byrne (2012) found more than 85 articles published on community gardening between 1985 and 2011, with most studies investigating gardens in New York, California, Michigan, and Colorado. Research has focused on the social benefits of community gardens, and to a lesser degree, on the environment, health landscape, economy, and policy (Guitart et al., 2012). Other research has investigated the formation and sustainability of community gardens (Gough & Accordino, 2013; Zanko, Hill, Estabrooks, Niewolny, & Zoellner, 2014).
With case-based wisdom and limited empirical evidence, community gardens have been shown to have a positive influence on social cohesion (Teig et al., 2009; Hale, Knapp, Bardwell, Buchenau, Marshall, Sancar, & Litt, 2011), food security and health (Armstrong, 2000; Barnidge, Hipp, Estlund, Duggan, Barnhart, & Brownson, 2013; Corrigan, 2011; Knigge, 2009), therapeutic experiences (Hale et al., 2011; Hawkins, Mercer, Thirlaway & Clayton, 2013), cultural solidarity (Langegger, 2013) and knowledge-sharing (Aftandilian & Dart, 2013; Hongxia & Pierre, 2015). The most cited motivations for participating in community gardening are physical (fresh foods), social (community development and social cohesion), and economic (Guitart et al., 2012). While motivations and impacts of community gardening are well documented, the influence of garden participation within multilevel social relationships is less understood. Furthermore, geographical variability in community gardening research is largely limited to a handful of U.S. cities, primarily concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest. More research is needed to understand geographical and contextual variations in community gardening. The authors are unaware of any published research literature on community gardens in Florida, where the institutionalization of local, community-centered gardening is still relatively new.

Responding to others who have expressed a demand for geographically varied community garden research (Guitart et al., 2012), and to those who call for an increased emphasis on community engagement in research and health promotion (Minkler, 2005), this study intended to do two things: to understand the multilevel impacts of community gardening in Florida, and to understand the social actions of community gardens within the framework of community engagement. This article views community garden participation as a form of community engagement which, when taken in an ecological view, has the potential to address complex health problems (Wakefield, Yeudall, Taron, Reynolds & Skinner, 2007). We also use geographic information systems (GIS) technology and analysis to assess the spatial characteristics of community gardens in the Tampa Bay area of Florida.

Methods

The primary research goal was to identify the motivations and impacts of community garden participation on individuals, families, and the community in the Tampa Bay area. The study consisted of site observations, online surveys, and GIS data modeling. The Institutional Review Board at the University of South Florida approved this study.

Because the definition of a community garden can be quite vague, specific criteria were chosen to include only vegetable-producing community gardens, thereby excluding gardens that were exclusively ornamental. In the greater Tampa Bay area, 15 gardens were initially identified through Internet searches and personal correspondence via email and telephone. Additional study parameters required that all gardens have a formal system of membership. However, organizational structure, participation, and financial requirements of membership varied from garden to garden. Based on our inclusion criteria, 10 community gardens in the greater Tampa Bay area (Hillsborough, Pinellas, and Pasco Counties) remained. Of those 10, eight gardens were active in the area and agreed to participate in the study. The research team conducted eight site observations (one community garden had three separate site locations), documenting physical space and apparent productive outcomes (productive capacity). An online questionnaire was developed through Qualtrics online survey software (http://www.qualtrics.com) and disseminated by community garden organizers to the members of all eight gardens. In total, 75 garden member surveys were completed and included in the analysis.

The survey was comprised of both closed- and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions assessed participant demographics including age, gender, income, education, race, and membership. Open-ended questions assessed motivations for garden participation and impacts to the individual, family, and community. Given the exploratory nature of this study, a qualitative analysis approach was employed to evaluate the open-ended motivation and impacts questions. Prior to analysis, the evaluation team developed a flexible a priori codebook, which contained initial codes based on the questions of the survey. Two researchers independently coded the verbatim responses using the codebook. Open coding was also employed, and emergent codes were added to the codebook; as a new code was identified, the earlier transcripts were recoded. The codes and definitions were discussed with the research team until consensus was reached, and three sub-themes were absorbed into one overarching theme. An overall 86% inter-rater agreement was reached among garden member motivations and 82% inter-rater agreement was reached for garden impacts.
GIS and remote sensing provide a robust approach to visualize spatial data through the creation of maps. This study employed various GIS methods to explore the relationship between the location of community gardens and where members live to identify walkability of gardens and proximity of gardens to their membership networks. The map was produced using geoprocessing functions in ArcGIS 10.3.1 and Google Earth Pro. The eight community gardens that participated in the survey were included in the GIS analysis. Using each garden as a centroid, concentric buffers were generated to display walking distances of 0.5 and 1.0 miles, and member addresses were plotted to visualize spatial distance.

Results

Garden Characteristics

One community garden that participated in this study comprised three separate site locations for a total of eight physical garden locations with six garden associations. Five of the gardens were in Hillsborough County and one in Pasco County. Six of the eight locations had a fence or enclosing structure surrounding the main garden site. Two of the eight sites were on public school grounds, two gardens were on church-owned property, and one was in a deed-restricted subdivision. The rest of the garden locations were on public land owned by the municipality. All but one of the participating gardens had a watering system in place, which either tapped directly into a public source or utilized a personal well; one garden collected rainwater and relied on neighboring members for watering.

Each location was distinct with regard to individual garden plot style and arrangement. More than half of the sites had traditional wood-framed garden beds, which were rented to individual members on a monthly or annual basis. Typically, one paid membership equals one garden bed. Included in about half of the community gardens were communal garden plots. Larger in size than the individual plots, communal beds were rented and gardened by multiple individuals or families. One participating location was wholly arranged as a communal garden, with individual spaces loosely designated, and a portion of the whole harvest was shared among the membership. Also, nearly half of the gardens studied had garden plots allotted for community donation. These donation plots were typically planned and managed by garden organizers and planted and harvested by volunteers.

Of the 67 member addresses collected from the survey, 28 (42%) households were located within the walking distance parameters (Figure 1). The three Temple Terrace gardens are close to each other and, together, account for 11 of the 28 addresses within walking distance. The easternmost garden was the only location that did not measure any addresses within a mile radius.

Participant Characteristics

Among 75 respondents, participants were primarily female (66.7%), white (76%), and educated, with 73.3% attaining a bachelor’s degree or higher. Approximately 53% (n=40) of respondents reported a family income of at least $50,000, with 6.7% (n=5) making less than $25,000. Age of garden members ranged from 28 to 88 years, with a mean age of 53.

Although most gardeners drove to the community gardens, 33.3% (n=25) lived close enough to walk or bike. Approximately one-quarter (n=18) of the members were new to gardening or had no experience successfully growing food prior to involvement in the community garden. Another 9.3% of garden members noted some family gardening or farming experience as a child. Approximately 21% had several years of experience gardening or were considered experts in the field. More than half of garden members (n=47) also brought their spouses, friends, children, grandparents, or neighbors to participate in the community garden with them, sharing the space with community persons outside of the garden membership structure. Sociodemographic data were stratified by garden location to analyze demographic variability between gardens, and no significant differences were noted. Qualitative themes reflecting motivations and impacts results were also well represented across all gardens.

Motivations for Garden Participation

Thematic content analysis of all responses illuminated six themes of motivation for participation, with the top three amounting to 87.1% of all motivations. Table 1 shows the top three motivations were community engagement (46.7%), physical (22%), and spiritual (18.4%). The lesser motivations, together accounting for approximately 13% of responses, were practical, economic, and environmental. Open-ended response questions allowed garden members to list five motivations from the “most important” motivation to the “least important.” Responses were weighted by counting the “most important” motivation as worth five points, in descending order, to the “least important” as one point. Tallied weighted responses showed...
corresponding levels of importance to the total numbers of responses given, such that responses listed most frequently were also listed as the most important. Community engagement, physical, and spiritual motivations were the most important, in descending order. Environmental motivations were more important than practical motivations, and the economic motivation was least important.

Community engagement motivations. Community engagement (46.7%) is a composite theme containing social, educational, and altruistic motivations that reach the community level of social economy. Garden members who were motivated by community engagement felt that their involvement in the community garden contributed to something much bigger than their
plot and produce. Within the community engagement theme, social motivations included making friendships, enjoying a sense of community, and sharing “camaraderie” among other gardeners. Members found gardening a “nice way to connect with neighbors,” enjoyed meeting “like-minded people,” and found it a useful avenue for actively being involved in “community participation.” Educational opportunities were considered reciprocal, with members learning and teaching other gardeners and individuals in the wider community. Members were motivated to “support a positive program” because they viewed community gardening as a “great way to help my community.” Community garden members saw themselves as building up their community through coming together in a common space, a collective “participation in the neighborhood community.”

Physical and spiritual, and other lesser motivations. Physical motivations (22%) for community garden involvement included receiving a harvest of food, increased nutrition, and physical activity or exercise. Members were motivated because “fresh food is more delicious” and “it’s fun to eat something we grew.” Importantly, the gardens allowed members to share “vegetables grown in a community environment,” which seemed to some to make the tomatoes sweeter and the snap peas more fun to eat. Spiritual motivations (18%) were directly related to therapeutic benefits experienced by individual garden members, including a sense of enjoyment and personal satisfaction or a sense of calm, simply for the “love of gardening.” Practical motivations (8%) included the convenience of community gardens and the inability of garden members to create their own home gardens. For example, one member found that “we can grow many more varieties of produce than I can in my backyard,” while another said there was “no suitable place in my yard.” Eleven motivations were environmental in nature, including “creating a small footprint” and contributing to the sustainability of land within their communities. Finally, several gardeners mentioned economic motivations (n=7), such as to “save money on produce.”

