12-20-2016

Developing Understandings of Collaborative Partnerships Between University and Community

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Introduction

When forming collaborative partnerships between community entities and universities, unique considerations arise. As we at the College of Public Service at the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) are discovering, questions that need thoughtful decision making come into play. For example, when incorporating community collaborations into our courses, we need to be cognizant of the effects on the learning process of our students, on the course curriculum, and, we need to work within the time limits imposed by the academic course semester. Moreover, in the true spirit of collaboration, our students as well as our faculty should have a voice in the development of the partnership projects which may pose challenges for a pre-determined syllabus. In collaborative partnerships focused on research, the inquiry and analysis should not be situated with the faculty researcher alone, but should be jointly developed among the partners. This brings into question the faculty member's established research agenda. As we engage in community partnerships, we are developing understandings about what it means for an academic institution to be involved in its community. In this "Voices from the Field" piece, we have articulated some reflections about our current work.

Who are we?

The University of Houston – Downtown College of Public Service has programs in Criminal Justice, Social Work, and Urban Education and is dedicated to preparing our students to excel in these professions. As noted on our website, "We believe that, through public service, an educated society creates thoughtful policies and practices to improve the lives of diverse populations." Within the last few years the College of Public Service has added a Center for Public Service and Family Strengths (CPSFS) and, in 2016, an Institute for Community Research. The CPSFS is a centralized place of outreach and a physical and conceptual location where faculty, community members, students, and staff can 1) meet to strategize and develop projects and funding initiatives, 2) plan and publicize our college speaker series on key issues related to our disciplines and work in the community, and 3) conceive and initiate new, or continue existing collaborative partnerships. The Institute for Community Research was added as part of our strategic planning and vision for interdisciplinary community-based research. This is a very new resource for us in the College of Public Service, and we are engaged in decision-making about ways to use it most effectively as we continue to develop ideas about collaborative partnerships and community-based research. We view community-based research with our partners as a way to extend the reach

of our collaborative partnerships as we codify the experiences and knowledge-building that is occurring. Faculty, students, and staff have been involved in service projects in the community and in some level of collaboration with community schools, agencies, or institutions for over a decade. It is only recently, in the last two years as we have begun to consider our work strategically and to plan together that we are beginning to think about ways to systematize and refine our collaborative partnerships and to consider how we might engage in *interdisciplinary* partnerships with community entities. It is only recently that we have begun to talk with one another about the changes in our perceptions of collaborative partnership.

How do we define collaborative partnership?

We acknowledge that our ideas about collaborative partnerships between a university and the community are dynamic and responsive. By dynamic, we mean that our frames of reference are malleable; we build and re-build our concepts about working within collaborative partnerships as we develop ways of identifying potential partners, of learning about the culture of the agency or institution, of engaging in the partnership, and then, of talking together about our challenges, successes, and evolving understandings. Winer and Ray (1994) describe a continuum of partnering relationships. *Cooperation* is characterized by "short-term informal relations that exist without any clearly defined mission, structure, or planning effort". *Coordination* involves partners in "…longer-term interaction around a specific effort or program. Coordination requires some planning and division of roles and opens communication channels between organizations…authority still rests with individual organizations, and…resources are made available to participants." *Collaboration* as described by Winer and Ray is marked by "a more durable and pervasive relationship," wherein "Participants bring separate organizations into a new structure with full commitment to a common mission." These relationships are characterized by clear communication and shared planning and resources. Winer and Ray add that the members of the collaborative partnership also share reputation, results and rewards (31). Through qualitative analysis of 80 works focused on collaboration and coalition, Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, and Allen (2001) developed a structure or framework representing the core competencies and processes needed for successful collaborative partnerships. They suggest "collaborative capacity" is needed at four levels among collaborative partners; "within their members, within their relationships, within their organizational structure, and within the programs they sponsor" (242). Some key understandings about successful collaborations emerging

from this study also reflect the realities of what we are finding in our coordination and/or collaborative partnerships. Specifically, that *members* are effective communicators who have positive attitudes about collaboration; that *relationships* are characterized by interdependency and diversity of knowledge, a shared vision of the problems and shared decision-making; that the *organizational structure* of the collaboration is based upon semi-formalized work processes and feedback loops allowing response to unforeseen changes; and finally, that *programs* have clear objectives to provide innovative service and solutions for unmet community needs. These collaborative capacities are similar to those in the social partnerships discussed by Billet, Ovens, Clemans and Seddon who note that over time social partnerships working on local issues and "community-building activities" are characterized by shared goals, relations with partners, capacity for partnership work, governance and leadership, and trust and trustworthiness (2007, 639).

