

Convergent/Divergent Perceptions of Faculty and Community Partners' Collaborative Service-Learning Projects

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study of the perceptions of pairs of faculty and community partners who worked together on service-learning projects, reveals a good deal of convergence on their understandings of the goals, work done, and products/outcomes of their projects. Significant divergence did exist on different aspects of these projects based on partner involvement with one side of the exchange or the other. Faculty emphasized impacts on students and often seemed unaware of the impacts on organizations and community, while community partners seemed more focused on their organizations and the community more broadly. As service-learning practitioners are urged to create sustainable, egalitarian partnerships that incorporate the views of both parties, these results suggest that partners make explicit their goals so that each may benefit from students' work, and at the same time create a meaningful relationship. This seems to require extensive debriefing at the end of projects. Such a step would both enhance the value of participation for the partners and enrich students' and faculty views of the projects' worth, increasing sustainability of the relationship over time.

The benefits of service-learning for students have been widely reported (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Astin, 2000; Jacoby, 2003; Blouin & Perry, 2009). Lesser known are the benefits for faculty and community partners, but recent research indicates that service-learning provides the opportunity for both faculty and their partners to learn from each other, share understanding of goals and create new knowledge because of their collaborative efforts (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Harrison et al., 2013). Beyond these direct benefits is a model of service-learning that valorizes equitable negotiating power between faculty and community partners that results in achieving mutual goals (Nasmyth et al., 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2019). An early step in this process is coming to agreement about the purpose and outcomes of projects. Despite this, each partner can enter the relationship with differing goals, competing commitments and time pressures that can prevent full engagement. This qualitative analysis examines the extent to which community partners and faculty agree on the impact of their shared projects on student learning, benefits for community agencies and their clients, contributions to the broader community and advancement of social justice. Agreement between partners is a first step in equalizing power between the partners and working together toward a common goal.

The Collaborative Process

The literature on faculty/community partnerships in service-learning stresses the need for community partners to have a voice in all phases of a project. Trebil-Smith and Shields (2018) emphasized early involvement with community partners, close attention to the goals of service-learning and the organization's mission and offering closure at the end of a project (Rinaldo, et al., 2015). "...the benefits are possible for both partners but only when universities work alongside agency leaders to plan for and recognize the considerable time expectations of student learners and the impact of service learners on organizations" (Littlepage, et al., 2012, p. 317). In this collaborative process, Dempsey (2010) recommends that partners spend more time defining the partnership, developing a sense of common identity, addressing existing social and material inequalities to "...actively identify and mitigate these inequalities" (p. 381). Equality in partnerships is essential, argue Zimmerman et al., (2019), to ensure that projects truly meet the needs of the community, something the partners Cronley, Madden, and Davis (2015) studied found to be lacking.

As Worrall (2007) put it in her excellent literature review of service-learning partnerships:

Good partnerships are founded on trust, respect, mutual benefit, good communication, and governance structures that allow democratic decision-making, process improvement, and resource sharing (Benson & Harkavy, 2001; CCPH, 1999; Campus Compact, 2000; Mihalynuk & Seifer, 2002; Schumaker, Reed & Woods, 2000). More structured partnerships also include mutually agreed upon vision, mission, goals, and evaluation (Mihalynuk & Seifer, 2002; Points of Light, 2001; Royer, 1999), and a long-term commitment, particularly on the part of the higher education institution (HEI) (Maurasse, 2001; Mayfield & Lucas, 2000). Long term, healthy, sustained partnerships are grounded in personal relationships.

Building good partnerships can take time. As Brock et al., (2017) put it "...strong partnerships ...require trust and rapport building between partners that can be labor and time intensive" (p. 324). Yet well-planned projects that foster mutuality enhance the chances for impacting the community and supporting the time needs of all participating parties (Chupp & Joseph, 2010). From their perspective, community partners desired continuous faculty oversight through consistent check-ins, communication and debriefings and stressed the importance of providing feedback to students (Davis, et al., 2019). They also recommended clear articulation of faculty and student needs and motivations, agreement on the scope and duration of the project (MOUs) and clear assignment of roles (Paul & Elder, 2006).

The Outcomes of Projects

Transforming Students

Students who engage in service to others learn tolerance, cultural competency and enhanced communication and leadership skills (Anker et al., 2008; Jessup-Anger, et al., 2020). In this iterative process, students can transition from self-examination of their own values to insights into social issues and then move on to social action. Such a social justice approach to service-learning requires that students examine those structural processes behind the symptoms of problems, doing a deeper examination of the political, economic, and social conditions that maintain inequalities (Mitchell, 2008). From partners' perspectives, these activities are typically couched in terms of implications for the community, i.e., global citizenship education (Reynolds, 2016), enhanced awareness of community issues and exposure to new communities and perspectives (Karasik, 2020; Cronley, et al., 2015). Partners express the desire that, in coming to better understand various disparities in our society, students will help to educate the next generation of decision-makers about those often adversely affected by policy decisions (Worrall, 2007), be better prepared for the realities of nonprofit and social welfare professions (Cronley, et al., 2015) and develop a lifetime commitment to volunteering (De Villiers, 2016).

A few studies consider the issue of social justice explicitly. Jessup-Anger, et al., (2020), in examining living-learning communities (LLC) at three Catholic Universities found that both the type of university and institutional resources impacted students' understanding of and involvement in social justice. Opportunities for engagement, reflection, and interaction in the community and the number of resources, e.g., credit-bearing classes and coursework focused on social justice, were especially important (Jessup-Anger, 2020).

