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**UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY
PARTNERSHIPS: BRIDGING
TOWN & GOWN**

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ABSTRACT

By partnering with state and local governments, the business community and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities are working to help improve the economic, social and physical conditions of their communities while simultaneously providing opportunities for faculty and students to apply academic knowledge to real world problems. This paper looks at the subject of university-community partnerships. Topics covered include: (1) a brief history of university-community relations, (2) an identification of the major types of university-community partnerships with mini-case examples of each type, and finally (3) a review of the literature on the characteristics of successful university-community partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

In 1876, Daniel C. Gilman, the first president of John Hopkins University arguably America's first modern research university, expressed the hope that universities would one day, ". . . make for less misery among the poor, less ignorance in the schools, less bigotry in the temple, less suffering in the hospital, less fraud in business and less folly in politics"(cited in Harkavy, 1998:4). Despite Gilman's clarion call for engagement, American universities have had a mixed record when it comes to involvement with their surrounding communities (Carr, 2002). Historically, many universities were originally located in rural areas, far removed and isolated from the economic and social problems of urban areas. Universities were looked upon as elite bastions by their neighboring communities and populations. The expression "town and gown" captures this separateness. Professors and students attired in their academic gowns were as distinct from their neighboring town populations as university campuses were from their surrounding architectures.

Urbanization in general, and urban sprawl in particular, changed the university-community landscape. Many universities were simply swallowed up by their local communities, becoming urban campuses not by design but by circumstance. The initial response of many universities to encroaching urbanization was to build higher walls and stronger gates in a vain attempt to maintain the separation between town and gown. But the walls and gates did not prevent community economic and social problems from infiltrating university campuses. Eventually, universities came to realize that isolation and separation was not a viable long term strategy. If universities were to grow and prosper, their futures were intrinsically intertwined with those of their now surrounding communities. Thus, was born the concept of university-community partnerships.

This paper looks at the subject of university-community partnerships. University-community partnerships are not exactly new, but the idea that they represent a distinctive field of scholarship is new. Increasing research attention is being paid to how university-community partnerships are formed, how they operate, and what they accomplish (Rubin, 2000). This paper begins with a brief history of university-community relations. The paper then transitions into a discussion of the major types of university-community partnerships with a mini-case example of each type provided. Finally, the paper attempts to synthesize the literature on the characteristics of successful university-community partnerships.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY RELATIONS

It has been argued that the history of university-community relationships has generally followed the evolution of the American higher education system (Maurana et. al, 2000; Boyer, 1990). Universities began as 17th century institutions focusing on moral and religious training. In the 19th century, they became institutions emphasizing business and economics. Finally, in the 20th century, universities became institutions operating as detached bastions of knowledge development populated by equally detached academic researchers. During this evolution, university-community relations were fostered and promoted during specific periods such as the “Progressive Era” and down played during others such as in the years immediately following World War I and World War II.

The “Progressive Era” of university-community relations began in the 1860s and ended with the advent of World War I in 1914 (Harkavy, 1998). During this period, the American university system operated under the premise that “government would flourish best if citizens would generally adopt the habits of thought hitherto supposed appropriate mainly for scholars and scientists” (Anderson, 1993:8). The principal function of the university was the application of practical solutions to community dilemmas. *The Land Grant College Act* (1862) “enhanced the role of state universities in teaching the skills that would support the agricultural and mechanical revolutions” (Maurana et. al, 2000:3). Symbiotic relationships were created between universities like Johns Hopkins, Columbia, the University of Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania and local governments, businesses, and citizen groups.