How might collaborative partnerships engender community-based research?

As we are university based, our ideas about collaborative partnerships often include research aspects. Some of us, who come from a research background, have grappled with the variation between a study conceptualized fully by the researcher and in which the members of the community are participant/subjects and that of community based research in which the university partner listens to the members of the community in order to identify the unmet needs of the community, seeking a point of connection and potential mutual benefit. An example of a community based research project is one in which faculty members in our Department of Urban Education were approached by the Museum of Fine Arts Houston staff who were seeking assistance in evaluating their professional development programs for educators. This would be of benefit to university faculty as we, who were seeking ways to help our pre-service teachers identify community resources and design engaging curriculum would have the opportunity to become participant-observers in the professional development offered by the museum through the summer and fall of a single year. The knowledge we gained could be infused in our own course curriculum and shared with our developing urban educators. There would also be some benefit to the teachers who were participating in the museum's program as their work and their voices would become a part of the record and their experiences would inform the future development efforts of the Museum of Fine Arts Houston. As the months progressed and our museum partners talked with us about our written observations, artifacts, and analysis of the reflective journals of the teachers participating

in the professional development sequence provided by the museum, they asked us to talk with them about our research processes. We began having additional meetings and exchanges on aspects of qualitative research, analysis of naturalistic data, the development of emerging themes and others of interest to the museum staff. As a result, they began to envision new ways to document what they were learning and disseminate it among their professional colleagues. As is sometimes the case, this particular collaborative partnership ended before all of the goals were met and before we could use what we had learned to decide where we would go next; two of the four key partners left their current positions and were unable to continue. At the university, we were able to infuse what we had learned into our existing curriculum as appropriate and to formalize connections between our pre-service teachers and museum resources.

How might collaborative partnerships engender the learning process?

While we may work as one or several faculty members from the university in collaborative partnerships with a community agency or entity, we are often searching for a collaborative partnership that can include our students as active members. We are a college made up of faculty many of whom strongly believe in engaging our students in high-impact, hands-on, and lived experiences in order to instill in them the core concepts of our disciplines, including the belief that we serve others. It is our mission to prepare our students with the skills and ways of thinking they will need in order to be successful in their future professions and to simultaneously provide them with deep and meaningful conceptual learning. As we consider including community-based projects into our teaching, we face a mind-shift similar to that faced as we consider including community-based projects into our research. If we strive to create collaborative rather than cooperative or coordinated partnerships to infuse in our instruction, we need to adopt a model that includes shared planning and shared resources with our partners as well as mutual responsiveness. This process, while fluid, may result in degrees of ambiguity in our course curricula. As with collaborative research, we also need to listen to our partner as we design learning activities for our students. To be truly collaborative in nature, the learning experiences that we offer our students should be mutually beneficial. The conception of the learning experiences should not rest solely in the hands of the instructors, but rather should be jointly constructed. As with collaborative research, this approach to course design challenges the traditional teaching norms with which most university instructors are comfortable. In our college we are striving to expand these norms.

How Can We Acculturate our Students?