Other studies aiming at social justice outcomes offer valuable lessons by examining their shortcomings. In one case, teachers and villagers from a poor, rural community in South Africa, working with university faculty, expected financial, material, and infrastructural gain, which the university was unprepared to offer (Ebersöhn et al., 2015). Without agreed upon expectations between university and community, the university is unlikely to deliver on unspoken community expectations (Holland, 2005). Another study of student action in health care centers in poor urban neighborhoods in the Philippines (Adarlo, et al., 2019) showed that almost all students had difficulty moving past their personal concerns and connecting their experiences to larger social issues. Faculty reported a greater need for critical reflection that allows students to reveal their biases. Still, some have found the opposite effects on students as for some, biases are reinforced (Chupp & Joseph, 2010). Moving toward a social justice paradigm, Jessup-Anger, et al., (2020) recommend that students be introduced to civic engagement through varying levels that build on knowledge and skills over time, and include one-time activities based on students' levels of commitment and training in guided reflection with faculty and staff.

Mitchell (2008) offers practical advice on how to distribute power equally among partners so that training students is not the sole responsibility of faculty (Dempsey, 2010). She recommends that partners contribute to designing the course syllabus and that community members play multiple roles: teacher, supervisor, and person requiring

services. Students, through readings, reflection, experiential activities, and classroom discussions, can examine power inequalities. Such an approach prioritizes work with organizations that are involved in social action and works toward the redistribution of power.

Impacts on Organizations

Impacts on organizations and communities studied in this literature are both intended and unintended (Zimmerman, et al., 2019; Reynolds, 2016). Cronley, et al., (2015) concluded that the partners they interviewed believed that their projects had met “short-term” needs, that many of the things they received from the projects were not sustainable and some things became out of date very quickly. Chupp and Joseph (2010) cited a HUD study that concluded that 92% of service-learning projects provide short-term direct services or assistance, rather than having longer term impacts. However, Trebil-Smith and Shields (2018) argued that there are often broader impacts of these projects than initially understood, such as program collaboration, shared resources, and sustainable relationships - and that the community benefits through increased resources that address current community needs.

The outcomes that were mentioned most often in this literature focused on students’ contributions to organizations’ capacity to do their work. Interviews and surveys of community partners reported that students contributed their work-related skills to assist clients (Ferrari & Worrall, 2000), applied expert knowledge and creativity to support clients and increased agency capacity (Kindred & Petrescu, 2015; Rinaldo, et al., 2015), and used their resources to generate energy, enthusiasm and fresh perspectives that advanced the agency’s mission (Trebil-Smith & Shields, 2018; Karasik, 2020). In one study, a zoo’s manager of Conservation Education and Public Engagement in Science reported that students’ observations and findings gave their conservation staff a better understanding of the behavior of some animals and so would help with animal husbandry (De Villiers, 2016). Comeau et al., (2019) found that community partners had overall high levels of satisfaction with the public health assessments students had done, felt the quality of the data and reports was high, and also appreciated the increased organizational capacity the students had provided them. Littlepage, et al. (2012) concluded that partners believed they benefitted from working with students in past projects by the large number of nonprofits who said they would like to work with more students.

Impacts on Community

Additionally, several of these researchers found evidence of impacts of these projects on the community more broadly. Three studies focused on issues of public health, finding unintended and lasting impacts on policy and program changes, collaboration strategies and information sharing (Zimmerman et al., 2019; Comeau et al., 2019), and on issues of juvenile obesity (Brock et al., 2017). Chupp and Joseph’s (2010) respondents also reported similar extended impacts from projects done with social work students: greater engagement of community residents and stakeholders in decision making with city government, creation of specific programs, sharing of information and resources, increased capacity to manage and sustain revitalization investments, and improved quality of life for community residents. Reynolds’ (2016)

international partners reported outcomes of increased access to health care and clean water, saved lives, greater trust in local processes and feelings of inclusion and pride in one's village.

Methods

Much of the literature discussed above involves qualitative methods - focus group discussions, depth interviews, participant observation and content analysis - perhaps because qualitative approaches lend themselves to assessing the nuances in partnership relationships. Like our own study, others used depth interviews exclusively (Zimmerman et al., 2019; Kerrigan, et al., 2012; Rinaldo, et al., 2015; Jessup-Anger, et al., 2020; Adarlo et al., 2019) or in combination with other qualitative methods (Ebersöhn, et al., 2015; Catlett, et al., 2019; Dempsey, 2010; Culhane et al., 2016; Reynolds, 2016; Chupp & Joseph, 2010). Some studies mixed qualitative interviews with quantitative approaches such as surveys (Clayton et al., 2010; Trebil-Smith & Shields, 2018, Comeau et al., 2019).

In this study, we collected interview data from 19 pairs of faculty and community partners at two comprehensive Midwestern state universities that offer an array of service-learning classes in all disciplines. Each author accessed a list of courses with service-learning components from the administrative offices that coordinate such projects and began contacting faculty who supervised students, looking in particular for projects that had the potential for addressing social justice issues, and asking faculty to provide the names of their community partners on these projects. Faculty interviews occurred over the course of several years, but all partners were interviewed over a six-month period. For the most part, the faculty were asked to select a service-learning project they wanted to discuss prior to the interview. The partners they had identified were then interviewed about their views of this same project.

The 19 total pairs of faculty and community partners were concentrated in certain areas of study: the social sciences (N=8), health and nursing courses (N=5), teacher education (N=2), engineering and business (N=2), and courses taught by a director of a student engagement office (N=2). After both faculty and community partners offered a brief description of the project, we asked questions about the benefits of the project for each partner, for the clients served by the agency, for the organization, and for the community, in general. Lastly, we asked how the projects empowered the people served by the agency and if partners believed it promoted social justice in any way.

After initial coding, we were guided by patterns that emerged from the data – the extent to which the pairs agreed about the basic nature of the project, the benefits that accrued to students, the partners' organizations, and the community more broadly, basic exchanges that occurred between students and organizations/partners, and how the community was changed, specifically but not exclusively in terms of social justice outcomes. Although students' views were not part of this study, faculty and community partners reveal the aspects of student learning most important to each. After each author coded sections of the transcripts, we negotiated any differences in our analysis, ultimately resolving all differences.