In 1889 the University of Chicago opened “Hull House,” a university-community partnership designed to help mitigate the effects of industrialization and urbanization on the population of Chicago’s West Side. At the turn of the century, President Seth Low worked to make Columbia University more a part of its larger community. Low encouraged faculty and students to become involved in community work (Harkavy, 1998). The official legal name of Columbia attests to this orientation, “Columbia University *in* the City of New York” (emphasis added). During the same period, the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania began its long history of promoting university-community partnerships. Under the direction of Edmond James, the Wharton School evolved from an institution focusing on finance and economics to a *de facto* school of political and social science (Harkavy, 1998). The examples provided by Chicago, Columbia, and Wharton underscore the point that university-community partnerships involving elite institutions is not a contradiction in terms.

University-community partnerships waned dramatically following World War I and then again after World War II. Both academics and students, whose lives and careers had been placed on hold and otherwise disrupted by the two wars, became detached from their communities and turned inward focusing on “academic pursuits.” The time period between 1914 and the late 1980’s can perhaps best be described as the “Ivory Tower” period of American higher education. The previous commitment to community was abandoned for the academic expectation of research and publication (Maurana et. al., 2000). As Harkavy (1998) states, “in the decades after World Wars I and II, American higher education increasingly competed, ferociously, egocentrically, narcissistically, for institutional prestige and material resources. Almost single-mindedly, pursuing their self-centered goals, they increasingly concentrated on essentially scholastic, inside-the-academy problems and

conflicts rather than on the very hard, very complex problems involved in helping American society realize the democratic promise of American life for all Americans” (p. 9).

At the same time, university-community partnerships were waning and in many instances disappearing, university-military partnerships were ascending. The Office of Scientific Research and Development was founded in 1916 primarily to encourage universities and academics to assist in war efforts. The US-USSR “Cold War” greatly accelerated the number and type of university-military partnerships, particularly in the areas of physics, engineering, and medicine. The focus on university-military partnerships continued until the demise of the USSR at the end of the 1980s.

The ability of universities to become re-engaged with their surrounding communities required some fence mending. Writing during the mid-1980s, Kysiak (1986) described the status of the university-community partnership efforts being carried out at Yale University and Northwestern University. Kysiak commented that “although universities bring great prestige to a community, many citizens perceive them solely as large, powerful, non-taxpaying entities that soak up city services and provide little in return. This perception, combined with the universities’ penchant for making unilateral decisions without city consultation, made the relationship between the two entities more and more acerbic as time went on” (p. 50).

In 1992, the University of Pennsylvania developed its famous Center for Community Partnerships that included businesses, community groups, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in planning and urban renewal (Carr, 2002). The idea of university-community partnerships targeted at urban renewal picked up considerable momentum when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) established its Office of University Partnerships (OUP) in 1994. The goals of OUP included increasing university involvement in local revitalization projects, the creation of “urban scholars”, and the meshing of various teaching, research and service partnerships into a cohesive force (OUP, 1999). In 2003, OUP received \$6.8 million dollars in funding from HUD for its Community Outreach Partnership Centers Program.

Today, university-community partnerships, particularly those in the science and technology sectors, have helped to reduce tensions and have done much to re-cemented relationships between town and gown. However, issues of costs, control and the direction of university-community partnerships still emerge on occasion.

A TAXONOMY OF UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Writing about the current status of research in the field of university-community partnerships, Rubin (2000:220) notes three contemporary trends: (1) the literature has transitioned from simple case studies to more systematic, longitudinal and comparative studies, (2) the literature is now being largely produced by academics rather than practitioners, and (3) a wide array of academic perspectives is being brought to bear on the subject (e. g., sociology, psychology, social work, education, anthropology, education, political science, public administration and others). Because of the increased attention being

paid to the subject, it is now possible to formulate an initial taxonomy of university-community partnerships.

Building upon the research of both academics and practitioners, the Office of Community Partnerships (OUP, 1999) within the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has proposed a taxonomy of university-community relationships or more broadly university-community partnerships. The taxonomy contains seven categories: (1) service learning, (2) service provision, (3) faculty involvement, (4) student volunteerism, (5) community in the classroom, (6) applied research, and (7) major institutional change.