Our college had an opportunity, in the summer of 2016 to reach out to entering freshmen who indicated that they intended to major in one of our programs. For these entering freshmen, the University of Houston Downtown implemented an innovative approach to orient and motivate these new students. For the first time the new entering freshman were required to attend a week-long summer orientation for the purpose of integrating them into the life and culture of the university community. Because community involvement is integral to UHD as a whole, it was integral to this university orientation as well. The orientation program included an Engagement Immersion session whose objective was to expose students to the many community service and service-learning opportunities open to UHD students. However, at UHD the heart of service learning beats in the College of Public Service. In light of the special role of Service Learning in the college, the freshman students intending to major in one of the disciplines represented in the college attended a special college level Engagement Immersion program that introduced them to the stimulating community work in which their intended college is specifically engaged. This session allowed us to begin to instill in our future students the specific values of our college and to entice them to solidify their intended majors through exposure to the many opportunities that our college offers in community engagement. For these reasons we chose to plan our own college Engagement Immersion session rather than have our intended students attend the overall university session.

During our Engagement Immersion session, College of Public Service faculty representing all three of our majors, Criminal Justice, Social Work, and Urban Education presented six ongoing projects based on community partnerships. It was made clear that this was by no means an exhaustive list of opportunities, but rather a sampling for the new students of the varied kind of work in which they can participate. Maria Bhattacharjee and Poonam Gulati presented their engagement work at Crockett Elementary School in the Houston Independent School District where bilingual pre-service teachers and students in science classes work together with teachers and children to enhance science instruction in bilingual programs. Judith Harris explained how she and her students are impacting the Harris County Sheriff's Office Re-entry Program. John Kelly and Colin Dalton talked about their Juvenile Detention Writing Project where their students work with youth in the juvenile detention center school, teaching them self-expression and reflection though creative writing. Rebecca Pfeffer discussed her work in the Houston Community to curb human trafficking and how her students help in those efforts. Bernard Pohl

presented his work with the African American Library where his students conduct projects to enhance this new historical resource at Gregory School. And lastly, Leigh Van Horn described how she and her students plan and implement literacy activities for parents and children at the House of Tiny Treasures, a pre-school for homeless children. The incoming freshmen asked many insightful questions about these projects and were clearly stimulated by the variety and innovative nature of the work. They also were excited by the possibilities on the horizon for them to take active roles with their new college faculty. The incoming students also shared how they thus far already had been engaged in community work, primarily in high school and in teen-age extracurricular activities. The students then divided into six groups, one for group for each of the presenters, where they discussed the projects in more depth. In order to begin the collaborative spirit in which our college operates, we provided each group with a blank giant jigsaw puzzle and drawing materials. We asked each group to work together to agree upon a theme related to the project under discussion and to visually represent that theme on the puzzle pieces. They were encouraged to use images, text, symbols, or whatever else they could dream up, to create a puzzle which would be subsequently presented as a gift to each respective agency. Needless to say, their creations more than met our expectations.

What are some Specific Benefits to Learning and to the University Context?

As noted above, the main objective of the college Engagement Immersion session was to acculturate our new College of Public Service students into the spirit of community engagement and to motivate them to participate in these and the many other community projects offered by their new college. It is a safe assumption that these incoming students, intending to major in one of the programs offered in the college, are already committed to helping professions and to community engagement. However, they may be less aware of the benefits that service-learning offers the learning process itself. The hands-on experiences and the bridging of theory and practice pave the way for the deep learning advocated by constructivist theory. In the sections that follow, Bernardo Pohl, Rebecca Pfeffer, and Judith Harris reflect on the central aspect of the learning as it emerges in their collaborations with students and community partners.

Bernardo Pohl's description of his students' encounter with the African-American Library at the Gregory School encapsulates a learning experience much different from what ensues in a typical classroom-based social studies methods class. The students, their professor and the community partner together develop their curriculum or project, at the site.

This approach aligns with the collaborative model discussed above. In addition, encouraging student input is empowering and motivating and is the impetus of student-centered instruction. Moreover, the learning experience described below is not simply an assignment, it has far-reaching meaning.

Pohl writes, in the fall of 2015, Leigh Van Horn, Interim Dean of the College of Public Service at the University of Houston-Downtown, approached me to discuss the possibility of a partnership with African-American Library at the Gregory School. She had previously worked on a project with them to provide transcripts of oral history interviews of the residents of the Fourth Ward, Houston, Texas. During meetings with Valerie Wade of the African-American Library at the Gregory School it became clear that there were many opportunities for connections between the African-American Library and the College of Public Service. The idea was to establish a series of collaborations and projects that would enhance the purpose and community outreach of the library. These projects and collaborations were varied: transcribing interviews, archiving primary documents, and developing lessons plans. At the request of the Dean, I agreed to an initial visit to the library to hold a meeting and discuss a possible partnership.