Analysis

Our analysis focused on the extent to which community partners and faculty had convergent or divergent views on their joint projects. Our contribution to the literature is that partner pairs described their mutual projects from their own perspectives. We first looked at agreement within the pairs, then considered the extent to which their perceptions diverged. While there were considerable areas of agreement, there were more points of divergence. Divergence was seen by comparing what each partner pair had to say and then generalizing to the larger group of faculty compared with the larger group of partners.

Points of Convergence

Fifteen of the 19 pairs we interviewed showed considerable overlap in their understandings of the nature, work, and impact of their projects. Most of these overlapping views involved the products or outcomes of the projects, in addition to the work done. The outcomes often involved helping the partner organization better accomplish their goals.

A faculty member in a Food and Nutrition class and her community partner, a Board member of a homeless shelter and soup kitchen, described the work done by the students to create awareness of food nutrition and safety.

Students developed a quality cooking recipe book for the shelter to help them in utilizing more of their donated food items and commodity foods...Students developed sanitation and training videos for the UCS volunteers to watch prior to volunteering in the kitchen....**Faculty**

We also got a recipe book they developed, which we have used. A longer term issue has been more attention to nutrition and food safety as far as our process, and the nutritional needs of that population...It provided more awareness about food safety and nutrition, since that is a big part of the operation of [Agency].

Community Partner

The pair involved in a project done by a computer information science class with a community organization that loans used musical instruments to low-income children spoke in common terms about the work done to create an organized system to track the distribution of the instruments

We went in and designed...a data base to keep track of instruments, who donated them and send out thank you's...a system of who they were loaned to and when are we getting it back...letter would be generated...Donors...would get tax form saying how much you donated. **Faculty**

The project has taken us from three different EXCEL sheets and index cards for keeping inventory for keeping instruments for the community. Our records would indicate when they go out to young students who can't afford them and get to use them. It is a huge way for us to be organized. We know what our inventory is,

and we can make records and reports when we pursue grants. Get instrument in, get it out quicker, send a thank you note to the donor, make the donor feel grateful...Get tax credit letter off to them for tax deduction...**Community Partner**

Comments about a communications project also showed shared views of projects aimed at improving strategies for coping with conflict

...how to work to resolve that conflict through strategic communication that is targeted toward specific personality types...**Faculty**

They got our students to think about how to solve problems with others besides yelling and conflict. **Community Partner**

For some, the goal involved impacting the larger community beyond the participating organization. This pair had similar things to say about a project done by a Student Affairs faculty member and an international nonprofit focused in part on human trafficking.

For the community, it was more of an outreach they did. The biggest thing they contributed to was an awareness campaign, getting more people to attend their events, donate supplies, time and money, getting people to understand what the organization was...helped fill a void of awareness...**Faculty**

...We do an annual fundraising event and a marketing class...look on how to best market that event... We got more exposure, more tickets were sold...we had 1,100 tickets that were sold and 913 people showed up, so it was...a big win for us... **Community Partner**

The ideal service-learning project involves a basic exchange of learning for the students and service to the community. Partners agreed on benefits of products produced by projects, but also recognized the mutual benefits projects provided for both students and agency. These partners in a project with a charter school done by a teacher education class gave common descriptions of the exchange between the university class and the charter school.

Teacher candidates learn how to manage small groups of students under guidance of a veteran teacher. They get a feel for the school setting and experience planning lessons. Early exposure to the classroom prior to student teaching is a valuable resource for our teachers...Classroom teachers have extra hands in the classroom to provide one-on-one or small group assistance to give their students the extra assistance they need to be successful...**Faculty**

They got to do some hands-on teaching, got to design and implement lesson plans. It makes them more prepared to teach when they get into their own classrooms...It provided some benefits for our students, being able to work on things one-on-one.... **Community Partner**

These partners also commented on the exchange between the university students and the younger students, as the relationship became more informal over time, likely promoting mutual learning.

The tutors commented on the change in their relationship with the kids, in their attitudes, how at first, they treated the tutors as authority figures but by the end, they were actively looking forward to their visits and bringing in homework for help. **Faculty**

...this idea that we have college kids working alongside our third graders at [name of school], that's just really terrific...that's where they begin to understand what college is...begin to see themselves as going to college. And so that informal mentoring that happens, I think is very valuable...We like to encourage our students to be learning together. **Community Partner**

This teacher education faculty and her students worked to address educational deficits so that YouthBuild students could pass the GED.

... students enrolled in the course taught lessons and tutored secondary students enrolled in the YouthBuild Program...All of the students enrolled in the YouthBuild program had either dropped out or have been removed. Therefore, the...students created their lessons to address academic deficit areas which were critical to passing the GED...The community benefitted...in the sense that the...students had the opportunity to share their knowledge and skills with the YouthBuild organization. **Faculty**

Her partner put it more succinctly, but with some of the same rhetoric:

If they saw a need, they developed projects, teaching aids, props, etc. and tried to help however they could. The...students did a really good job and helped our students achieve good outcomes. **Community Partner**

Another pair agreed on the benefits for the residents of a homeless shelter of a project conducted by a communications class,

Residents appreciate the attentive, caring approach that the [university] students take in these workshops, as well as the opportunity to develop more effective coping skills (anger management, assertiveness, nonviolent communication, mindfulness etc.)...In the dialogues that take place in these workshops, residents have the opportunity to learn more about each other, and to initiate and strengthen supportive relationships. They listen to one another, offer advice, and share resources. **Faculty**

They share similarities and differences...team builders throughout the process. They choose their most important conflicts and act [them] out and as a bigger

group they pick it apart and decide the best way to resolve... **Community Partner**

Some pairs discussed attitudinal and behavioral changes that had resulted from these projects. Two pairs agreed their projects had sensitized the university students to broader social justice issues of which they were not previously aware. This is from a communications faculty and her partner at a large community after school program:

I wanted them to understand issues related to class, and perhaps social justice issues, but I wanted them to recognize how difference emerged and how they (might) respond as a result of the difference, real and perceived...Most were changed and in a positive way. Frankly most had never been to a low-income area and assumed such were only in big cities. Sadly, they learned that poverty is in their backyard--as before they had no idea. **Faculty**

It seemed that they had no idea this existed, from the conversations we had after we would get to together and have get-to-know each other activities. It opened their eyes to things that these kids were experiencing, the things they knew about at such an early age, terminology for getting arrested, visiting a parent in jail...with no real negative connotations about it. **Community Partner**

A student affairs instructor and his partner in the administrative office of a local school system also saw the university students changing in this way, his partner seeing longer term impacts of these changes.