Table 1. Motivations of Community Gardens in Tampa Bay (N=74 respondents, 332 total responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
<th>Sample Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community Engagement</td>
<td>155 (46.7)</td>
<td>for social interaction, create a sense of community, develop relationships with residents in the neighborhood, camaraderie; help educate others about producing food, provide educational opportunity to children/teens; provide food to pantries for the needy, for charitable donations to the community, community time (giving back), sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>73 (22.0)</td>
<td>fresh food for family, eating better, vegetables!, great exercise, grow my own fresh organic food, reap a harvest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>61 (18.4)</td>
<td>enjoyable, spirit pleasing, meditation, relaxation and peace, fresh air, to feel accomplished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>25 (7.5)</td>
<td>rent property do not own, garden in great location, we don’t have a yard, no suitable place in my yard to garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>11 (3.3)</td>
<td>good for the earth, to contribute to the urban agriculture movement, environmentally sound to grow our own food</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>7 (2.1)</td>
<td>extra income, save money, low cost, cheap healthy food, makes sense economically</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Impacts of Community Garden Participation

The survey asked members how the community gardens impacted themselves, their families, and their communities. Table 2 shows that within each level of societal interaction, the community gardens impacted members in different ways. While impacts of community engagement were found in all three levels—social, educational, altruistic—other impacts were mentioned only in one or two levels. Aside from the practical motivation, all motivations described by garden members were also found to be impacts on some level, whether for the individual member, family, or the community.

Individual Level Impacts

When asked how participation in the community gardens impacted their personal lives, 68 members responded with impacts on individual
level. However, some participants listed multiple impacts within the same response, generating a total of 133 individual impacts. These were grouped into five unique themes: spiritual, physical, educational, altruistic, and N/A. The following comment from a Tampa Heights Community Garden member shows how one response can contain many themes, “…thoroughly enjoyed getting to know the other members of the community garden and learning about different veggies/herbs from Table 2. Impacts of Community Gardens on the Individual Family, and Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>n (%)</th>
<th>Sample responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>36 (27.1)</td>
<td>Made some really great friends, working with others on workdays and meeting garden friends at various times, current social life revolves people I have met in the garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual</td>
<td>38 (28.6)</td>
<td>Respite and peace, added to my enjoyment in life, therapeutic, makes me feel really good, stress reliever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>16 (12.0)</td>
<td>Eating more fresh produce, improves health of immune system, working outdoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>24 (18.0)</td>
<td>Eating more fresh produce, improves health of immune system, working outdoors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>14 (10.5)</td>
<td>Share my surplus harvest, satisfaction of donating, love giving back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5 (3.8)</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>25 (30.5)</td>
<td>Share my surplus harvest, satisfaction of donating, love giving back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>3 (3.7)</td>
<td>We all go and volunteer, my husband has built structures that benefit the garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>2 (2.4)</td>
<td>Extra cash helps, saving money on grocery shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>7 (8.5)</td>
<td>New things to eat and learn about, children understand the eco-cycle better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>9 (11.0)</td>
<td>Involvement in the community, grandson learning about the impact of “commu[n]ing” in the garden with “neighbors,” more social and connected with our neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Cohesion</td>
<td>14 (17.1)</td>
<td>Good activity to share with each other, more quality time with children, something to talk to my aging father about, brought my wife and me closer together, family project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative or no impact</td>
<td>21 (25.6)</td>
<td>None, widowed without kids, son doesn’t like the time I spend in the garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>37 (40.2)</td>
<td>Neighbors get to know each other, neighborhood is more interconnected, brings different types of people together, successful parties, events and other celebrations at the garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Neighborhood Assets</td>
<td>23 (25)</td>
<td>Appreciation of real estate, beautification in the area, school programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Altruism</td>
<td>16 (17.4)</td>
<td>Garden donating over 7000 lbs. of food, donate to food kitchens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>8 (9.8)</td>
<td>Raised awareness about being self-sustaining, kids learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Environmental</td>
<td>1 (1.1)</td>
<td>Help lower waster produced by local restaurants… collecting their compostable scraps and turning it into soil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative or no impact</td>
<td>6 (6.5)</td>
<td>Not much interest, many have dropped out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
them. The opportunity to support such a positive opportunity for the youth in the after-school program is very personally fulfilling.” This garden member’s response was coded as social (getting to know other members), educational (learning about plants), spiritual (personally fulfilling), and altruism (opportunity to support the youth gardening program).

The most frequently cited individual impacts of community garden participation were spiritual (28.6%) and social (27.1%). Individuals who reported positive spiritual impacts from the community gardens found them relaxing, therapeutic, and personally fulfilling. Social impacts of the community garden included making great friends, interacting with neighbors, and building or strengthening a sense of community. One Seminole Heights Community Garden member reported, “I love the challenges and successes of working with others; I love the joys of meeting new and like-minded people and having wonderful conversations with them.”

Other garden impacts included individual educational impacts (18%) such as gaining gardening skills and learning to identify food origins; positive physical impacts (12%) including increased health, eating more vegetables, and reaping the physical benefits of hard work; and altruistic impacts (10.5%) related to satisfaction in donation and volunteerism. Five of the 68 respondents said the gardens had no impact on their personal lives.

Family-Level Impacts

Sixty-five members responded to how the community garden impacted their families. Some participants listed multiple impacts within the same response, while others typed unrelated responses, generating a total of 82 impacts grouped into six unique themes. Approximately 31% of the responses identified physical reasons, such as family eats more veggies, enjoys hard work together, and uses gardening as a group activity. Over one-quarter of the participants (25.6%) said that the gardens did not have an impact on their family or the impact was negative. However, 17.1% said that the community gardens strengthened cohesion among family members. Family-level impacts were coded as “family cohesion” if they identified activities that allowed the family to spend more time together or brought the family closer together on an emotional level. One member from the Temple Terrace Community Garden said, “My husband and I can do it together, although he does more. He loves it and I think it contributes greatly to his happiness, which of course contributes to the wellness of the household as a whole too.” Another from the Tampa Heights Community Garden responded, “We work alongside each other. Having to work through some issues we have had has been so good for us. We all go and volunteer in helping take care of the common areas.”

Social impacts were identified in 11% of the responses and described how garden connected the family to the neighborhood. For example, one member from the Plant City Commons Community Garden explained that, “My 2-year-old grandson is learning about the impacts of ‘communing’ in the garden with neighbors.” Approximately 9% of the responses were categorized as education impacts, such as learning opportunities for children. Two members (2.4%) described positive economic impacts from community garden participation.

Community-Level Impacts

Sixty-four members perceived impacts of community gardens in their local community. In total, these responses generated 92 different community-level impacts, which were grouped into six unique themes. Forty percent of the responses included positive social impacts on the community. Members wrote that the gardens helped build community and pride, solidified neighbor networks, and kept neighborhood kids active and involved. One member of the Tampa Heights Community Garden said:

It provides a reason for gatherings, such as the times of planting, major cleaning, and harvests. The Community Garden helps break down the social barriers that we ourselves put up. Some people would probably never have spoken, or interacted with their neighbors. However, this gives people a reason to break the silence and talk with one another.

A quarter of the responses identified positive neighborhood assets such as “economic benefit due to appreciation of real estate” and “programs at local schools.” Altruistic impacts, such as generating a source of food donation to the hungry, were mentioned in 17.4% of the responses. One member from Seeds of Faith Community Garden reported that their garden had “donated over 7,000 pounds of vegetables to various organizations over the past three years. We have provided plots for varying ministries in the community.”

Approximately 17% identified the community gardens as having positive educational impacts for
the community. Benefits included raising awareness (on gardening), generating curiosity, and contributing to general garden knowledge. In total, the data provided 86 descriptions of ways the garden members engaged with the community. Six respondents (6.5%) stated there was either no impact or negative community impact from their garden.

**Discussion**

Data from the survey demonstrated the principal motivations and impacts of community gardening from members of eight gardens in west central Florida. Similar to the residents who choose to garden in Detroit, Denver, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and New York (Guitart et al., 2012), residents of the Tampa Bay area are also motivated to consume fresh produce, improve physical health, develop social relationships, provide economic gain, find spiritual or emotional satisfaction, and to practice sustainability. Almost half of the motivations described by garden members in Tampa were related to the perceived opportunity to engage in the community though social, educational, and altruistic participation in the gardens. Individual benefits (physical, spiritual, economic) were viewed as secondary motivations. While many urban community gardens projects in the U.S. target low-income persons, few garden members in Tampa Bay are categorically low-income. Community gardeners in this study expressed greater interest in community engagement than in economic savings from the produce harvest, perhaps in part because their income was higher than that of other lower-income members highlighted in community garden literature.

The GIS model showed that just under half (42%) of garden members were located within walking distance of the community gardens (refer to Figure 1); a corresponding 33.3% of members reported walking or biking to the gardens regularly. As expected, the three Temple Terrace gardens had the most member addresses within walking distance as well as the highest percentage of members who reported walking or biking to the gardens. Tampa Bay gardeners’ motivations and opportunities to engage in the community may be facilitated by their proximity to the gardens. However, it appears that the influence of community gardens extends beyond the immediate neighborhood, as 58% of members lived outside of the buffer delineating walking distance and several lived approximately a half-hour drive away (refer to Figure 1).

Positioning gardens within a community of change may therefore be less important to determining community engagement than other characteristics of garden members, such as income, education, and age.

The findings from this study indicate that an important avenue to community engagement is through social relationships developed in the community gardens. Teig et al. (2009) describe the social interactions in Denver community gardens as “collective efficacy,” or the combination of social connections, reciprocity, and mutual trust. Garden members in Tampa spoke of the gardens as a place of dynamic social interaction between neighbors and community members. Strong social ties are developed between individuals, families, and neighbors, often between community members who would not have naturally met outside of the gardens. All gardens in this study extended the social benefits of the garden community outside of their membership structure and into the wider community. For example, one garden holds an annual market event that gathers individuals, families, and organizations from the wider Tampa area. Another garden incorporated into their name the concept that their garden is not simply a place to grow food, but a meeting place for the community. The outward expansion of meaningful social interactions is consistent with Glover and colleagues' (2005) evaluation that “the effects of the community gardens [are] not necessarily bound within the context in which they…originate.” Indeed, the authors suggest that the success of community gardens depends on the social capital developed within and outside of the garden networks. The experiences and activities described by garden members in Tampa illustrate that social relationships serve to facilitate wider community engagement, including gardening programs in local schools, community events at the garden sites, and mutual encouragement of healthier eating.