From the moment I entered this building, I was amazed at the historical richness of this library. Valerie Wade, the library's oral historian and archivist, took the time to explain the purpose of the library, the history of the Gregory School, and the main exhibitions. She also took the time to explain her reasons for reaching out to us at UHD. Her idea was to find new ways to utilize the exhibits and the galleries, especially to attract schools and districts in order to promote the variety of resources offered by the library. Immediately, ideas started to flow naturally and as we continued to talk there were many plans proposed. I saw clearly the opportunity for students to be engaged in a historical place that could bring history alive as few places could do. The rich history of the place, the excellent exhibits in the galleries, and the place the library holds in the surrounding community of the Fourth Ward were perfect ingredients for a social studies activity for my students. As a result, Valerie Wade and I agreed that I would bring my morning section of EED 3311, Social Studies Methods, to visit the library and explore the possibility of a project.

The first visit to the library happened in late September of 2015. During the initial visit, the students were introduced to the history of the Gregory School, the various exhibits and galleries of the library, and the historical importance of the neighborhood. The immediate reaction from the students was very positive; they were excited to be part of this project.

Moreover, this was a totally new experience for them, as many of them did not know the history of the place, the historical beginnings of the African American community in Houston, and the post-Civil War history of the city.

After the tour the entire class had a meeting. We discussed the various activities that we could do in the library and the many ways this space could be used. Without a doubt, the exhibition galleries had a major impact on the students. They were amazed at the timelines of the place, the vintage pictures of life in Fourth Ward, the artifacts found during the excavation of the land, and the stories behind the people that created this community. The idea surfaced to create lessons that could be used in the galleries, especially since Valerie Wade expressed the need for specific ways to engage visiting students and teachers from schools in the Greater Metropolitan Houston area. Therefore, we decided that we would create lessons for the library based upon the artifacts within the African-American Library at the Gregory School. It was agreed that this would be the semester project for the students in my university course on Social Studies methods in urban classrooms.

The students visited the African American Library at the Gregory School a total of four times. The first visit was an initial tour of the library. This visit gave the students a chance to experience that space, familiarize with the exhibits, and learn about the history of the place. During the second visit, students were asked to explore the galleries on their own. Additionally, they were asked to form their groups. Finally, as a class, we discussed the various activity ideas that each group had in mind: scavenger hunts, puzzles, games, and trivia questions exercises. We also brainstormed about other ideas not previously mentioned: the use of sound, videos, and multimedia. The third and the fourth visits were independent working time in the gallery.

The final presentation was held at the end of the semester in December at the end of the fall semester 2015. The students presented their work in front of the library's staff, Van Horn, and other guests from the community. The presentations were excellent. The activities ranged from scavenger hunts to gallery games.

There are very few words that can describe the experience and partnership that has developed with the African-American Library at the Gregory School. This is more than a high impact learning, field experience, or service activity. It is a genuine place where students can grow intellectually, emotionally, and pedagogically. For many, this was perhaps the first place where the story of their city did come alive for them. This was the first time that many of them had the chance to explore their own roots.

And for a couple of the students, this became a moment for discovering the forgotten history of their very own neighborhood.

The benefits from such a project are abundant: the university gets to establish an important partnership with the community, the students get to explore their history, and the library gets to further cement their legacy in the city. In the end, we all benefit from this, as we continue to cherish the historical legacy of the Space City and Fourth Ward. The partnership with African-American Library at the Gregory School continues. Future endeavors discussed includes the following: creating lesson plans with the archives, developing professional development activities for teachers, and pursuing grants for the future use of technology.