Many were at low-income schools and the students hadn't been in that type of environment before. **Faculty**

This idea that you...send people out into the world with a greater understanding of the community that they live in really helps...because I don't think people always really understand why schools are the way they are or all the different... challenges that they bring...They don't understand why a child goes to school without a coat on. So, once they've been...around those families, they sort of get to see and it does help... **Community Partner**

Others focused on changes they saw in clients. This nursing faculty and her partner both noted behavioral changes in members of a Latinx community as the result of health fairs her students helped with.

Over the past 5 years that I have been engaging with students in the health fairs, I have seen the participants beginning to change from being present-oriented and not really thinking about prevention and health promotion, to now taking initiative with their health care and getting appointments to be seen by providers. In the beginning, 80% of these Hispanic participants just went to the emergency room when things got bad; there was no thought for prevention or ongoing care, and now that is changing...We are making an impact in the community with this

population and with our future healthcare providers through these health fairs.
Faculty

...It gives the community members the opportunity for services they don't have otherwise. The whole family comes to...[health fair] because they feel they can get all kinds of help right there. They have their medical exams on site at the monthly fairs, with a high amount of benefits. It really pays off, the preventive care and information. They were encouraged to change their eating patterns to prevent diabetes. The dieticians helped them know what to eat; they teach them to eat healthy, and they started doing this. **Community Partner**

This nursing faculty and her partner discussed changes they observed in clients' behaviors.

Individuals were...made aware of resources in the community and how to cope with the challenges they faced. **Faculty**

They have had a big impact on the neighborhood that we serve. First, the knowledge they all get. They hear about issues with smoking, drugs, and alcohol, but to have the students come in with charts and pictures and see what it will do to you and your baby, that has a much bigger impact. We can see the mothers rethinking their behaviors and some come in saying "I've quit smoking" or "I'm not drinking anymore." But it has had an even bigger impact on the youth who won't start these things...we can see it is having an impact. **Community Partner**

Both faculty and community partners saw that positive behavioral changes in their clients led to positive community change. This social work faculty paired with a large non-profit noted that the programs her students helped with would have long-lasting effects, but her partner connected her clients' learned traits to larger issues.

The nutrition program, the kids were able to try the fruits and vegetables and then can go home and tell their parents that they had asparagus, and it was good. There are so many issues with childhood obesity...Character-building is what this program really emphasizes, teaching the kids at a really young age...honesty, respect, integrity. This carries over into the school day, the importance of being respectful. We know if we teach these traits, they will carry over into adulthood. **Faculty**

I think number one, it supports the mission statement that they will respond to the needs of the community...The secondary pieces, we're...creating better people in the world...more people who give back and take care of the world...
Community Partner

This social work faculty and her community partner doing outreach for homeless programs noted the concrete outcomes their project had produced.

A report from the study was published...representing a major collaborative effort to end homelessness in _____ County. It was instrumental in the establishment of a new housing center for both homeless veterans and homeless families more generally... **Faculty**

We were able to house 60 families last year because of the outcomes in the community. Many benefits came with it. Research like that done by these graduate students is needed to make the case for those who don't have a voice...In these times, the money's getting tighter, it's tougher. Anything that points out the situation is needed. **Community Partner**

These faculty and community partners seemed to be arriving at common understandings of the nature of their projects. They demonstrated common understandings of the goals and outcomes of their projects, for the university students, the partner agencies and for the community more broadly.

Points of Divergence

While there were points of agreement between most of the pairs in the study, faculty and community partners tended to emphasize different aspects of these projects, often based on their involvement with one side of the exchange or the other. The faculty emphasized impacts on students and often seemed unaware of the impacts on organizations and community, while community partners seemed more focused on the impact on their organizations and the community more broadly.

Impact on University Students' Learning

For faculty, a primary motivating factor seemed to be enhancing the learning of their students. Some focused on specific skills they saw students gaining: addressing social problems, putting theory into action, applying knowledge gained in a classroom, and gaining a sense of empowerment in communications and computer information science. A communications faculty working with an alternative school saw his students helping others learn what he had been covering in class.

...Our students learn to communicate with them, and in turn, learn to address problems rather than complain about them. They learn that...bullying is a complex problem. **Faculty**

Another communications faculty saw his students applying what he was teaching about conflict resolution.

My students had the opportunity to put theory into action, wrestling with complex and changing contingencies. They developed a stronger sense of their own agency and leadership skills. **Faculty**

A computer information systems faculty discussed his students applying what they learned from him in developing the program to track the use of musical instruments.

I taught the theoretical concepts, did hands on practice and then they start evolving that understanding...I would say this needs work or this is fine, but here

are changes. Take the design and go through a couple of rounds of feedback... By end of September, they had arrived at the design and started constructing the database themselves...The students had a tremendous experience working with the community partner. **Faculty**

A psychology faculty observed his students applying what they had learned from him about interviewing.