Service Learning

Service learning involves university initiatives designed to engage students in community learning and service activities as part of their regular coursework. An example of service learning is provided by Northwestern University.

Case Example of Service Learning at Northwestern University

An undergraduate architecture class at Northeastern University participated in a service learning project focused on an area of land known as the Forest Hills section of Boston's Jamaica Plain neighborhood. Teams of students studied neighborhood demographics and finance to develop visions of mixed-use centers. Students became educated on the needs of the community, emphasizing the larger problem of affordable housing. Student models were created with the goals of creating sustainable, demographically inclusive and balanced communities. During the project, students learned about collaborating with others on a common theme. Student teams produced three sets of models, each emphasizing areas of importance identified by community members: privacy for families, retail activity, considerations for older adults, and open-park space. The students were not paid for their work, only rewarded with grades, and there was no profit to the university; this approach helped to build trust with the community (Adams, 2003).

Service Provision

Service provision involves faculty and student initiatives that take the form of coordinated, sustained, long-term projects targeted towards a specific community. An example of service provision is provided by the University of Pennsylvania.

Case Example of Service Provision at the University of Pennsylvania

The University of Pennsylvania launched a series of service provision initiatives as part of a large-scale effort to revitalize the neighborhoods surrounding its West Philadelphia campus. The University is investing in local housing restoration, area retail development projects, lighting installation for 1,200 West Philadelphia properties, and an incentive plan to entice faculty and staff to take up residence in the communities. The University of Pennsylvania has also created working relationships with community-based organizations to acquire and

use information technology for neighborhood development purposes. A Center for Community Technology in West Philadelphia was opened and staffed by graduate students and AmeriCorps volunteers. The center refurbishes and recycles used computers, offers technology-training classes and operates a community information portal (OUP, 1999).

Faculty Involvement

Faculty involvement takes the form of individual initiatives where faculty become the driving forces behind particular community activities. An example of faculty involvement is provided by the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA).

Case Example of Faculty Involvement at UCLA

UCLA conducted a local and regional effort to build local community capacity from data. This initiative targeted tax, property and disability-related data. UCLA also provided the necessary training and consulting services for community groups to mobilize data as a tool for land reclamation and housing development. These faculty involvement initiatives are handled administratively through UCLA's Advanced Policy Institute (API). Faculty and staff from the institute advise local government officials on strategic planning issues related to: housing, economic development, transportation and the environment. Technical assistance is also provided to community-based organizations. Through a web site called "Neighborhood Knowledge Los Angeles," community groups can access the latest data by: individual property, census tract, zip code, or council district and display that information on maps (Roper & Pinkett, 2002).

Student Volunteerism

Student volunteerism involves individual and voluntary initiatives where students engage in community activities separate and apart from service learning initiatives. An example of student volunteerism is provided by the College of William and Mary.

Case Example of Student Volunteerism at College of William and Mary

The College of William and Mary's Office of Student Volunteer Services created *College Partnership for Kids*, a tutoring program run by more than 100 student volunteers each semester. College students provide one-on-one and small group sessions in a variety of subjects to hundreds of children from 11 elementary and middle schools in the Williamsburg-James City/County school system. In addition to providing tutoring services, the college students serve as role models and help build children's self-esteem, which has proven to impact positively on academic achievement. College students help identify children who are academically needy, provide tutoring space, and address children's special needs. William and Mary staff provides supervision to tutors at each school, tutor training, and coordination of transportation for volunteers (OUP, 1999).