A second impact of community gardening is the educational opportunities for individuals, families, and communities. Knowledge-sharing in the context of community gardening means sharing information about best practices, knowledge of new foods, and lessons about sustainability. Many gardeners feel that involvement gives them an important opportunity to share information about local food production and consumption with community members, especially with children at the local schools. The general feeling among garden members was that the community should have a greater appreciation for growing and eating local, organic foods for their health and environmental
benefits. The community gardens surveyed in Tampa serve as a place for the generation of health and garden knowledge, as well as a platform through which it is shared with the wider community. Our findings are consistent with Shan and Walter’s (2015) analysis of the practice-based learning of Chinese immigrants in community gardens in Canada. Their evaluation found that gardens promote learning through (a) communities of interdependence, (b) physical things in the environment, and (c) the garden as an assemblage of culture, place, and space. The experiences of Tampa Bay gardeners illustrate a variety of opportunities for place-based learning and teaching.

Community gardens can be described as “communities of practice” (CoP), or “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 2007, p. 1). CoPs are positioned within Lave and Wenger’s (1991) model of situated learning, which describes how social participation provides the necessary context for peripheral learners to become full members in the community and to increase knowledge in skills, structures, and ways to engage in the world. The process of learning through community participation is also considered an important principle to community engagement: “Meaningful community participation extends beyond physical involvement to include generation of ideas, contributions to decision making, and sharing of responsibility” (CTSA Community Engagement Key Function Committee Task Force, 2011). Adam and Hess (2001) describe local and organizational knowledge as the “centralised knowledge base of stored data” (p. 21), a quality source of information to develop community policy and programs. In our study, community gardens provide a source of local and organizational knowledge that initiated activities on several community platforms—school gardening programs, volunteer opportunities to address local food insecurity, and neighborhood events such as solstice festivals and community potlucks. These activities were generated from within the gardens, which served as central sources of information and action.

Altruistic attitudes and actions of gardeners provide a third opportunity for community engagement. Members believe that by participating in the community garden they are contributing to something much larger than the garden itself, demonstrated in the comment, “I love feeling part of building [something] that is part of humanity’s survival rather than contributing to humanity’s extinction.” The role of community gardens in our study was particularly salient to addressing issues of food security. Hillsborough County ranks fourth in the state of Florida for the value of agricultural products sold; yet one in six Tampa Bay residents struggles with hunger (USDA, 2012; Feeding America Tampa Bay, 2014). One of the Tampa Bay gardens—Seeds of Faith Community Garden—was intentionally founded to ameliorate food insecurity in their neighborhood, donating over 50% of its net produce to local food banks and shelters. Since its inception, the garden has donated over 7,000 pounds of fresh produce. Many members were motivated to participate in this garden because of the large amount of food relief they were able to provide their community. On a smaller scale, garden members in Tampa Bay were motivated to participate in their neighborhood community gardens because they created an opportunity to give away herbs and vegetables to friends, family members, and co-workers. Whether formal or informal in practice, all gardens had systems of food gifting. Overt and subtle forms of donation are noted in other studies (Aftandilian & Dart, 2013; Knigge, 2009) and demonstrate opportunities for community development and health promotion (Armstrong, 2000).

Armstrong (2000) suggests that, “Individuals involved in community gardening may provide an even more integrated perspective to health promotion and empowerment designs” (p. 326). Instrumental impacts seen as tangible improvements include a sustainable local food system, improving job skills, addressing mental health, improving neighborhood aesthetics, and lowering crime. Our findings also demonstrate the collective neighborhood benefits of community gardens: educational programs in local schools, increased value of real estate, and improved diet of community members. However, the largest reported impacts (and the primary motivations) of community gardens for physical, mental, and social health promotion in Tampa Bay are the ways members participate in community engagement through social, learning, and altruistic processes.

While our study explores the motivations and multilevel impacts of community gardens from the perspective of active garden members, it does not reflect the views of family or community members who are not involved in formal membership of the gardens. Additionally, the analysis does not show the effects of the other community gardens (both ornamental and herb) in Tampa Bay. While the results of this study are not generalizable to all
community gardens, our findings were consistent with other garden studies and highlight many of the most common impacts of community gardens. Analysis of community gardening as a means to community engagement helps to broaden the understanding of gardens as assets to the community and frames the argument for establishing new community gardens, as is occurring across the globe. Additional research through geospatial analysis and in-depth interviews with garden organizers will be useful to understand if and how geographic location affects the success and sustainability of gardens to contribute to long-term community engagement.

Conclusion
This study affirms that community gardens in Tampa Bay are hubs of community engagement; they provide opportunities to interact with neighbors and contribute to the development of community assets. The gardens promote healthy, secure food consumption among members. As Leopold (1949) suggested, “the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts” (p. 203), and all ethics of land, health, and development depend upon the ability of individuals to cooperate in a community. The community garden is one locale where such activities take place in a meaningful way. Our analysis of individual, family, and community-level impacts shows that the benefits of garden participation are distributed beyond the individual member and throughout wider spheres of influence. Community gardens should be appraised for their potential to foster community engagement and developing local assets. Research indicates the importance of community gardens for health promotion, particularly in local schools and community organizations (Armstrong, 2000; Hale et al., 2011; Hawkins et al., 2013), and the literature suggests community engagement can foster healthy environments (McCloskey et al., 2011). Future research should focus on the factors that affect sustainability of gardens and the effects of garden-directed community engagement over time.

References


**About the Authors**

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Introduction

Recent grassroots activism in the development community, including the first ever menstrual hygiene day, has highlighted the potential impact menstruation in a poor income setting may have on women’s rights to sanitation health and education (Boosey & Wilson, 2012). Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) is a term that has recently emerged among the international development community to refer to the process of handling menstruation (Boosey & Wilson, 2012). According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF, 2012), good MHM is defined as access to necessary resources (e.g. menstrual materials to absorb or collect menstrual blood effectively, soap and water), facilities (a private place to wash, change, and dry re-usable menstrual materials in privacy during menstruation, and an adequate disposal system for menstrual materials, from collection point to final disposal point), and education about MHM for males and females.

A study of 12–17 year olds in 20 primary schools in five districts in Uganda revealed that girls in rural Uganda miss up to eight days of study each school term because they are on their periods (The Guardian, 2014). This was due to lack of washrooms, lack of sanitary pads, and bullying by peers. The eight days on average translates into 11% of the total learning days in a year. It’s a school absence rate that is hard for the girl to make up for and partly accounts for girls dropping out of high school (The Guardian, 2014). Most of the girls in the study said they used a piece of cloth called a kitenge, which they got from their mothers, while others improvised with the cloth nappies used by their younger siblings. Some girls even used dry leaves to try to soak up the blood in emergency situations. Not only are these girls dealing with a lack of materials, they are also stigmatized by cultural attitudes that associate menstruation with being dirty. Many girls grow up dreading their period because of this kind of social stigma, as well as the lack of services and facilities to help them (The Guardian, 2014).

According to the 2011 Uganda Education Management Information System report, the average primary school completion rate was 52%, and the retention rate for boys and girls was 53% and 42%, respectively (Bernbaum & Kurt, 2011). A study conducted by the Netherlands Development Organization in Uganda reported that up to 40% of female teachers in primary schools missed school, and 11% of the time, girls missed learning due to challenges of coping with menstruation (The Netherlands Development Organization, 2013). Women and girls living in rural settings in particular suffer from the stigma and lack of services and facilities to cope with the physical and psychological pains associated with menstruation. Sanitary pads sold locally are extremely expensive (House, Mahon, & Sue, 2012). While there are other factors that prevent girls from attending school, this project focuses on the barriers that prevent girls from attending school due to lack of sanitary napkin pads needed during their monthly menstrual cycle.
Causes of school dropout are many and they vary among regions. Several studies, including the 2012 UNICEF report document reasons for school dropout without quantifying the proportion each contributes. They include, but are not limited to, hidden costs of education. Although Uganda introduced free primary education in 1998, parents are expected to provide stationery, food, exam fees, uniforms, and cash contributions to support teacher remunerations. Other factors are: lack of interest due to irrelevancy of curriculum and poor quality teaching; absenteeism by teachers and pupils, leading to lack of motivation; repeating of classes (pupils have to pass end-of-year exams before they advance to the next class); prevalence of corporal punishment (humiliating—especially for girls); family demands—domestic and farming chores and (mainly girls) nursing a sick family member; lack of parental support—lack of appreciation for value of education; early pregnancies (sometimes leading to early marriages); long walking distance to school; overcrowded classrooms (150–200 per class in rural areas); various forms of gender-based violence (GBV); and defilement at times by teachers. Despite existence of laws prohibiting GBV with harsh consequences, weak enforcement mechanisms mean that these practices are prevalent. Hardly a day passes without news reports of GBV, defilement, early and/or, forced marriage.

While attempts to mitigate school dropout rates for girls have been made across numerous government and non-governmental levels, access to sanitary pads for girls remains a daunting task (Nakanyike, Kasente, & Balihuta, 2002; Kasente, Nakanyike, & Balihuta, 2003). To address this problem and other challenges faced by women at various levels of human development, HERS-EA was formed. HERS is a non-profit educational organization incorporated under the laws of the state of Colorado and based in Denver, Colorado in the United States, providing leadership and management development training for women in higher education administration (HERS, 2017). HERS-EA is an affiliated organization of HERS, providing leadership and management development training for women at higher education institutions in East Africa (Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, and Ethiopia) (HERS-EA, 2017). The goals of HERS-EA are to (a) advance women leaders in higher education institutions in East Africa, and (b) to empower women at multiple levels of leadership and integrate the results to change systems (HERS-EA, 2017). HERS-EA aims to remove barriers to girls’ education in order to increase retention of girls in schools. Also, its curriculum addresses the plight of women in rural communities, including those that have not gone to school and those who have dropped out—referred to as Returning Learners (HERS-EA, 2017).

In 2015, with support from Mississippi State University (MSU), HERS-EA conducted a needs assessment aimed at improving the retention rate of schoolgirls by helping them manage menstruation through access to affordable sanitary pads. The specific objectives of the study were: (a) to equip the women in District A (Bulambuli District, Uganda), with business skills to market reusable sanitary pads that they were making, (b) train the women in District A to become trainers of the women in District B (Butaleja District, Uganda) so that the reusable sanitary pad project could be scaled up to benefit girls and women in other parts of the country, (c) develop and implement a small business microfinance strategy for rural women in the two study districts, and (d) provide a research and outreach engagement opportunity that links women researchers at MSU and Makerere University (Mak) to the rural women to address pertinent community challenges such as MHM.