Rebecca Pfeffer likewise notes the deep learning that ensues as she engages her students in her research on human trafficking. Pfeffer writes, the most important step we can take to better identify cases of human trafficking in the United States is to increase community awareness of the problem. Excellent anti-trafficking legislation and victim services are crucial, but they are meaningless if communities are not able to identify victims of trafficking in the first place. At the University of Houston – Downtown, we are working to increase comprehensive understanding of the problem of human trafficking among our students through education, awareness-raising activities, and community engagement so that our students can educate their networks and increase local awareness and identification of human trafficking.

Human trafficking is a form of modern-day slavery in which a person is compelled to perform labor or commercial sex due to elements of force, fraud or coercion. Although it is a problem of national and international concern, it is increasingly understood that both sex and labor trafficking are prevalent in the greater Houston area. Following the passage of federal anti-trafficking legislation in 2000, Texas was the first state to pass anti-human trafficking legislation in 2003. Houston, specifically, has pioneered anti-trafficking efforts, and was among the first cities to receive federal funding to improve the local response to human trafficking. Though we have seen excellent policy changes to address the problem of trafficking, a critical first step to implementing these laws, pursuing charges against traffickers, and connecting victims with protection and support programming is the identification of trafficking cases in the community.

Because of the inherently hidden nature of human trafficking victimization, these cases do not typically come to the attention of law enforcement from anyone involved in the exploitation—the trafficker, the victim, or the person(s) benefitting from the exploitive labor. Obviously, traffickers and those benefitting from the sexual or labor services of the

victims are not likely to alert law enforcement about trafficking. Similarly, there are a multitude of reasons that victims do not come forward and report their plight to law enforcement, including that some victims do not self-identify as victims, some fear law enforcement or fear of retaliation from traffickers or people in their networks. It is essential that community members understand what human trafficking is, how it is different from other phenomena such as human smuggling, and the signs that a person might be trafficked so that they can alert law enforcement to the possibility of trafficking.

As a scholar of human trafficking, I find that the best way to teach individual students about the reality of human trafficking is to engage them in my own research on human trafficking in the local community. To date, three students have worked as research assistants on projects related to human trafficking. Not only does this foster deep and meaningful engagement with the topic, but it also introduces students to potential future employers in the community.

In another instructional example, Judith Harris addresses the powerful learning that results from engaging her students in the development of a service learning course and in the realization that the curriculum of a service learning course is dynamic rather than static. This stimulates authentic and transformative learning and by its very nature, adds a degree of empowering ambiguity to the course and the learning objectives. Harris shares that while one does not necessarily have to "hit it out of the ball park" when teaching a service learning class, it is crucial to learn from mistakes. An article by Rumsey and Nihiser (2011) echoes this do or die attitude. Students often become lethargic, lose their sense of purpose and are unsure of the class direction. This is especially true when beginning a new service learning start-up class. Whereas, most university classes use a clear and concise syllabus, the nature of service learning is that of change. Therefore, when a new project is in its infancy it is important to incorporate students to share in every task, conversations with stakeholders, emails, group-think, and most importantly lessons learned from previous senior seminar projects. These conversations will ensure the student has access to what it takes to make the initial and all important academic scaffold for the project.

Notwithstanding, a service learning course is a unique commitment between the professor and student; mutual trust between stakeholders, and support from the university administration. The syllabus for a service learning class is a living document as it constantly, and consistently changes to meet the needs of the community. Effective communication is an essential skill for all entering into this form of student learning. While,

Womble and Adams (2016) discuss service learning in the context of it being used as a teaching tool. The authors claim service learning has not been adequately researched, therefore, positive outcomes from such courses are still not known. On the contrary, the benefits of service learning courses have been researched (Schelbe, Petracchi, & Weaver, 2014; Bureau, Cole, & McCormick, 2014) and have shown substantial increases in student retention and learning.

The incorporation of community service projects into university curricula enhances the learning process by offering intensified interactions, authenticity, invigorating uncertainty and personal meaning. Faculty make connections for themselves and for their students to the challenges of practice in and among these disciplines of criminal justice, social work, and urban education as they infuse their content and courses with realism from the field. The real world as well as theoretical research inform their teaching. Students and their professors literally construct knowledge as they conduct research at the partner sites.