Community in the Classroom

Community in the classroom initiatives involve making available to community members university courses designed to enhance community building and community capacity. An example of community in the classroom is provided by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

Case Example of Community in the Classroom at MIT

In an effort to help rebuild and empower its community, MIT developed a Neighborhood Technology Center program. The program, called “Creating Community Connections” (C3), provides residents of all ages in Boston’s Roxbury/South End with access to computer training to improve community safety, recreation, continuing education, and employment opportunities. Initiated by MIT graduate students, the project utilized computers, Internet access, comprehensive training courses and a web-based system. As part of this project, MIT worked with residents of the community to collect information and build a database highlighting community resources. Once residents received computer training at the Neighborhood Technology Center and were deemed “computer literate,” a computer with Internet access was installed in their home. This project was to serve as a model, demonstrating the use of information and technology to support interests, needs and improve the quality of life by increasing access to services and awareness of community resources (Roper & Pinkett, 2002).

Applied Research

Applied research initiatives involve the university, faculty and students in data collection, analysis, and reporting on community issues of the day. An example of applied research is provided by the Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Central Florida.

Case Example of Applied Research at University of Central Florida

In 2003, the UCF Center for Community Partnerships (CCP) was contracted by Orange County Government (Orlando, Florida) to complete a review of its newly created Central Receiving Center (CRC) for adults with mental illness and substance abuse issues. The CRC is a partnership as well, collaborating with area providers including: local governments, law enforcement agencies, community organizations, area hospitals, and the public defender. The UCF Center conducted a review of the CRC’s first six months of operation. The review included: site visits, interviews, data collection and analysis, and a final report to the CRC Governing Board. The review also provided Orange County Government and the CRC Governing Board with a capacity and equity analysis that indicated Orange County was not receiving its fair share of state and local funding to serve the identified target population. Orange County Government has asked the CCP to conduct a follow-on study to identify best practices in community mental health system delivery and to identify gaps in service in Orange County (Martin et. al, 2003).

Major Institutional Change

Major institutional change initiatives are designed to bring about internal organizational cultural change (e. g., changes in mission, promotion and tenure criteria, awards, course offerings, etc.) in universities in order to promote more university-community engagement. An example of major institutional change is provided by Howard University.

Case Example of Major Institutional Change at Howard University

In an effort to overcome its image of isolation, Howard University's president established the Center for Urban Progress (CUP) in 1995 and the Howard University Community Association (HUCA) in 1996. Howard University, utilizing CUP and HUCA, plays a major role in Northwest Washington, DC's social and economic development. CUP is run by faculty, staff and students. Its mission is "to mobilize the Howard University community to address urban crises – locally, nationally, and globally – through the development of academic programs and community leadership training, applied research activities, technical assistance, and direct project implementation" (Roper & Pinkett, 2002:). HUCA serves as liaison between area residents and the university. HUCA's programs include organizing student volunteerism, supporting community design and planning activities, and serving as a clearinghouse for information. CUP and HUCA collaborate on projects; recently incorporating information and technology, and have opened a Community Technology Center (CTC) providing training and support services to area community-based organizations (Roper & Pinkett, 2002).

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS IN UNIVERSITY-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

A distillation of the literature (e. g., Dugery, & Knowles, 2003; Blackwell et. al, 2003; OUP, 2003; Roper & Pinkett, 2002; Sandmann & Baker-Clark, 1997) reveals several factors that are identified as critical to the success of university-community partnerships. These critical success factors include: funding, communication, synergy, measurable outcomes, visibility and dissemination of findings, organizational incompatibility and complexity. The first six are positive factors the literature suggests should be embraced; the last two are negative factors that the literature suggests should be avoided.

Funding

The source of funding as well as the nature of the financial relationship is considered to be central to a successful university-community partnership. Blackwell et. al (2003) suggests that government agencies (and to a lesser extent foundations) are usually willing to provide funding for university-community partnerships that focus on "community driven research." However, the role funders are to play during implementation needs to be defined early and clearly (Blackwell et. al, 2003). A funder may desire to be either an active or passive participant in a university-community partnership.