The overall theoretical lens that frames this project is linked to literature on building community capacity. Chaskin (2001) conceptualizes community capacity as the relationship among human capital, organizational resources, and social capital used to solve problems and improve a community. According to Chaskin, this involves four key elements: 1) a sense of community, 2) a level of commitment, 3) the ability to solve problems, and 4) access to resources. Social agency is a critical component in building community capacity. Chaskin goes on to identify four core strategies to building community capacity: 1) leadership development, 2) organizational development, 3) community organizing, and 4) fostering collaborative relations among organizations. Building community capacity for both the sanitary napkin project participants and the HERS-EA initiative are essential components to ensuring the success of both projects.

Methodology

Project area. The project area comprised two districts: Bulambuli (District A) and Butaleja (District B), both located in Eastern Uganda (Figure 1). Uganda is a landlocked country in Eastern Africa with an area of 241,038 square km. Kampala, with a population of 1.2 million, is the capital and its largest city. Uganda is divided into
four regions, the Northern Region, the Central Region, the Eastern Region, and the Western Region, and subdivided into 111 districts (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014). The study districts are located in the Eastern Region (Figure 1, green). Uganda's 2014 National Population and Housing Census reported a total population of 34,634,650. The Central Region contained 27% of the country's population, the Western Region 26%, Eastern Region 25%, and the Northern Region 22%. The populations of the study districts—Bulambuli (District A, No. 85 in map) and Butaleja (District B, No. 15 in map)—were 174,508 and 244,158, respectively (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

**Education.** Uganda’s education system follows a four-tier system. The first tier is comprised of seven years of primary education, followed by four years of ordinary level secondary education, two years of advanced level secondary education and the final tier is three to five years of tertiary education. Each level is nationally examined and certificates awarded. The government introduced universal primary education in 1997 to offer free education at the primary level, and in 2007 universal secondary education was introduced. University and tertiary education are offered by both public and private institutions. There also exists informal education in Uganda that aims to serve those persons who did not receive or only partially received formal education. Under the informal system, a range of practical/hands-on skills are imparted. The informal system includes a functional adult literacy program in the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and adult basic education for Karamoja among others (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

Illiteracy can be defined as the inability to read and write. In the context of this study illiteracy further means the inability to understand written instructions in whatever language or medium of communication. According to Everest Tumwesigye, Uganda's commissioner for community development and literacy, "Uganda is unlikely to meet the adult education target under the goal to achieve education for all by 2015." (New Vision, August 28, 2013; retrieved from http://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1330222/uganda-falls-short-2015-adult-literacy-target). According to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2014), average adult literacy for persons over 18 years was 71%, with male literacy estimated to be 81% and female literacy 61%. The average data masks vast differences between regions, age groups, and gender but indicate that overall female literacy lags behind male literacy. Among the study groups, illiteracy was a barrier to understanding and interpreting instructions leading to a number of limitations including: (a) primary data collected only via oral interviews, (b) lengthy explanations required to understand business documents (of which many had no prior knowledge), (c) inability to open and manage a bank account, and (d) slower than expected progress during training.

**Characteristics of Women Groups.** The women in Bulambuli District had formed a group called Elgon Pads, comprised of five women and one man, and had been making reusable sanitary pads since November 2013. Elgon Pads was formed with support of African Village Support, a charity registered in the United Kingdom, and partner to HERS-EA. The company was not selling the sanitary pads in spite of the apparent demand in the district and in other parts of the country. It lacked both leadership structure and business management skills. There were no records of inventory and no market research had been completed regarding customer concerns. The women lacked confidence in marketing the product, especially in schools, partly because most heads-of-schools were men. Also, Elgon Pads was not registered and had not patented their product; they also did not seem to be aware of the risk. Making pads was not the primary activity for the members; it was done in their spare time and the shop was not always open and pads were sometimes out of stock.

All six members of Elgon Pads had dropped out of high school and none of them had formal
qualities. They got along well but they had no structure in place to streamline allocation of activities; no one seemed to have overall responsibility for any area of the project. They operated in a small room (about 25 square meters) with display shelves at the front. These premises, which were part of African Village Support, were strategically located, about 100 meters from Bulambuli District Administration offices and within a four-mile radius of 10 primary schools and three secondary (high) schools and about 10 meters from a busy main road and local commuter taxi park. This underexploited location was convenient for legal business processes, proximity to market, and transporting products to further places. All members were very skilled in making the sanitary pads and capable of producing up to 20 packets a day. However, from observations made, Elgon Pads members lacked confidence in themselves and in the product they were making, did not seem to be aware of the high untapped demand for the re-usable sanitary pads. As produced, the pads were difficult to sell because they had no labels or instructions for use or washing, the packaging was not attractive in comparison to other sanitary products, and the size was small and did not cater to those who bled heavily. Elgon Pads had sold some sanitary pads to girls in a nearby school but had not obtained feedback on the product.

Butaleja District group had 25 women comprised of teachers, community leaders, schoolgirls, and housewives, ranging in age from 17–48; many were mothers of teenage girls. This group had received earlier training in business management from World Vision and the Africa Institute for Strategic Resource Services (AFRISA) at Mak. The women were earlier organized with a chairperson, secretary, and treasurer; however, the group was incomplete, as some office bearers had moved out of the area.

The Needs Assessment. In Bulambuli District, the needs assessment was carried out through observations, informal discussions with the stakeholders, and surveying the participants using guided questions to establish specific needs that would be addressed by the HERS-EA and AFRISA teams during the business skills and training sessions. An interview guide with specific questions was used to gather information on sanitary pads production, business priority needs, and appropriate interventions. The interview was administered orally as the participants were not confident about responding in writing. The specific questions covered sanitary pads production, quality control, sales and marketing, profitability of business, and company registration. Information gathered enabled pre-training and post-training assessments to gauge the impact of the project on Elgon Pads’ business. HERS-EA ensured that the relevant stakeholders—the rural women, husbands, community leaders, and teachers—were informed and supportive of the pads project. Also, HERS-EA team interviewed a small group of girls (eight volunteers) from a nearby school, who had purchased pads from Elgon, to obtain their feedback.

In Butaleja District, only 10 of the 25 women participated in the discussions. The 10 were comprised of three group leaders, two teachers, two schoolgirls, and three housewives who were literate. The 10 women had previously been trained by AFRISA, and were therefore familiar with group activities. In both districts the participants were briefed about the purpose of the project before they responded to the questions; they were also debriefed, after the discussion, in order to manage their high expectations and also to offer support to those who got emotional. The majority of the participants were illiterate, although a few had basic literacy, so most of them answered questions through oral interviews. The HERS-EA team summarized the information gathered from the discussions. The HERS-EA team engaged with the community leaders before the visit to ensure that all protocols were observed and to gain their support for the project. Several community and political leaders were present during the visits.

Training. Two visits were made to Bulambuli District to train the women on (a) business management, and (b) training of trainers. The Elgon Pads group of six women was joined by 26 additional women associated with African Village Support for the business skills training. At the beginning of the training session participants shared their expectations, which included (a) how to make money, (b) getting the right employees, (c) how to get buyers, (d) how to access government grants and bank loans, (e) trading standards and regulations, and (f) how to register their businesses. The business management training was conducted over three days by three trainers from AFRISA and HERS-EA. Business concepts were explained in the local language and learners were fully engaged and responsive throughout. Afternoons were spent in group discussions with clear expected outcomes, such as development of a business plan. The training of trainers was conducted on the fourth day. Elgon Pads women later traveled to Butaleja District to train the women there on sanitary pads production.
Butaleja District women were also trained on sanitary pads production. These women had prior knowledge in basic business management, provided earlier by World Vision. Also, the women had discussed, though unsuccessfully, the concept of reusable sanitary pads using old cloths with World Vision. This prior knowledge served them well during the training. Using grant funds from MSU, HERS-EA purchased two sewing machines and fabrics and other accessories for the training. The training session started with a review of the business skills previously covered. Participants then shared their expectations with the trainers (Elgon Pads and HERS-EA), which included: (a) learn how to make pads, (b) earn some money, (c) afford pads for themselves and their children, (d) feel more confident and productive throughout the month, (e) learn how to make other garments, and (f) make new friends. Participants brainstormed on how best to use the two sewing machines, and agreed upon: (a) making African print unisex outfits, (b) repairing clothes, (c) making upholstery, (d) making school uniforms, (e) making aprons for local health centers, and (f) sharing handcraft skills to make more handcraft items. The training was hands-on with Bulambuli women showing Butaleja women how to make the pads while maximizing resources available. The sewing process was stalled because most of the Butaleja women did not know how to use a sewing machine. A local trainer was therefore hired to teach Butaleja women the basics of using a sewing machine.

Evaluation

The evaluation process for the project was conducted by HERS-EA through analysis of information gathered from the needs assessment of the women in Bulambuli and Butaleja. HERS-EA also made additional follow-up visits to Bulambuli and Butaleja districts to conduct a post-training assessment.

Results

Needs Assessment

Butaleja District. Only 10 of the 25 women participated in the discussions. All participants (men and women) were eager to participate in the pads production, distribution, and selling. The women were reluctant to engage in the discussion about menstruation in the presence of men, but later opened up and shared their testimonies once the men left. Many of the women said they were relieved to hear that others were in similar situations and they felt that they could continue supporting each other after the survey session. Overall, Butaleja women found menstruation a challenge but the ways in which it affected them varied according to their daily activities. With regard to housewives, their domestic activities, which included gathering wood for cooking, collecting and cooking food, fetching water, cleaning the home, and washing clothes and dishes became a problem. For example, some felt unwell and unproductive before and during menstruation. Schoolgirls missed up to seven days a month; a school term lasts three months so some of the girls missed up to 21 of the 90 days in a term. The girls felt that they fell behind and were not capable of catching up. Each of the participants knew of an incident where a schoolgirl had been teased about menstruation by her peers and (at times) teachers, or had missed some school days due to lack of sanitary facilities at home and at school. Professional working women seemed to struggle mostly with lack of female toilets and sanitary pads at work. Some of the teachers could remember a few girls who had dropped out of school because they had missed so much that they felt they could not catch up. They also complained about lack of facilities, and many teachers could not afford disposable pads either, so like their students, they too missed some days rather than risk having stained clothes at work.