Yet community partnerships benefit universities in additional ways as well. They open avenues of communication between potential employers of graduates and faculty so students can be better prepared for the workplace. Employers can hire graduates who already have initial experiences that minimize training needs. The university profits from more visibility in the community which enhances recruitment of future students. And most important, students are making an impact in their community as they simultaneously earn their degrees.

What are Some Unanticipated Benefits?

As we continue to engage in collaborative community partnerships that include both research and instruction, we note additional unanticipated benefits arise. In the example below it is apparent that when using emerging curricula and student-centered instruction, the learning process is infused with unforeseen outcomes and discoveries. As evidenced by Pfeffer's collaborative project, students gained employment and joined doctoral programs. Moreover, new university courses and study abroad options developed.

Pfeffer notes, one student worked as a research assistant for course credit through an independent study. This study involved analyzing prostitution incident reports from the Houston Police Department for indicators of human trafficking. As part of his coursework, he presented some preliminary findings about our research at a university student research conference. Upon graduating, he moved on to a graduate program where he intends to focus on human trafficking. Another student, who is working on the same project, has decided to apply to the Houston Police

Department to pursue an assignment in the Human Trafficking Unit upon his graduation at the end of this year. He has met with a Lieutenant who has offered to mentor him during his application and academy experiences. Indeed, individual student involvement in community-based research projects is equally beneficial to the researcher, the students, and the community agencies we work with.

At the departmental level, the UHD Department of Criminal Justice and Social Work began offering a special topics course in the spring of 2015 focused on human trafficking. This course focuses on the prevalence, measurement, and response to both sex and labor trafficking in local, national, and international contexts. Throughout the semesters it has been offered to date, multiple community partners were invited to speak with the classes, including representatives from Homeland Security, the Houston Police Department Human Trafficking Unit, victim service providers, and local public policy advocacy organizations that lobby for improved anti-trafficking legislation in Texas.

Outside of the classroom, supported by an internal university grant, students participated in a "Human Trafficking in Houston" bus tour, led by a local advocacy organization involved in anti-human trafficking work called Children at Risk. Notably, the experience was so impactful that students from the class organized and raised money to support a second bus tour a year later so that more UHD students would have the opportunity to learn about cases of human trafficking that have occurred right in our neighborhoods. Students in this class also took the initiative to create a resource pamphlet about the definition and indicators of human trafficking that they distributed around the university campus.

At the university level, efforts have been made to increase community awareness about human trafficking. In early 2016, UHD's College of Public Service sponsored a panel discussion about human trafficking that was open to members of the UHD community and the general public as well that included representatives from the Houston Mayor's Office, the Houston Police Department, the U.S. Attorney's Office, a victim service provider, and a survivor of human trafficking.

Additionally, the Department of Criminal Justice and Social Work organized a study abroad trip to the Netherlands and Sweden focused on anti-human trafficking policies to encourage deeper engagement with the subject. Twenty-two students and two faculty members attended the trip, and met with representatives from Dutch and Swedish government and non-governmental organizations to learn about alternative approaches to confronting the problem of human trafficking. A corresponding course, Exploring Criminal Justice in the Netherlands and Sweden, encouraged

students to compare the Dutch, Swedish and American legislation around human trafficking and to critically analyze best practices in each of the three cultural contexts.

Students in Judith Harris' senior seminar classes also enjoyed employment and training opportunities. As Harris notes, today, service learning and community engagement are a permanently embedded syllabus requirement for one of the Senior Seminar classes at the University of Houston Downtown, Department of Criminal Justice and Social Work. The course was officially approved by the Service Learning Committee on Monday, June 29, 2015. The core project for this course was initially focused on the Harris County Sheriff's Office (HCSO) reentry program. As a testament to the student's work, the HCSO reentry program identified students they wished to hire and train as case managers. In addition, students continued to volunteer on a daily basis after school to gain further experience in the correctional arena.