...people aren't aware of these people with multiple problems or if you are aware, you don't know how to interact with them...It builds confidence in students, shows them they do know something...How do you transfer the spirit of interviewing to those without verbal skills, get the experience of what I teach them, but challenges them. Here is the limit of what I taught and how do you modify it in this context. Don't get rid of what I told you but change what I told you. They feel comfortable in their ability of doing this. **Faculty**

Fewer community partners discussed the students' learning, and when they did it often involved preparation for future careers, not necessarily what they were learning from the credit course. The executive director of the international nonprofit (partner) spoke of not only offering an educational experience for his intern, but building skills that led to a job:

...Actually, one of our interns just got hired...by a local...company...to run a not-for-profit and...I think this probably gave him a great start...We don't want to just give people busy work...not just...“Okay, here's a broom, go sweep the floor.” But what is something meaningful, something that could impact them and impact us and impact the people we are trying to serve ...It is a tension of trying to find legitimate, good projects for them, but...I embrace the challenge... **Community Partner**

This local school system official, working with a student affairs instructor, talked about what the university students had learned from a collaboration that brought the students into schools for a recess monitoring project, but also prepared them as future instructors.

...We want to provide a good experience for these students, so...they're not making copies...Let's make sure we provide something that's enriching and rewarding and educational for the students...**Community Partner**

This executive director of a program for developmentally delayed adults, a partner of a psychology professor, talked a good deal about what the students gained from that project.

They were paired up with professionals...They developed assessment and treatment plans and plans of care and did some work one-on-one in occupational therapy...with an occupational therapist...shadowing her and learning about the interventions. This was beneficial to them. Some of them work with me...One [student] was interested in...basic case management how we make decisions

about plan of care, and some work with the psychologist and learn how to develop behavior plans for interventions...As we go along some of the students don't know what they want to do, and we look at real world type things and have them look up jobs to get a job like that. Then we would gear skills toward that. Pair them up with care manager...It is really a great opportunity for us to educate...[we] hope to build on this to help to develop professionals who have desire...[to help] people who are dual diagnosis. **Community Partner**

Community partners displayed an expanded knowledge of student projects beyond the classroom. This executive director of an international nonprofit, partner to a student affairs instructor, discussed a project where a business finance class helped assess small loan applications from individuals in a developing country.

...they have to apply and they have to write up a business plan and...the students actually get to see the applications and...participate in the approval process of the applications...They also wrote 24 lessons that the loan participants...get approved, have to go to a weekly business class that was written by college students...to help them...have better business practices...And to date, we've had 100% payback on every loan we've distributed...It's really cool to...have a finance class sit there and look at the applications and listen to their input as they...try...to figure out...in a third-world environment what business models they think will fly or not. **Community Partner**

This community partner focused on how these experiences give the students she worked with the chance to apply what they learned to an actual project. She also hoped to gain some ongoing volunteers.

I think we've been a valuable outlet for them to learn about the community and make an impact. They gain and we gain...It's also a potential volunteer recruitment tool for us. As these kids learn about us and what we do, hopefully they'll stay engaged and keep them doing it... **Community Partner**

This partner who worked on a design of a trails system and her faculty partner both discussed the impact on students' learning, but the community partner saw a broader range of learning the students took away with them than the faculty member articulated.

The college students who participated always tell me they get far more out of doing a real hands-on thing than just some academic experience. That was especially true for the engineering students who worked on developing the trail...It's a real thing...not just something they're studying in a book or some theoretical thing...It exposes them to things they could do the rest of their life. **Community Partner**

Enhancing Student Awareness of Social Issues

More faculty than community partners mentioned that they intentionally sought to expose their students to people and communities in need. Faculty mentioned students gained increased awareness of social issues, recognized and overcame some stereotypes they held about minorities, people in poverty and people with disabilities. A nursing faculty spent a good deal of time detailing the changes she captured in her students' understanding of the Latinx community they served at a health fair through before and after surveys she administered, and reflection journals her students wrote.

Students wrote reflection journals about their health fair experiences... answered some specific questions that I posed to them. The themes that emerged from their journals were that this was a very eye-opening and worthwhile experience that they could not have gotten by hearing a lecture or reading it from a book, and they would carry it into their professional lives and future coursework... 82.9% of students had "somewhat" or "little" awareness of the unique needs of the medically underserved Hispanic participants prior to coming to the health fair, and this experience provided them with an important awareness and knowledge of the needs of this population.

This faculty member further saw her students overcoming preconceived notions of the Latinx population.

Their idea of people in poverty who are from another culture was challenged; they assumed they would see fractured families with no cohesion or values, and they assumed that they didn't have jobs. What they learned is that this population is very family oriented, as they saw entire families coming to the health fair, and all the children were well mannered and dressed with care. The parents took pride in what their children were learning at school. They were not looking for a free handout; the fathers want and expect to provide for the family, and the children work hard to succeed at school to bring honor to the family. All these Hispanic participants had jobs and were working in the community, but they did not receive health care with the jobs they held. They earned low wages, yet they saved money and sent money...to family members in their home country...Also, students a lot of times don't "get" that it isn't as simple as just making a phone call and making a referral to get people seen. The participants have to trust you and feel safe where they are going to get health care (especially if they are undocumented), and they don't want to get a big bill they can't pay. They are proud and do not want charity. **Faculty**

This teacher education faculty also observed changes in her students' understanding of a disadvantaged group.

I didn't fully anticipate the eagerness for my university students to not just teach a good lesson, but actually make a meaningful impact on the lives of their "pupils". I was often moved by the real conversations, relationships, and sharing that happened between the pre-service teachers and YouthBuild students.... **Faculty**

A sociologist who ran the honors program discussed her students' growing knowledge of the differences and similarities between the youth they were engaged with and themselves.

They also realized that the kids weren't that different than any other kids in some way (sweet, loved attention, interested in learning, liked to have fun), but very different in others (kinds of problems they talked about - parents in jail, can't pay bills, not around). **Faculty**

A social work faculty member discussed the learning outcomes her students had achieved working with a project on homelessness.