The personal testimonies by the women gave a deeper insight into specific ways in which lack of menstruation management had impacted them and their children. The effects of the emotional distress displayed could not be quantified within the scope of this study. Table 1 summarizes a few examples of the testimonies. The women reported...
a few interventions but said they were inadequate. For instance, some participants had received sanitary pads from World Vision but that had been a one-time event so their problems remained. Some resorted to poor, unhygienic substitutes, like rags, because of the high cost of disposable pads. The rags used had been made of any available fabric, including nylon, which was not absorbent and could get hot and smelly. Others reported using bits of old blankets, which could cause skin irritation in the vaginal area. A few had used thick, hairy leaves, believing that they were more absorbent, only to be disappointed. A few schools had designated female senior teachers to help girls with menstruation issues by providing information and some emergency sanitary pads. Some participants reported hearing about discussions by the Uganda Parliament on menstruation and its effect on education for girls and wondered whether any action had been taken. Some of the girls and women recognized the need to wash and dry the pads thoroughly to avoid acquiring a bad smell; others had challenges on where to dry them, while others doubted the effectiveness of reusable pads in managing heavy bleeding (see Tables 1 and 2).

Evaluation of the Training. As a result of the training and networking, the women groups became better organized, grew their membership, and acquired additional skills that they did not have before. For instance, with the support of a male community leader (chair of the local head teachers’ association), Butaleja women were able to reorganize and develop a new management structure with a chair, secretary, and treasurer. Also, the membership of the group grew from 25 to 30. The group was named Pambileho, which meant “holding hands,” or support for each other, in the local language. Registration of Pambileho and opening a bank account were initiated. The group also received some training in operating a savings and credit plan that would enable them to access funding from local institutions. As a result of the training, Pambileho women learned how to sew and make sanitary pads, and also acquired extra skills including making handicrafts. Additionally, a professional tailor was identified to train the women in making African print garments.

The objective of training Elgon Pads women in (a) business skills and (b) training of trainers was accomplished. At the end of the project, it was observed that the Elgon Pads group had gained confidence in themselves and their product, and they took pride in teaching the Butaleja women how to make the pads. They also elected two leaders and started keeping records. The presence of the Bulambuli chief administration officer at their awards ceremony boosted their morale and raised the profile of the group and their product. However, the group needed a mentor to support them in establishing a business, patenting, opening a bank account, and basic bookkeeping. They also needed to expand the market for their pads, including selling the pads to the school leaders’ organizations. Increased sales and ability to train groups of women in different parts of the country would improve their livelihood, increase self-esteem, and help raise the profile of reusable sanitary pads for the benefit of a wider group of women and schoolgirls. Overall the Women Empowering Women project was successfully implemented, with respect to the objectives outlined, apart from setting up the microfinance strategy.

Small Business Microfinance Strategy. The objective of setting up a microfinance strategy for the women in Bulambuli and Butaleja Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Testimony</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Menstruation incidents affect girls starting from primary 4 to primary 7. One girl refused to leave her desk at the beginning of break; boys in her class were suspicious so they surrounded her; eventually she left. The senior teacher intervened and lent the girl a skirt but the girl left school and she never returned.” school teacher, aged 32</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>“During a parents-teachers meeting I saw three girls with blood spots on their dresses who explained that they did not have pads. I offered a cloth to one of the girls to wrap around her; the others left the meeting and missed all the advice that was being given.” parent/community leader, aged 50.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>“I always pretend to have malaria when I get my periods so that I stay home but, it is like a double punishment because I miss classes and fall behind and I also get punished for missing school; maybe it is easier to just give up school; but I really want to be educated and... (sobs).” school girl, aged 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>“My 14-year old daughter used to secretly get money from a man, to buy pads; he eventually raped her.... I can’t believe something so stupid.....” 43-year-old mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Our top female student suddenly disappeared, after she was teased by peers when they saw blood stains on her dress.” 50-year-old teacher</td>
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Table 1. Testimonies on How Menstruation Affected Different Groups of Women
was not achieved due to: (a) lack of functional financial literacy—most of the women did not have the skills to fill out an application form, operate a bank account, or use a cell phone adequately, (b) political and technical bureaucracy—the training took place during political elections, when political alliances were significant in decision-making and collaborations, and (c) organization within the groups—both groups were still in their infancy and needed support to strengthen the management structures of their young organizations and build track records for their activities before they could be considered for grants and loans. This failure can be further understood by knowing that a local technology of sending and receiving money using cell phones (mobile banking) is widespread in East Africa, but it requires the phone number to be registered and an ability to read security codes when sending or withdrawing money. These women were unable to make these transactions. Additionally, financial institutions were cautious due to uncertainty about the election outcomes.

**Discussion**

**The Scholarship of Engagement in the Project “Women Empowering Women through Reusable Sanitary Pads”**

Fisher, Fabricant, and Simmons, (2004) describe four types of civic engagement: service learning, local economic development, community-based research, and social work initiatives. This project embodied three of the four types of engagement noted, and created opportunities for service learning for students in the future. Below is a summary of the four themes of scholarship of engagement that emerged from the study and their relation to the current literature. While this project was not extensive enough to generate theory, the authors present the information with the intention of setting a contextual stage for scholarly discussion and future research.

**Theme 1: Emphasis on Community Engagement.** Universities and colleges are increasingly providing internal grants to encourage faculty and staff involvement in community-based research and service-learning projects (Nicotera, Cutforth, Fretz, & Thompson, 2012), and studies have shown that community-based projects energized the participating faculty, helped them make their academic work relevant in communities, created formal and informal university/community partnerships, and elevated the university's public image (Nicotera et al., 2012). This project was funded by an internal grant from MSU International Institute ($4,000) and The National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center (NSPARC) ($10,000) to encourage interdisciplinary and international faculty engagement. The participating research universities (Mak and MSU) both espouse community engagement, and the project focused

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>School Girls</th>
<th>Married Rural Housewives</th>
<th>Professional/Working (mainly teachers)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Premenstrual pain that is not attended to; not seen as a “sickness”</td>
<td>• Sit up all night to avoid soiling the bed</td>
<td>• Lack of female toilets at the work place</td>
<td></td>
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<td>• Tension/stress as periods approach and begin, due to lack of facilities</td>
<td>• Sexual aggression from husbands when bleeding</td>
<td>• Sexist comments by male colleagues about hormonal stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Missing school; up to 7 days a month.</td>
<td>• Humiliation by husbands when women ask for money to buy sanitary pads</td>
<td>• Some women could not afford sanitary pads at market price</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Discomfort and irritation from items such as leaves, rugs, cotton (in raw form)</td>
<td>• Lack of facilities can lead to unpleasant smells</td>
<td>• Abandonment by husbands who lack understanding of menstruation issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Humiliation from peers (especially boys) and some teachers and members of the community when clothes are stained.</td>
<td>• Abandonment of unhygienic smell</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Girls feel inferior</td>
<td>• Humiliation from peers (especially boys) and some teachers and members of the community when clothes are stained.</td>
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</table>

**Table 2.** How menstruation impacted different groups of women
on empowering rural women in two districts in Uganda in entrepreneurial skills to produce and market low-cost, hygienic, reusable sanitary pads in their communities. In addition to generating income for women, access to sanitary pads enabled girls and school teachers to stay in school and rural women to engage in social, political, and economic activities. The participants, primarily women and girls, and secondary beneficiaries (community and political leaders) participated in decision-making regarding the type of activities and sustainability of the project.

**Theme 2: Emphasis on University Outreach.** Universities’ primary missions are education, research, and outreach (Lynton, 2016). Outreach has been defined as “a reaching out from the university to the people and organizations a university serves” (Byrne, 2016, pp. 53–58), including transfer of knowledge and technology from the university to its constituents. Leading scholars have eloquently described the societal need for a more intense and direct engagement of universities with their external constituencies (Lynton, 2016). The internal benefits of outreach to universities are immense, and strong faculty engagement in outreach is needed by the university as much as it is by its societal partners (Lynton, 2016). Each engagement in outreach is likely to have an element of inquiry and discovery, leading to creation of new knowledge that flows in both directions. First-hand faculty involvement in the field provides new academic insights and understanding, which provide new directions for controlled research in laboratories. Findings, in turn, lead to ideas that can be brought to the place of application (Lynton, 2016). Outreach is needed for the optimal generation of knowledge; it provides bridges between theory and practice that benefit the teaching and learning process, both directly and indirectly. Direct student involvement in faculty-outreach projects has the potential of providing considerably more mentoring and learning than an external experience in which students are not engaged. And, faculty outreach indirectly benefits all other students (Lynton, 2016). This project provided a research and outreach opportunity that linked women faculty at MSU (U.S.) and at Mak (Uganda) with rural women in Eastern Uganda. As a result of this engagement, new interdisciplinary research questions were generated and efforts are ongoing to address them.