Our partners too, have experienced some unanticipated benefits. This is especially true for those partnerships that are longstanding and that change responsively over time. In the following description of a collaboration with Harmony Public Schools, Van Horn demonstrates the unanticipated benefits that arose for our community partner as well as for us at the university.

Several years ago our university entered into a partnership with the City of Houston and other community agencies and institutions including the Houston Public Library to create activities and experiences in a month-long celebration of our diverse citizenry called Citizenship Month. As a faculty member in the College of Public Service and specialist in literacy and curriculum and instruction, Van Horn was asked to collaborate with Harmony Public Schools, a large charter school system, and sites within the Houston Independent School District (HISD) where children who had recently immigrated to the United States were served. Partners indicated that they wanted to build on the current practice of having children write poetry related to their citizenry. For the next two years, Van Horn developed a unit of study including resources and learning experiences on topics of poetry, citizenry and identity (year one), and poetry, citizenry and empathy (year two). One hundred and thirty middle school and high school teachers from Harmony Public Schools came to the university to collaborate with Van Horn for two days each summer. The teachers were provided with the books and materials they would need to adapt the units of study for their students. Van Horn traveled to the HISD schools and met individually with teachers in their classrooms, studying the work that was ongoing and then listening as the teacher thought about what might work for his or her students' needs

and what would align with the framework of the district curriculum. Just after the culmination of the first year's session, Van Horn's role in the college changed. It became increasingly challenging for her to engage in this collaborative partnership while serving as the Interim Dean for the College of Public Service. The city-wide collaborative partnership for Citizenship Month was evolving as new members came on and some of the previous members left the partnership. The Harmony Public Schools group had a strong desire to continue the collaborative professional development of their teachers in the summer session at UHD. We met and discussed options for making connections to the work being done in other university partnerships to collect oral histories from the members of our surrounding communities. We made the decision to focus the sessions on oral history. Van Horn agreed to introduce the event and asked Beth Secor, a lecturer in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences if she would participate. Beth Secor was involved in an ongoing project between her freshman students and students in our English Language Institute here at the university. The students interviewed one another and then took portrait photographs of one another; the photographs were well executed compositions and innovative reflections of what the interviewer had learned about his or her subject. Beth agreed to share her work with the teachers from the Harmony Public Schools.

As we continued to talk together we foregrounded the collaborative aspect of our previous sessions and discussed the importance of providing leadership opportunities for Harmony Public School teachers who seemed to be ready to take on the role of developing curriculum and sharing it with their colleagues. Keri Bell, the Director of English Language Arts, Grades 6-12, for Harmony Public Schools, reached out to a select group of teachers, inviting them to be involved. All five teachers agreed to participate; Kristy Abusaid, Harmony School of Advancement, Sarah Connelly, Harmony School of Science, Carlene Dorsey, Harmony School of Excellence, Rebecca Hall, Harmony School of Science, and Nicole Kawaja, Harmony School of Discovery. For the first time, we included UHD student participants, representatives from student organizations in our Department of Urban Education teacher preparation program. A group of six middle school social studies educators from a neighboring HISD school, Marshall Middle Academy of Fine Arts, Social Studies, were also invited to participate. Two of the practicing teachers participating, Nicole Kawaja from Harmony School of Discovery and Miguel Flores from Marshall Middle Academy are also graduates of our Urban Education program. Van Horn noted that the sessions epitomized what we want to see in professional development for teachers. "We had a large gathering of teachers who are

clearly intellectually and emotionally engaged in providing educational experiences that are relevant and authentic to the students in their classrooms. This was compounded by the fact that these teachers were guided in the consideration, discussion, and experiential learning by their peers…individuals whose classrooms they can visit and with whom they can continue the dialogue!"

Within weeks after the professional development sessions the members of this collaborative partnership met for lunch and considered future directions. The teachers who presented found this to be a positive experience and have volunteered to do it again. We want to invite five additional teachers to participate with them. We plan to design the inquiry/learning experiences around two essential questions that will be decided upon by the team of teacher presenters. During this initial meeting we began making plans to collect data and share it with one another, to begin looking for ways to maintain communication through the use of shared documents and commentary systems, and finally, to begin to work together to reflect on the data, write about, and share our experiences at professional conferences for teacher educators and/or English/Language Arts teachers.