Students looked deeply into their own pre-conceptions, examining their own beliefs and stereotypes, and attempted to reconcile what they had thought to be true of homeless people with what they had discovered in just one set of intake interviews....In addition to being able to better engage with individuals from diverse backgrounds, students were able to apply critical thinking and creatively problem solve as situations arose in the interview setting and during the course of the interviews. These reflection papers provided evidence on the part of many students of their ability to identify social justice issues. Additionally, the students demonstrated their understanding of issues relating to diversity and inequality.

Faculty

Students gained a deeper understanding of their own beliefs and reconciled them, through reflection, with what they had experienced. Faculty also reported that teachers' behaviors belied their reports of how they treated minority students and those with disabilities. This student affairs instructor noted the criticism his students made of a local public school where they were helping with recess.

Some of the...students were very critical of the teachers; they saw that minority and disabled students were often treated differently. As they worked through that, many of my students chose to comment on the fact of a disconnect between the type of positive discipline the teachers talked about and the way they may have yelled at them on the playground...They saw a lack of the positive approach to discipline that was talked about. **Faculty**

Some faculty reported shock on the part of their students as they came to understand the outcomes of disparities of families too poor to pay bills or access needed transportation. In such examples, students' prejudices about the working poor or others in poverty can be reinforced. This communications faculty attempted to expand her students' awareness of inequality, allowing that she was not always successful:

Entitlement issues were rampant. Assumptions as well-- that the kids must be neglected, that parents were terrible, and so on. I definitely need to target a few

things--mainly aspects of otherness that seem to pop up with a few of the...students. **Faculty**

And this communications faculty also explicitly stated that his students sometimes had their misconceptions reinforced through the projects.

A lot of our students have never seen these students first-hand. The fear subsides after a few minutes of interacting, and they find surprising similarities. I wouldn't go so far to say that stereotypes are broken, because several of them are reinforced as well. **Faculty**

University Students as Models

Partners, more so than faculty, observed the interactions between university students and their younger clients, viewing university students as resources that put a face on what younger students deem as success. This partner, working with a sociologist who also ran an honors program, appreciated the interactions between the university students and the youth in her program.

Any time college students come there...the kids don't often see these positive adult role models, even young adults...coming and trying to make something out of their lives and succeeding. The other examples they see of success are those in gangs [and] other such activities. This gives them an alternative view and it is fun too. They can see other options. **Community Partner**

This partner in an after-school program working with a communications faculty also saw this happening.

The biggest benefit, in general, was the college aged students interacting with our kids. A lot of them are from families with single parents, lower economic status, and have not thought about going to college. Finishing high school may even be a question. Many have young mothers who themselves didn't finish high school...They would do role playing scenarios with...[the] students...one-on-one contact with the [university]...students, with different faces, someone they build a relationship with and look up to, saying these things to them. They identified with them, saw them as role models. **Community Partner**

As did this partner with a neighborhood program working with a nursing faculty.

We want to show them alternatives, to see they can go to college or go to trade school, that these college students they see have succeeded, so they can, too... In the current group of youth, we are working with, none of them have gotten pregnant, none have gotten in trouble with the law, over one-half of them have gainful employment this summer. A lot of this has to do with the students coming here...and working with them and giving them hope. **Community Partner**

A partner with another communications faculty said this about the impact on her students in an alternative school.

Our students always need positive role models, which the university students were for them. It was positive to see college students in the building besides the teachers. We don't see that much, not much mentoring going on. There is so much focus on instruction; that is the priority... They provided good models for the students here, how to deal with stress and conflict. It exposed our students to college professors and students. They talked about their experiences, how they got interested, living in the residence halls, and so on that our students had never heard about. It gave them some exposure to the college culture. **Community Partner**

Faculty saw projects as leading to greater understanding of class-based social injustices and saw students' desire to work with populations in need as a successful outcome of community engagement. The partners saw great value in the students serving as role models for the youth who were their clients. Some partners were explicit about their responsibility to teach students the significance of their work for both agency and community.

Benefitting the Organization

Community partners often saw more direct benefits coming to their organizations than the faculty. For example, this health sciences faculty member whose class worked with a community garden project on preparing plots mused that the project may not have helped the organization that much.

...students don't have contact with the population... No way of knowing. Students aren't in there long enough. They do not see the people again unless they go out again on their own. **Faculty**

However, her partner talked at length about the benefits of the project for her organization.

It makes it easy for them to have a sellable garden for people to work at... Students... weeded... added more compost. We greatly benefitted from the work that they're doing preparing the garden for the 109 gardeners that were there. Pathways that needed weeding. Provide extra hands that help us out... There are a multitude of things that need to be done, little projects get done. I... think it definitely helps the community as a whole. The garden is a showplace... Students are basically helping us achieve that, keeping the gardens looking good helps us tremendously. **Community Partner**

Or this psychology faculty who believed his students had not contributed much to the non-profit he was partnering with.

Is stuff being used? Our students... have one or two clients that they interact with,

no one has measured the importance of the relationship...Is it long lasting, systematically changed? No...Not much contribution to agency. **Faculty**

While his partner saw more benefits.

Look at people as not...part of a population...how do you work with individual people? Want to leave here with that...Not labeling but treating them as individuals. Really great opportunity for us to educate and hope to build on this to help to develop professionals who have desire...[to work with] people who are dual diagnosis. We talk about client rights, and they are trained in that and integration with the community... Really difficult concept for some to understand how do we work with them. Make sure they have independence...**Community Partner**

Then, there was the nursing instructor who listed four things her students did with a faith-based family-centered, non-profit in a low-income neighborhood.