**Theme 3: Interdisciplinary Research.** This project provided an opportunity for faculty to generate interdisciplinary research questions and also enhance international collaboration between faculty at MSU and Mak. The study played a supporting role to the university’s primary missions of education and research and fulfilling the goal of land-grant universities of serving people globally. HERS-EA researchers from MSU, in partnership with the AFRISA Institute, collaborated with researchers from MSU’s Social Science Research Center, Human Sciences, and the College of Veterinary Medicine to conduct a pre-training and post-training assessment in production and marketing of the sanitary pads. This interdisciplinary project facilitated through MSU’s International Research Development Office at the International Institute generated areas for further research in education, sociology, business, technology, and engineering. HERS-EA, in collaboration with Mak and MSU researchers, is actively seeking funding opportunities to expand this international collaboration, including providing opportunities for student training. Plans are underway to build upon accomplishments of the project “Women Empowering Women Through Use of Reusable Sanitary Pads” to advance cross-national research and programmatic development. For instance, an interdisciplinary research team from MSU comprised of scholars with expertise in sociology, gender studies, women’s economic empowerment, community development, demography, and social entrepreneurship has been formed. The MSU research team has developed a 10-year plan to work with East African scholars to develop and expand the existing WEW project. The research project goals include: (a) establishing long-term (5–10 years) research project with multiple peer-reviewed publications, (b) strengthening ties with HERS-EA and participating in an annual HERS-EA Leadership Training Academy, (c) securing grant funding for research, (d) incorporating the project into the MSU Sociology Department undergraduate and graduate curriculum, and gender studies curriculum at Mak, (e) establishing study-abroad opportunities at Mak for MSU students, and (f) facilitating faculty exchange. The research questions identified include: (a) how is menstruation perceived culturally in Butaleja and Bulambuli? What is the specific content of these beliefs? (b) once reusable pads are established, both in terms of stable production and use, what are the long-term effects on women’s social participation and status? (c) how does the business affect the workers, their families, and the community?
Theme 4: Opportunity for Service Learning for Students. In their report to UNESCO, Boothroyd and Fryer (2004) draw on their experience in Vietnam, Thailand, and North America to argue that universities have the capacity to create social change through carefully planned engagement by faculty and students. Also, research indicates that service learning as an instructional strategy helps students gain knowledge and skills and increase self-confidence and a sense of caring (Jenkins & Sheehey, 2012). It increases understanding and depth of course content, promotes knowledge and understanding of civic and social issues, and increases awareness and acceptance of diversity (Jenkins & Sheehy, 2012). In addition to creating opportunities for future faculty research and publication, the project also provided educational opportunities for students at both institutions through study abroad, joint research, and service learning.

Service learning can benefit the education of students in several ways. Values such as diversity, self-determination, accountability, and collaboration can be taught using service-learning methods, which further students’ learning (King, 2003). Service learning also promotes professional development. Feedback from students who were taught a policy course using service-learning projects suggested that students increased their confidence and competencies as policy practitioners and that the service-learning projects were influential in that change (Mink & Twill, 2012). After the course, students engaged in policy activities such as calling, emailing, or writing an elected official, working on a specific policy change effort, participating as a member of a coalition working on a political issue of change, and voting (Mink & Twill, 2012).

Limitations of the Study. This small qualitative study focused on the engagement experiences of women groups in two districts in Uganda, and may not reflect the views and experiences of women in other districts in the rest of the country or other sub-Saharan countries. The two districts selected for inclusion in the project were chosen based on the production of sanitary pads (Elgon) and prior engagement with World Vision and AFRISA at Mak. The perspectives of the women in the two districts may not reflect the views of all women in all 111 districts of Uganda. A study on a larger scale would provide wider perspectives of how MHM affects women at a broader level. In spite of these limitations, we believe all institutions working to enhance women’s advancement will find helpful suggestions from our findings and lessons learned.

Reflective Experiences of the Project “Women Empowering Women Through Reusable Sanitary Pads”. The partnership between MSU, Mak, and HERS-EA demonstrated by this project highlighted the mutual benefits of this collaboration and existing opportunities that support the university’s primary missions of education, research, and outreach. The project enabled MSU and Mak women researchers to connect with real issues faced by rural women in Uganda and to understand them within the cultural settings where they occurred. Faculty encountered the role played by Indigenous knowledge and cultural art and they began to apply their own scientific knowledge and research skills to begin creating new knowledge and assess how to impact gender and economic policies through engagement rather than top-down strategies.

Action research identified from the project covered several disciplines including: (a) education—impact of menstruation on education of the girl child and policy development to address this plight, (b) sociology—impact of menstruation management on professional women and inclusiveness and full participation of women in economic and other activities, (c) science and technology—development of a product that was environmentally sensitive with regard to inputs and disposal, and (d) business—sanitary products have a guaranteed and growing demand.

Unexpected challenges encountered included a range of issues: (a) balancing the fear of losing husbands due to lack of understanding of menstruation issues, to seeking help regarding buying pads (b) some women could not afford underwear needed to hold the sanitary pads, (c) many of the women were illiterate, which made teaching of record-keeping skills difficult, (d) more sewing machines were needed, (e) product distribution—there was a lack of packaging materials and the target schools were within a 10-mile radius; the women lacked reliable transportation, and (f) there was need for funding for an office and capacity building at HERS-EA.

Potential Future Collaborations. Opportunities exist for collaborative research, training, and outreach between higher education institutions in East Africa, the United States, and other stakeholders on: impact of MHM on education of the girl child and policy development; impact of MHM on professional women; science and technology—developing an appropriate product that is environmentally sensitive with regard to inputs and disposal; and business-entrepreneur-
ship development. Additional opportunities exist for developing further partnerships between HERS-EA, African Village Support, AFRISA, and other stakeholders, such as development agencies.

Conclusion

This paper described the plight of women regarding Menstrual Hygiene Management and the need to address it in order to keep girls and women teachers in school. It highlights the role of higher education institutions in addressing MHM through scholarly activities of research outreach and community engagement—contextualized within the theme of the 17th Annual ESC conference, namely “Visioning the Future of Engaged Scholarship: Reciprocity, Mutual Benefit & Impact.”

With a small grant from MSU, in collaboration with African Village Support and AFRISA, HERS-EA was able to conduct a baseline study in Bulambuli and Butaleja Districts, train women in Bulambuli to (a) better manage the pads project and (b) become trainers of other women in making the pads. HERS-EA also trained Butaleja women on how to make sanitary pads. Consequently, as of December 2015, the women in Butaleja District had made and sold their first batch of reusable sanitary pads and were ready to develop the skills further and to grow their business, if they could access more capital. This project has enormous potential to create employment for many women and improve their livelihoods while improving retention of girls in schools.

The women who were trained still require further mentorship in managing small businesses successfully and improving their product so they could gain confidence in promoting the sanitary pads for the benefit of a wider group of women and schoolgirls. There is a ready market for reusable sanitary pads and there are existing distribution channels (local shops and schools) that could be used to sell the pads. At the time of the evaluation visit on January 15, 2016, Pambileho had received orders of 8,000 packets from local schools but could not meet the demand due to lack of sewing machines and funds to purchase the necessary materials. The need for reusable pads was apparent from the responses, media reports, and informal conversations during visits by HERS-EA. Therefore, with monitoring and mentoring and seed money to provide sewing machines and fabrics, the groups had potential to grow and expand the pads project. HERS-EA is indebted to MSU for facilitating this project and looks forward to developing collaborative research and more community engagement projects to provide life-changing opportunities for marginalized groups of women and girls in Eastern Africa.

References


**Acknowledgment**

Higher Education Resource Services, East Africa (especially Loyce Hamba, volunteer); Mississippi State University (International Institute and National Strategic Planning & Analysis Research Center (nSPARC) for providing funding; Department of Sociology; HERS, Denver, CO for the support; Africa Institute for Strategic Resource Development (AFRISA), Makerere University.

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On October 9 and 10, prior to the start of the 2016 Engaged Scholarship Consortium (ESC) Conference in Omaha, Nebraska, the Consortium leadership gathered to discuss plans as ESC approaches its 20th anniversary. Before we look toward the future, however, it is important to understand ESC's history and purpose.

ESC traces its roots to 1999, when Pennsylvania State University, The Ohio State University, and the University of Wisconsin-Extension initiated the Outreach Scholarship Conference, an annual meeting to share knowledge about their community-based programs. In 2009, recognizing that multi-institutional efforts could accelerate some of the changes they desired for their own institutions, the three founding universities began to formalize their relationship, incorporating as a non-profit and changing the name to National Outreach Scholarship Conference (NOSC). It was during this time that they also began inviting other institutions to join them. In 2013, NOSC became ESC.

From its humble beginnings as a trio of universities in 1999, ESC has grown to 37 member institutions from three countries. Given the organization's growth in terms of geographic reach, number, and diversity of institutions, as well as developments in the national/international engagement scholarship landscape, Consortium leadership approached the 2016 conference considering strategic changes in the organization's vision, focus, mission, and direction leading up to its 20th anniversary in 2020. (Editor's note: Although the conference first met in 1999, it did not become an annual event until 2001. The conference will return in 2020 to Pennsylvania State University, site of the inaugural annual meeting, to celebrate its 20th anniversary.)

After reviewing the three-pronged vision, focus, and impact approach, the board passed the resulting ESC 20/20 Strategic Action Plan unanimously. Following an overview of ESC, representatives of the five standing committees—conferences, awards and recognition, scholarship, membership, finance and administration, and governance—reported on their respective areas.

ESC Today

Samory T. Pruitt, president of the executive committee of the ESC board of directors and vice president of the Division of Community Affairs at The University of Alabama, shared the board's vision of ESC: to promote excellence in the practice of engaged scholarship both locally and globally; to serve as the premier resource for higher education institutions and their faculty, staff, students, and community partners; to improve the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities; and to build capacity through community-engaged scholarship.
ESC Conferences

David Procter, professor and director of the Center for Engagement and Community Development at Kansas State University, gave the report on ESC conferences. Procter, executive committee member-at-large, noted that ESC was originally founded to provide opportunities for faculty to disseminate their research on the scholarship of engagement, primarily through a single national conference. He discussed the need, looking forward, to expand opportunities and consider new ways to present and disseminate the results of ESC endeavors as the Consortium continues to grow. Geographic regions have already been established within the ESC membership, and their institutions will be encouraged to host regional conferences that embody the ESC vision, help ESC remain connected to its regional roots, address the needs of the membership, and provide additional venues and opportunities for faculty and staff to present and receive recognition for their scholarship.

Recognizing the necessity of maintaining the underlying principles of the Consortium’s vision across various regional events, ESC leaders underscored their commitment to the development of a proposal process with criteria to guide institutions when applying for and hosting an ESC regional event. In addition to providing more presentation and recognition opportunities, these ESC-sanctioned events will create increased opportunities to: (a) build local leadership, (b) increase local/regional/institutional recognition, and (c) increase recognition of best practices by faculty, staff, and community partners.