Other collaborative partnerships have expanded and evolved considerably. The partnership between Judith Harris and her students in the senior seminar capstone course and the Harris County Sheriff's Office Re-entry Program unexpectedly expanded over time into new territories. Harris describes this expansion as follows, noting that over a period of five years the vision for change became a priority for this important capstone experience. We now have many ongoing community relationships and each semester we are building new ones. Agency needs are always changing; therefore, the needs of the class also must change. While the academic framework of the course is well established, we have to be flexible to the needs of the community and the many agency groups with whom we are working.

New service learning opportunities often come from the spectrum of known agencies. More often than not, service learning opportunities come from having a robust, and innovative university brand. Most agencies are aware of UHD, and the strong ties the university has cultivated with community engagement, service learning and volunteering throughout the city. Therefore, agencies are eager to connect with and be part of this growing tapestry of shared experiences within the city.

The new service learning project with Service Employment Redevelopment (SER) Jobs for Progress which began in the fall of 2016 is a testimony to the spontaneous interaction between the university administration, academia and agency practitioners. All it took was an email

from a third party asking if the senior seminar class would be interested in a new partnership. SER is part of the Employment and Training Administration, Department of Labor Training to Work 3 – Adult Reentry Initiative (TTW3).

SER and the senior seminar class quickly entered into a partnership which will provide SER with students who are in a curriculum based service learning environment. The goal of this partnership is to provide the full range of services to all eligible TTW3 project clients. SER has asked senior seminar to provide the following:
- Reentry initiatives as part of a service learning model collaboration
- Work with SER staff to provide support/resources for enrolled clients (ex-offenders).
- Make presentations and assess clients.
- Provide pertinent information to client's case/success this is while adhering to confidentiality protocols, requirements and securing release of information clearance and consent.

SER will provide the following:
- Provide skilled case management and job coaching service learning opportunities focused on engaging clients to create and meet project objectives and goals.
- Provide learning opportunities for student service learners to acquire job development and job placement experience with ex-offender special population.

What are some Unexpected Challenges?

It must be expected that collaborative partnerships are more often than not laden with procedures and processes that are necessary for the projects to take place. Each partnership is unique in its demands and procedural requirements. For example, before a pre-service teacher can observe in a public school, a criminal history check must be run and the student must be cleared. When working with youths at the Juvenile Detention Center, the checks are even more extensive. In planning for Harris' project regarding the HCSO Re-entry program, she notes that students who participated did so under HCSO guidelines. However, student participation within the jail is restricted. Therefore, for this particular service learning course to be successful students were offered alternatives outside the jail facility.

We have learned that patient planning for all necessary paperwork to be processed with the partner agency needs to be addressed up front so that unrealistic expectations do not hamper the project. Moreover, participating partners often need to overcome the fact that many agencies and faculties undergo turnover. It can be quite disconcerting to develop a

working relationship with an agency partner, or for an agency partner to develop a relationship with a faculty member, only to discover that now there is someone new with whom to collaborate. This was noted above in the collaboration between our college and the Museum of Fine Arts. However, these challenges, as difficult and as frustrating as they may be, are overshadowed by the powerful benefits that collaborative community partnership bring to all partners.

Conclusion

During our strategic planning session in the college, it was suggested by faculty members that we may be ready to identify partners and sites within the surrounding community where we can work in an interdisciplinary fashion across our academic disciplines. A faculty member from another college in the university who has a long-time partnership with multiple agencies serving homeless youth asked us to consider where this partnership can best reside within the university. We scheduled a meeting between our university level community engagement liaison and a member of our Social Work faculty to clarify the work being done in a partnership developing in the Third Ward. Students who are involved in a senior thesis project worked inside our Institute for Community Research to document through film the work they are doing within a developing partnership. We exist in a constant and recursive state of knowledge building as we work together to create collaborative partnerships that are innovative, meaningful, and life changing for the members of our community and our university.

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