

University-Community Partnerships: Food for Thought

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Agenda

- Review seminar themes
- Discuss inherent complexities within anchor institutions and community partnerships
- Discuss theoretical frameworks from relevant literature about partnership complexities
- Offer key questions to facilitate stronger relationships between anchor institutions and stakeholders

Seminar Guiding Questions

- What have been the strategies among various entities - nonprofits, community colleges, 4-year colleges, charter schools, alternative schools, corporate employer models- that enhance the career development and workforce preparation of underserved youth?
- Should and, if so, how do universities and other anchor institutions in a city work to complement and support such initiatives with the resources and capacities they have?

Themes from Seminar

- **Providing** services (college counseling, financial help, career development) are just one piece of the puzzle - systemic challenges continue to exist
- **Coordinating** programs and pathways into postsecondary education – can promote student success on multiple levels
- **Educating/training** students and young people – offering stackable/micro-credentials and an array of professional development experiences
- **Convening** or serving as intermediaries – participating organizations have played an essential role in coordinating councils and collaboratives

Plight of the Anchor Strategy

- Tremendous resources to leverage and can be highly influential in shaping local economies, geography, and standards of living
- Deep rooted tensions within and between community and university partners— the nature of partnership, the context and history of place of partnership
 - Appropriate forms of engagement e.g. land development, jobs, community schools
 - Identifying the appropriate roles of institutions
 - Identifying the right processes and structures

- **Resource Allocation vs. Resource Misalignment:** “[...]so one of the things I’ve experienced in this role is that, when everyone wants to help without asking what help is needed[...]so, you know, one of my challenges trying to realize, even just from like a political standpoint, to realize what[...]this is an important partner that’s come in that has a lot of weight and prestige behind them or, you know, **they’re lookin’ to do a lot of things and a lot of times those things don’t necessarily align with what the community needs or what the kids may need so we have to kinda – how do you make it mutually beneficial?** (Penn University-Assisted Community School staffer)
- **Neighborhood Revitalization vs. Historical Distrust:** “[...]the University of Penn wanted to expand- all they did, they bought up a lot the neighborhood and pushed a lot of the African Americans who were in this area further, um, to, um up towards the Bottom and **they call it the Black Bottom so it’s like a really blighted area, but the university kinda just said ‘We’re expanding, eminent domain kinda thing so there’s been a acrimonious relationships**[...]even my grandparents and my parents remember that time where people kinda displaced[...] so it kinda makes people a little hesitant to say, **‘Oh, we’ll welcome you with open arms so you guess we can get resources’ so, but then it’s the Ivy League with privilege and those who have not and how do you kind of, you know, cuz history says it’s like, ‘Oh, like the ones that have not are gonna get the short end of the stick so that’s been a huge barrier** that I believe I’ve helped to, um, you know change that[...]“(Penn University-Assisted Community School staffer)

- **Expertise vs. Engaging in School Context:** “So when they [a Penn School] provide those resources they don't think into what would those people, those groups, um, those demographics, what can we provide and how can we, um, provide the resources to support them? So, instead of digging deeper into it, they said let's provide the resources[....]And that isn't looked into as part of the process of-- You see what is needed and let's put some resources into play [...] That's where -and I try--and I support them whatever way I can because I know that they really want to do, you know, ‘That's what I went to school for, I want to do this work and don't understand why people aren't[...]', um, **because it's excellent, the programming is excellent, the thought behind it, but there's a disconnect, why aren't we connecting? And then the school is not very good at that either because they're so busy doing everything else that they're doing, um, and that's where there's a disconnect there.** (Penn University-Assisted Community School Parent Leader)

University-Community Partnerships as “Fields of Paradox”

Top down institutional presence	vs.	"bottom up" grassroots orientation
Improving relationship quality		Increasing organizational efficiency
Exposing unequal power relations		Strengthening trust
Fostering egalitarianism		Respecting hierarchies
Transformational goals		Tangible achievements
Achieving a common/shared morale		Respecting multiplicity of identities
Discipline for long-term involvement		Generating permanent innovation

Adapted from Strier, R. (2014). Fields of paradox: university-community partnerships. *Higher Education*, 68, 155-165.

Implications and Limitations for Anchors

- University-community partnerships are inherently complex, difficult, have multiple entry points, and layers of engagement (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Moore, 2014)
- Uneven power dynamics between universities and communities at heart of tensions between stakeholders (LeChasseur, 2014; Gronski & Pigg, 2000; Moore, 2014; Strier, 2010; Strier, 2014; Wiewel & Lieber, 1998)
- Universities may benefit more from engagement efforts than targeted communities (Strier, 2014)
- Anchor institution idea is one of several ways to conceptualize university engagement
- Identifying the appropriate positionality in a larger, regional-centric, cross-sector collaborative e.g., Collective Impact Framework (Kania & Kramer, 2011; The Strive Network, 2012).

Towards Democratic Engagement

	Civic Engagement (Focus on Activity and Place)	Democratic Civic Engagement (Focus on Purpose and Process)
Community Relationships	Partnerships and mutuality; Deficit-based understanding of communities	Reciprocity; Asset-based understanding; Academic work done with the public
Knowledge Production/Research	Applied, but unidirectional flow of knowledge	Inclusive, collaborative, problem-oriented, multidirectional
Epistemology	Distinction b/w knowledge producers and consumers; university at center of public problem solving	Co-creation of knowledge; university as part of ecosystem of knowledge production
Political Dimension	Apolitical engagement	Engagement that facilitates an inclusive, collaborative, and deliberative democracy
Outcome	Knowledge generation and dissemination through community involvement	Community change that results from co-creation of knowledge

Food for Thought

- Who are you targeting and why?
- How are benefits and/or outcomes to universities and communities framed? And who currently frames what those benefits are?
- How do you operationalize democratic civic engagement?
- Are the core purposes of universities in conflict with community long-term development, improvement, and positive change?
- How can engagement practices achieve sustained and institutionalized community change rather than project- or initiative-based practices?

Suggested Readings

- Bringle, R.G., & Hatcher, J. (2002). Campus-community partnerships: The terms of engagement. *Journal of Social Issues, 58*(3), 503-516.
- Kania, J., & Kramer, M. (2011). Collective impact. *Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter 2011*, p. 36-41.
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- Hodges, R. A. & Dubb, S. (2012). *The road half traveled: University engagement at a crossroads*. East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press.
- Moore, T. L. (2014). Community–university engagement: A process for building democratic communities. *ASHE Higher Education Report, 40*(2), 1–12. doi:10.1002/aehe.20014
- Saltmarsh, J., & Hartley, M. (Eds).(2011). *To Serve a Larger Purpose: Engagement for democracy and transformation of higher education*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
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