Awards and Recognition

Susan E. Short, also an executive committee member-at-large and the associate vice president for engagement at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, spoke about awards and recognition. She announced that ESC will support and encourage excellence in engaged scholarship through an ESC Awards and Recognition Program that will take place for the first time at the 2018 ESC conference. The program will be designed to recognize institutions, organizations, and individuals and will increase opportunities for enhanced peer learning by inviting representatives from award-winning institutions to participate on panels during national and regional conferences. The program will focus on excellence in engaged scholarship through institutional practices that support, encourage, and recognize engaged scholarship efforts by faculty, staff, and community partners.

Scholarship

Addressing scholarship was Scott Reed, executive committee member-at-large and vice provost for university outreach and engagement at Oregon State University. Reed reported that ESC will work to connect scholars and community partners who, together, create innovative engagement. He said ESC will strive to facilitate increased scholarship and research through case studies, visiting sabbaticals, collaborations on publications, and externally funded grant proposals that focus on the scholarship and practice of community engagement. The Consortium also plans to explore opportunities and means to provide seed funding and recognition that will assist in encouraging
collaboration among faculty, staff, students, and community partners at member institutions, thereby promoting knowledge advancement, faculty skill development, community vitality, and resource development.

Membership

Katy Campbell, board secretary and dean of the extension faculty at the University of Alberta, spoke about ESC membership, noting that a growing ESC will provide opportunities to leverage the diverse institutional strengths of engaged researchers in ways that further advance engaged scholarship both nationally and internationally, as well as increase the reputation and visibility of ESC while securing additional resources to support its programs, projects, and initiatives. She reported that the initial growth plan will involve strategically approaching U.S. institutions that have received the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement. Additionally, the Consortium will continue to recruit international institutions possessing an engagement infrastructure and sharing the ideals of ESC.

Finance and Administration

Reporting on finance and administration was Craig Weidemann, special assistant to the provost for innovation and education technology initiatives at Pennsylvania State University and treasurer of the board. Weidemann reported that ESC will establish written procedures and agreements for member institution contributions, for conferences, and for proposing partnership agreements for journals, websites, and conference workshops. He further noted an emphasis on effectively securing and investing funds in ways that support ESC’s goals, members, and priorities.

Governance

Margee Ensign, vice president of the executive committee of the board and president of Dickinson College, gave the committee’s report on governance. She shared that ESC will implement a governance structure that establishes criteria for effective board and committee participation and establishes standing ESC committees that include conferences, awards and recognition, scholarship, membership, finance and administration, and governance. The ESC executive committee will support these standing committees. The ESC board will continue to host a board meeting during the annual conference and will explore hosting a second board meeting during the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) summer meetings. This structure—both efficient and effective—will yield increased institutional support from its board members and more effective involvement of member institution representatives.

Conclusion

Wrapping up the pre-conference session, Pruitt said: “Our vision is to promote excellence in the leadership, scholarship, and practice of engaged scholarship, both locally and globally. Our current impact can be seen in the increasing number of successful and sustainable community/campus partnerships that address critical societal issues and improve the quality of life for individuals, families, and communities through the scholarship of engagement.”

Editor’s note: The Engagement Scholarship Consortium, a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization, is comprised of a mix of state-public and private institutions of higher education. The ESC goal is to build strong university/community partnerships anchored in the rigors of scholarship.
Six posters were recognized as most outstanding at the 17th annual conference at the University of Nebraska Omaha October 11–12, 2016. Six judges selected from 40 posters representative of the 37 states and five countries that sent delegates to the conference.

There were six categories: People’s Choice; Community Outreach and Development; Engaged Teaching and Service Learning; Institutional Policies and Practices; Global, Civic, and Engaged Research; and Best Overall.

**Best Overall**

Presenters: Naomi Lumutenga, Higher Education Resource Services, East Africa (HERS-EA), Makerere University, Uganda; Meghan Millea, Mississippi State University; Margaret L. Khaitsa, College of Veterinary Medicine, Mississippi State University; Florence Wakoko-Studstill, associate professor of sociology and assistant director of library assessment at Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia; Ruth Muwazi, associate professor of veterinary anatomy in the College of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Resources and Bio-Security at Makerere University; Irene Naigaga, lecturer in the College of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Resources and Bio-security at Makerere University; and Loyce Hamba, College of Veterinary Medicine, Animal Resources and Bio-Security at Makerere University. Title—Connecting Higher Education Institutions and Grass Root Women: A HERS-EA Case Study of Women Empowering Women Through Reusable Sanitary Pads in Eastern Uganda. HERS-EA partnered with African Village Support, a non-governmental organization that has developed an affordable reusable sanitary pads prototype with rural women in Bulambuli District, Eastern Uganda. Researchers conducted a needs assessment to identify challenges related to this subject. Basic business skills were offered to women in the Bulambuli district, who in turn trained the women in the Butaleja District. Potential research areas were identified. To learn more about this research (see pages 142–152 of this issue of JCES).

**Community Outreach and Development**

Presenters: Sheridan Trent, assistant director, Volunteer Program Assessment (VPA), University of Nebraska Omaha; Kelly Prange, UNO graduate research assistant; and Joseph Allen, associate professor, UNO Industrial and Organizational Psychology, and director, Center for Applied Psychological Services.

Title—Volunteer Program Assessment: Engaging Students in Their Community Through Service. VPA-UNO is an innovative, cutting-edge, and completely free feedback and assessment system designed to enhance non-profit organizational effectiveness. Led by a faculty director, the program utilizes graduate and undergraduate student analysts who volunteer their time to administer and facilitate the VPA survey to organizations with volunteers throughout the United States. Fostering ties between students and the community is beneficial for both student analysts, who receive positive outcomes through their volunteer work, and for the non-profits they serve.

**Institutional Policies and Practices Award.**

Presenter: David E. Meens, instructor and director, Office for Outreach and Engagement, University of Colorado at Boulder. Title—A “Colorado Idea”: Building the 21st Century Public Flagship University. This research proposes a new iteration of a publicly engaged comprehensive university based on a vision of the “21st Century Flagship” that places outreach and engagement at the center of our understanding of university research and creative work, teaching, and service.
Engaged Teaching and Service-Learning. Presenters: Margaret Williamson, assistant clinical professor, Department of Experiential Learning, Harrison School of Pharmacy, Auburn University, and Eva Dubois, assistant clinical professor, School of Nursing, Auburn University. Title—An Interprofessional Approach to Community Wellness Screenings. The objectives of this project were to develop the infrastructure for an interprofessional team that consists of nursing and pharmacy to enhance health care to underserved populations; pilot an interprofessional mobile approach that builds on the current initiatives of nursing and pharmacy; and determine the impact of an interprofessional model as a means to educate future practitioners and its ability to provide sustainable outreach services.

Global, Civic, and Engaged Research Award. Presenter: Del Bharath, doctoral student, School of Public Administration, University of Nebraska Omaha. Title—Feasibility Study: UNO’s Role in Connecting Students with Board Service. This study looks at whether UNO should act as a pipeline to connect master of public administration students to nonprofit board service opportunities and address the needs of both populations. Additionally, it examines programmatic considerations and their feasibility if the proposed program is implemented. The study found interest in all sectors for this type of opportunity, but there are barriers to implementation that need to be addressed.

People’s Choice (voted by conference attendees). Presenter: Heather Starr Fiedler, associate professor of multimedia, School of Communication, Point Park University. Title—Social Impact: Connecting Classroom and Community through Wood Street Communications. The initiative is a partnership between students in upper-level communications courses with non-profits in the region to produce communication materials in a mutually beneficial relationship. The goal is to serve at least 30 non-profits in the Pittsburgh region each semester, work with at least 25 students each semester, and produce successful, useful communications material.
South Region
East Carolina University. Title — MATCH-ECU Partnership. The partnership was created to address an epidemic of 33% of Americans and 50% of Eastern North Carolina children overweight or obese. Attesting to the significance of this effort can be seen that by estimates that by shifting 3% of overweight adults to healthy weight will yield $3 billion in annual savings. Since 2007, MATCH-Wellness partnerships have grown from two pioneers to 15 communities at 35 schools in three states, preventing an estimated 1,300 cases of adult obesity. MATCH-Wellness publications, including scholarly publications and web-based information, have increased dramatically and financial report has exceeded $3.5 million. — Information provided by Sharon Paynter, associate professor and interim director, Office of Public Service and Community Relations.

Northeast Region
Penn State University. Title — The Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness at Penn State. Numerous and extended deployments, chronic stress, loved ones in harm's way, and the physical and emotional wounds of war have placed heavy demands on military families. The Clearinghouse promotes research and outreach that ease these conditions. In the program's six-year history, through partnerships with U.S. departments of defense and agriculture and each military branch, focusing on several activities. These include (a) analyzing evidence from programs and practices for military families; (b) offering consultation, coaching, and continuing education for service professionals; and providing students with immersive learning opportunities to prepare them for research and practice in the field. Information provided by Keith R. Aronson, associate director, Social Science Research Institute and Children, Youth, and Families Consortium.

West Region
Portland State University. Title — Let Knowledge Serve: Portland State University and the Portland Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. For more than 25 years, Portland State and the Portland's Bureau of Planning and Sustainability have partnered to produce data for the city's waste management policy; climate change research; planning and executing an age-friendly city agenda; improved transit access; and assistance in placing Portland State students and interns in supporting neighborhood-level activities. Information provided by Mark Wubbold, senior policy analyst, president's office, Portland State University.
North Central Region
Purdue University. Title — Military Family Research Institute. The Institute partners with Star Behavioral Health Providers (SBHP) to strengthen community mental health services for military veterans and their families. SBHP provides training about military culture, common PTSD symptoms, evidence-based treatments, and a registry of trained providers. More than 75,000 hours of training have been recorded to some 8,000 behavioral health providers in seven states. More than 86% of the providers report using the program materials in their work with clients. Multiple funders have supported the program that has produced scholarly materials, peer-reviewed publications, congressional testimony, and federal legislation. Information provided by Steven R. Abel, associate provost for Engagement, Purdue University.