Here are a few of the things that our mental health nursing students have used as projects: 1) Teaching about healthy foods and snacks to parents and children at [homeless] shelter ; 2) Information on how to be a smart consumer of health care; 3) At the [the faith-based non-profit], students utilized a Wheel of Misfortune to help individuals identify why use and misuse of drugs and alcohol harms both the individual using but also family and friends; 4) The importance of exercise and strategies for how to incorporate in daily life for all ages. There are lots more examples if you need them. **Faculty**

This is an extensive list, but her partner's list (who had more than one faculty working with him) was longer and dealt with tangential issues.

They have worked with all aspects of our program, helping teach parenting skills, working directly with the youth, working with our staff. We have used their help in so many different ways...They've also given classes on First Aid, CPR, taught the Heimlich maneuverer, did AED training with the staff that may well have saved lives, did risk assessment for diabetes, high blood pressure...Students stayed and helped with the soup kitchen, helped with adults...Some of the research on the population they serve that [nursing] students did has been useful in writing grant proposals to get additional funding for the programs there...A Masters in Hospital Administration class did three projects, one on volunteer management, others on Human Resource issues that have been very helpful... [This partner's psychiatric nursing students] did some projects on stress and anger management and other things for both the youth and the parenting class...**Community Partner**

Or the CIS faculty member who focused fairly narrowly on immediate benefits of the project his students did with an organization that loaned little-used musical instruments to young students.

They had a database system that wasn't functional, not working well...Before the project, didn't know the status of an instrument. Now with a click of a button they can show a report and see where instruments are. **Faculty**

Again, the community partner had a broader view of the benefits for themselves and others.

...There are a good number of people who loved the instruments they've played. They just don't want to give the instrument away...We all know that art and music seem to be disappearing more and more from the schools...the program...fills a void. It is probably the program which is a warm and fuzzy for those people who have loaned instruments. I love the fact that there is a recycling of the instrument. They learn the music and have gratitude and appreciation and when they hear music, they can appreciate the work that went behind it. **Community Partner**

This dental hygiene faculty also saw outcomes as tied to her class topics, while her partner saw wider-ranging outcomes.

Students educated women in an addiction recovery center about the risk factors, signs, and symptoms of oral cancer...Students used the skills they learn in class and provided a service for members of our community...Dental hygiene students provided non-surgical periodontal therapy to clients exhibiting moderate to severe chronic periodontitis... **Faculty**

It really helped with awareness among this population of high-risk people. Most of them are smokers, and that is a major factor when it comes to developing oral cancer...The population we are serving is often neglected by society, agencies, and so on. This project put them in position to get help with a disease if they needed it...helped the disadvantaged get the help they needed, get more resources...It put them in a position to have some control over their living space and to learn more about how to live a good life. **Community Partner**

The contact that faculty and students had with community partners varied across projects. Nevertheless, faculty often seemed to underestimate the benefits that partners saw resulting from these projects. In two cases, faculty felt that students had little or no impact on the organizations they worked with, while their partners saw substantial benefits. Additionally, faculty had a narrower view of who benefitted from the projects, focusing their attention on students, while partners saw transformations in students' capabilities and their contributions to their organizations and the larger community.

Benefitting the Community

Community partners had a broader view of the impact their projects had on the community more generally than faculty. Fourteen of the 19 community partners (74%) discussed impacts on the community, while less than half of faculty (47%) related their project to community development. Community partners saw the potential for bettering

the community through education of clients. Half of the 14 community partners who talked about community betterment attributed this to the education their clients received from university students. In this example, the role modeling of university students “helps the entire community.”

By being there, people are already instilling self-worth in these kids, helping them see the need to stay in school...Now the older kids want to finish high school and go onto trade school, more schooling. Every [university] student that comes there has something to do with that...It helps them grow. Helps the entire community.

Community Partner

Similarly, another community partner said,

...the better we can educate the children, the populace as a whole, the better off the community is. **Community Partner**

Typically, faculty focused their attention on student or client attitudinal or behavioral changes. A nursing faculty responded to an inquiry on the impact of her project on the community.

Exposure to nursing students may decrease anxiety for those who need to access health care services. Individuals were also made aware of resources in the community and how to cope with the challenges they face in their lives.

Faculty

Her community partner not only emphasized the health of the community but saw the long-term effects of service-learning on sustaining the environment.

They understand if they're making a trail, the purpose is to provide an opportunity for people for decades to walk a trail and benefit physically, mentally, socially from that effort. It isn't just making a trail from here to there, that kids really understand why they're doing this and the impact they can have in the long term....'m a part of service-learning because I think we've got to find a way to give back to the world, but make sure everybody learns. **Community Partner**

This faculty saw contributions to the entire community from his trails project but expressed a narrower view than the partner.

Assuming all communities are looking for improved health, it would help any community. [City] doesn't have a good rating as far as we smoke too much and eat too much. Can burn up a few calories with the trails. **Faculty**

Another community partner involved in developing community gardens saw broad community impact.

Folks that garden together that may have been in a grocery store and in a desert.

They now have a connection. Feel better about the neighborhood, about the garden. It's a real sense of pride that the garden is there, that people go to the picnic table to talk and sit and enjoy...builds community in each area.

Community Partner

In the following case, students developed a media story about addiction for people who visited their site, but the faculty did not fully appreciate its impact.

_____ has a media story that they showcase on their website...It's communicating to people who are visiting...using digital media and the internet is a positive...I didn't ask about impact. **Faculty**

The benefits to our agency are good quality videos that we can use. They reach a population we don't necessarily reach. High schools and then colleges and we don't get into either. And then just even the peer-to-peer education...Talking to classmates, high school...we really miss out on that...They are powerful speakers...Does make a difference...**Community Partner**

Most faculty expressed their desire to enhance student learning, develop cultural competency, educate clients about community resources, and promote client knowledge for self-betterment and empowerment. Community partners saw projects as helping the larger community through an iterative process that enhances the self-worth of their clients through education, promoting a safer, healthier, more beautiful and sustainable community.