Exemplary Project Recognition Honors
Cornell University, for the Cornell Prison Exchange Program; New Mexico State University, for the La Semilla Food Center; University of Missouri, for TigerPlace: Community Partnership for Aging in Place; University of Nebraska-Omaha, for the UNO STEM Leadership Team and Citywide Stem Ecosystem Effort; the University of Tennessee-Knoxville for Appalachia Community Health and Disaster Readiness Project.

SELECTION COMMITTEES
Magrath Awards
Mary A. Papazian, chair; members, Valerie Osland Paton, chair, Council on Engagement and Outreach, Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities; Samory T. Pruitt, president, Engagement Scholarship Consortium; Patricia M. Sobrera, president, Academy of Community Engagement Scholarship; and Barbara Weitz, community partner, retired social work professor for whom the UNO Community Engagement Center is named.

Kellogg Awards
Steven Abel, Purdue University; Paul Brooks, University of Georgia; Elizabeth Burman, University of Tennessee-Knoxville; Kathy Campbell, University of Alaberta; Denae Doris, Tarleton State University; Tracy Eells, University of Louisville; Margee Ensign, Dickinson College; Birgit Green, Texas Tech University; Terri Heimlinger Ratcliff, North Carolina State University; Cathann Kress, Iowa State University; Stephen Myers, Ohio State University; Sharon Paynter, East Carolina University; Patricia Pardo-Olmos, California State University-San Marcos; Scott Reed, Oregon State University; Susan Short, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University; Richard Smith, Pennsylvania State University; Deborah Smith-Howell, University of Omaha-Nebraska; Louis Swanson, Colorado State University; Jude Valdez, University of Texas-San Antonio; Laurie Van Egeren, Michigan State University.
Mission and Description

The mission of the Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship (JCES) is to provide a mechanism through which faculty, staff, and students of academic institutions and their community partners may disseminate scholarly works from all academic disciplines. All forms of writing, analysis, creative approaches, and methodologies are acceptable for the journal. JCES is a peer-reviewed journal open to all disciplines. Its purpose is to integrate teaching, research, and community engagement in ways that address critical societal problems through a community-participatory process. Normal publication frequency is twice a year, though special issues on timely topics are published occasionally.
Manuscripts that advance the field of community-engaged scholarship, focus on community issues, and involve community partners and students will be given favorable consideration. Manuscripts should be free of all forms of bias. Submission of a manuscript that is accepted for publication implies commitment to publish in this journal. Manuscripts must have been submitted for exclusive publication in JCES and not simultaneously submitted elsewhere, and should not have been published elsewhere in substantially the same form. Authors in doubt about what constitutes prior publication should consult the editor at jces@ua.edu.

Manuscripts are sought that contain substance, context, and clear language, along with the relevant philosophical, historical, and theoretical principles that underly the work.

Submissions must be submitted electronically in Microsoft Word with a separate cover page containing the manuscript title, the author’s or authors’ names, position/rank/title, department/college/institution, mailing address, telephone number, and email address, and four to six topical/methodological keywords at the bottom. Indicate on the cover page the section of JCES for which the document is intended—Traditional, From the Field, Community Perspectives, Student Voices, or Book Review (see Types of Manuscripts). This is usually a straightforward decision, and no change of category will be made by the editors without first conferring with the corresponding author.

Our blind review process requires that two copies be submitted, one with author names and other identification information included on the cover page. This administrative copy must contain authors’ names, titles, institutions, mailing addresses, email addresses, and telephone numbers. This copy provides the essential information needed for publishing and administrative purposes. A second, masked copy, with author names and other identifying information removed, is sent to the reviewers, who make one of the following three recommendations to the editor: accept, revise and resubmit, or reject. Both the blind and non-blind copies must be submitted to jces@ua.edu.

All submissions and inquiries must be emailed to jces@ua.edu. Paper submissions will not be accepted. Text should be double-spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font. Each manuscript must include an abstract of no more than 150 words. Article length should not exceed 35 pages, including supplementary material such as tables, figures, photos, and graphics. Such material, essential to the research narrative of most projects, should be on separate pages following the text (one table/figure/photo per page), with their placement indicated within the text. All tables and figures must have a title and all photos must include captions. Photos should be sent as 300 dpi color images to the same email as the manuscript. Both manuscript and photos should be sent as attachments to the email. Because of costs, editors reserve the right to publish images in color or black and white, although as many as possible will be published in color.


Authors of accepted papers must obtain and provide to the editor on final acceptance all necessary permissions to reproduce in print and electronic form any copyrighted work, including photographs and other graphic images. Authors wishing to display video associated with their published document, should first upload the video to YouTube and then send the relevant link to jces@ua.edu.

Manuscripts that comply with our standards will be distributed for review within two to four weeks of submission. Consistent with a thorough scholarly review, authors will be notified of a decision in a timely manner.
Types of Manuscripts

All manuscripts (Traditional, From the Field, Community Perspectives, Student Voices, and Book Reviews) are accepted on an ongoing basis. All submissions and inquiries for all types of manuscripts should be sent to jces@ua.edu.

Traditional
Manuscripts for this section run the gamut of engagement research. Examples include theoretical and descriptive research employing a variety of research methods, from survey to content analysis, from experimental to historical, from grounded theory to case study. Topics range from mistakes and subsequent adjustments by research teams in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina; food insecurity causes and solutions; issues of Cooperative Extension in university-community partnerships; fostering individual and university resilience with at-risk youth; theoretical, conceptual, and methodological foundations of community engagement; research and evaluation issues within service-learning programs; how disasters can provide opportunities for research on civic engagement and service learning; community issues that inform political participation among college students; evaluating academic-community partnerships in matters of health, finance, education, politics, family, spirituality, and many, many more. Ninety percent of our submissions fall in the bread-and-butter category.

From the Field
A second important segment of the journal is devoted to less theoretical, but no less important, from-the-field research. This section of the journal, also refereed, is reserved for studies that are likely to have a practice or case-study orientation. Research that emphasizes best practices, practice wisdom, and applied knowledge is especially appropriate, with less emphasis on theoretical foundations. Examples from previous submissions include how being jailed affects the health of homeless women; social change resulting from the political, cultural, and economic systems of Indigenous peoples; how a university team of faculty and students established a thriving partnership in Tunisia; the development of contemporary engineering skills through service learning abroad; discovering that collaboration is the key to tourism in Southern Appalachia; how creating a health partnership network enriched a rural community; and many more.

Community Perspectives
While community partners may also serve as authors or co-authors of manuscripts in the first two categories, most community submissions to JCES fall in the Community Perspectives category. Community insight and resources are key elements in engaged scholarship, and JCES welcomes submissions that describe, analyze, assess, or offer critiques of community engagement activities. Community Perspectives are more informal and eclectic in topic, writing style, analysis, and presentation. Previous submissions include a federally funded grant that addressed obesity issues in the Alabama Black Belt; an interpretive essay about the opioid epidemic in Northern Kentucky; a model mental health partnership that other urban areas could replicate; and many others.

Student Voices
Students are involved in all categories of manuscripts accepted by JCES, but Student Voices is the section where their words receive special attention. In this section, students have explored how they came to discover the importance of engaged research in their educational development. They have commented on numerous special projects, highlighting the rewards and frustrations encountered. Examples include Al’s Pals, a superlative school-based mentoring relationship between college volunteers and elementary school students; a collaboration between undergraduate students and their faculty advisor in South Africa to help a community while expanding their own intellectual horizons; efforts by a group of students to educate other students about service and...
nonprofit organizations that help foster a lifetime of service commitment beyond graduation; and lessons learned from a small village health fair to further transform lives and embrace diversity through cultural synthesis. These and other submissions to Student Voices have added spice to the JCES menu and more such submissions are encouraged.

Book Reviews
The review of timely books devoted to the scholarship of engagement is essential to the advancement of the field. From the outset, the editor and book review editor of JCES set an ambitious goal of five or more books to be reviewed in each issue. Classic reviews have included Fitzgerald, Burack, and Seifer (Eds.) the several volumes of the Handbook of Engaged Scholarship; the role of anchor institutions in community engagement for economic development; several books on how the notion of “service” has transformed into “engagement”; how engaging parents and other constituencies breathes life into K–12 schools; and many others.

**JCES REVIEW PROCESS**

**Manuscript Receipt**
- Editor scans for style and documentation standards; requests revisions if necessary
- Editorial staff assigns manuscript number
- Editorial staff sends acknowledgment email to corresponding author (usually, but not always, the first author)
- Editor selects appropriate reviewers

**First Review**
- Editorial staff sends manuscript to reviewers, with review form, return due date
- Editorial staff sends reminder email one week after due date if review not yet received
- Editorial staff requests reviewers’ evaluation and rating forms

**Editor Options**
- Editor accepts manuscript (proceed to Edit for Publication)
- Editor sends corresponding author the recommended revisions and requests resubmission
- Editor rejects manuscript (end of process)

**Revise and Resubmit Instructions**
- Editorial staff notifies author of publication decision
- Editorial staff sends to corresponding author a letter regarding the decision, reviewer comments, manuscript with edits and tracked changes
- Editorial staff requests resubmission within four weeks

**Resubmitted Manuscript and Second Review**
- Editor scans for compliance with reviewer evaluation; if necessary, author is sent request for further revision
- Editorial staff sends to the original reviewers the revised manuscript, a copy of the original manuscript with editor’s and reviewers comments and tracked changes, the review form, along with a copy of the letter to the corresponding author
- Editorial staff requests return of second review within 2 weeks

**Editor Options Following Second Review**
- Editor accepts manuscript with minor revisions
- Editor accepts manuscript (proceed to Edit for Publication)

**Accept with Minor Revisions**
- Editor sends corresponding author notification of decision to accept with minor revisions and requests a final revision within 2 weeks
- Editorial staff notifies author of publication decision
- Editorial staff sends manuscript to reviewers, with review form, return due date

**Edit for Publication**
- Final editing and proof reading by editor and editorial staff
- Editorial staff sends proof to corresponding author
- Editorial staff negotiates editorial changes with corresponding author
- Editorial staff sends official copyright forms for corresponding author’s signature

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*Authors*’ names on all documents viewed by reviewers, including manuscripts, letters, emails, and other identifying information, are masked throughout the process.
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