To a greater extent than faculty, community partners sought to give students a better understanding of their responsibility to make their communities more just for people in poverty and those lacking knowledge and access to needed resources. This community partner had a broader, more nuanced view on a range of the issues in the alternative school where she worked.

...we have a lot of transgender students, so we have a big issue with bullying. And this project helped with this in general and for specific groups, which helped us achieve a more just culture. **Community Partner**

The communications faculty working on this project had a more restricted view of the ways it had promoted social justice.

By targeting those who have been identified as "problem students," we may be able to change the message to one of prevention rather than reaction. Generally speaking, the messages on bullying have been "tell someone" if you're a victim and "You're going to get in trouble" if you're a bully. While these messages work superficially on the surface, they do not address the underlying issues of bullying in schools. **Faculty**

Or this communication faculty who simply stated that, “This project promotes social justice by breaking down the barriers of social class.” His partner saw many more ways social justice had been addressed for the residents of the homeless shelter.

Giving them voice and understanding they have a choice and how to use that choice...It builds comradery for the people at the shelter. We can pick apart choices and instill CR (conflict resolution) technique; it allows for easier transition for the client to get to the next level...**Community Partner**

This community partner explicitly saw outcomes related to social justice that her partner did not articulate as clearly:

One major goal we have embraced as a program the last several years is to give the youth hope for the future, which they haven't had a lot of. We want them to believe they can do more than the gang activity, drug dealing, pimping, and prostituting that they see now as successful role models...The youth who lived there who succeed...leave the neighborhood, so they don't see these examples...We have been successful in these efforts...A lot of this has to do with the students coming here from ___ and working with them and giving them hope.
Community Partner

Community partners expressed their appreciation of clients' newfound ability to improve their lives and foresee a better future for themselves and their families. Community partners, more so than faculty, connected clients' behaviors to community betterment, but most faculty seemed hesitant to claim their project had directly addressed issues of social justice.

Despite these differences in perspective, both faculty and community partners commented on how they might contribute their time to strengthen the relationship between university and community. This community partner commented on the importance of developing strong partnerships between university and community.

...that they get to see how well we all work together...that is very strong and that makes them, I am sure, feel that makes *me* feel so prideful about this community that we live in...We have a fantastic partnership. **Community Partner**

Discussion

Coming to agreement about the nature and intended outcomes of a project is a first step in developing the ideal type of relationship described in the literature review. Both faculty and community partners agreed that students gained important knowledge, networks, and “real world experience” and the community gained from the insights and labor of students and the materials and trainings students and faculty developed for agency clients.

Partners diverged on project outcomes, with faculty more often emphasizing the impacts on students and community partners generally seeing broader impacts on their

own agencies and the larger community. Community partners sometimes placed more value on work done by students in their projects than did faculty, and they were more aware of the modeling opportunities the university students provided for their young clients. Yet, in contrast to faculty's focus on specific student activities, community partners commented on students' technical supports, contributions as grant writers, and personal qualities as creative thinkers, and stated the importance of harnessing these talents for the future, seeing students as volunteers and professionals committed to community betterment. As role models, students formed positive relationships with those they worked with, taught others social and coping skills and advanced positive structural changes in the community. Community partners connected students' care for and education of their clients with advancing clients' physical health, which in turn, contributed to community health and welfare. Faculty were often not in a position to see these expanded outcomes.

There is strong evidence that community partners placed greater significance on their own roles as teachers and mentors than faculty seemed to realize and hoped to develop a long-term commitment to the university beyond the service-learning project. Without acknowledging it explicitly, both faculty and community partners had a commitment to social justice issues. Faculty expressed their desire to change the perceptions of their students to seeing the differences between themselves and those they served had origins in social-structural conditions and not in qualities of the people themselves and so, it was important to faculty to expose students to underserved populations. For community partners, their stated goals were to show university students that they could make a difference in improving others' lives. Community partners, in understanding community institutions better than faculty, realized that what students had done through their projects could be diffused to entire families who could change their behaviors and affect larger communities by sharing their knowledge. For youth, partners hoped to show that their current reality would not predict their futures, and that there were viable alternatives to the models they often saw around them. Community partners, because they could observe the exchanges between students and clients, had a more dynamic view of change that occurred in both student and client, while faculty tended to focus on the attitudinal changes in their students, something that was not apparently evident and difficult to measure.

What community partners took from their projects had enduring effects. They saw how projects had improved outcomes for clients, their agencies and the community, with anticipation that sustainable relationships would continue. Sustainability to partners meant growth and improvement for their communities.

The implications of our findings for changing the relationship between faculty and community partners in service-learning projects are substantial. As the ideal relationship involves both parties in guiding the project from beginning to end, it seems critical that projects finish well. Additionally, the rush to complete a project at the end of the academic semester is an artificial demarcation that universities must work to change. Increasing the space for long-term projects affords time for both partners to achieve a common vision for their projects, to properly debrief with all parties and gain a mutual understanding of their roles and to understand the full range of outcomes from these projects.

It is the responsibility of both parties to teach students about the significance of their work. However, the benefits of their efforts seem differentially rewarded. It is very difficult for faculty to measure if students' attitudes about the populations with which they work actually change. Currently, attitudinal measures based on self-report do not reflect actual future behaviors and even if behaviors change, there is no predicting how long this commitment will last. Community partners see the interactions between students and clients and through their mentoring efforts seem to have greater confidence that their work actually makes a difference. The challenge for both is to create a more meaningful relationship so that each can benefit from students' work and get validation that their contributions to the project make a difference in the lives of students, clients and the community. This can be achieved by better communication between faculty and community partners and an emphasis on faculty learning more about how agencies function for the community. Students can research larger issues of inequality associated with poverty, race or disability and come to understand how their personal contributions can promote greater social change. But these efforts must be measured so that faculty can have greater knowledge about the changes in their students, about the changes that students produce in others and the larger community. The combined efforts of students, faculty and community partners offer all these stakeholders a gateway to strengthening community.

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