Communication

Sandmann and Baker-Clark (1997) highlight the importance of initial meetings between universities and community partners. Frequent, formal meetings are encouraged to identify problems and challenges, discuss expectations, and develop professional relationships. The effectiveness of these meetings is said to be reflected by the presence of the following characteristics: (1) assignment of objectives, (2) effectiveness of communication, (3) clarity of decision-making, (4) clarity of accountabilities, (5) right skills in the right place, (6) credible partnering behavior of leaders, and (7) responsive ways of working (The Partnership Index, 2004).

A large-scale example is provided by the university-community partnership efforts of the Wright State University School of Medicine (Mace, Luken and Schuster, 2002). This university-community partnership includes three health departments, thirteen counties, seven hospitals and eighteen academic departments. Within this organizational complexity, initial meetings enabled stakeholders to define a shared mission and clarify goals. Mace, Luken and Schuster (2002) describe these meetings thusly: “in the first few months there were many more questions than answers. This open discussion and exchange of ideas served the team as an effective way to communicate each individual’s perspectives and ultimately resulted in the successful articulation of a comprehensive mission statement” (p. 58).

A smaller-scale example is provided by the university-community partnership efforts of the University of Southern California (UCLA) and its “UCLA Mobile Clinic Project.” The Mobile Clinic is an undertaking of the UCLA Center for Experiential Education (O’Byrne, Parada and Ezzeddine, 2002). The Mobile Clinic provides food and health services to approximately 200 homeless individuals in West Hollywood, and relies on student volunteers from various disciplines for support. The Mobile Clinic utilizes a steering committee of 30 students to define the program’s objectives and to integrate differing perspectives. Sandmann and Baker-Clark (1997) add that interactions between stakeholders may become more informal once a pragmatic framework has been implemented, though maintenance of the stakeholder roles and responsibilities should continually be addressed.

Synergy

Successful university-community partnerships also acknowledge and incorporate the participatory efforts of the various stakeholders; a notion termed “partnership synergy” (Lasker, Weiss & Miller, 2001). University-community partnerships require a two-way street approach to knowledge development and transference. University-community partnerships that attempt to adopt a rigid uni-directional (university to community) style are said to have less chance of being successful. Faculty involved in university-community partnerships must treat practitioners as full partners, not junior partners (Wettenhall, 2003; Bolton & Stolcis, 2003).

Measurable Outcomes

In order to be considered successful, university-community partnerships need specific measures of results. Therefore, early in the development of a university-community partnership, the members are encouraged to construct measurable objectives. Due to the complexity often found in university-community partnerships, traditional approaches to evaluation and outcome assessment may be “ill suited” (Blackwell et. al, 2003). Nevertheless, some form of impact evaluation is necessary.

Visibility and Dissemination of Knowledge

Another crucial aspect of successful university-community partnerships is visibility and the dissemination of the research and knowledge generated. Collected data must be analyzed and results presented in a professional manner. To promote the visibility of university-community partnerships, multiple communications strategies are frequently required. Academics may publish articles in journals, while practitioners may issue press releases and word of mouth at annual meetings (Blackwell et. al, 2003). After reviewing the key findings or outcomes of a partnership, stakeholders should decide on what information will be released to the community (with attention to issues of client confidentiality). Partnerships do not exist in a vacuum; therefore it is important that knowledge is disseminated to a wider audience.

Technology

Technology also plays a significant role in broadcasting the purpose and outcomes of successful university-community partnerships. Websites can provide a clear illustration of the various stakeholders within the partnership, can feature recent programs, and can include contact information for funders. Partnerships that have been successful and that have enjoyed longevity are usually quick to embrace the benefits of technology. Rosan (2002) highlights the economic benefits various agencies can receive by simply being located near a technologically saturated region, also known as “research park” areas. For example, in 1996 the Stanford Research Park had an estimated gross domestic product of \$100 million; over half of the companies in the research park were started by Stanford graduates (Rosan, 2002). Private organizations have a vested interest in improving the local community, and partnerships provide the opportunity for local organizations to increase their level of technological competency and ultimately increase funding opportunities. Successful partnerships often include technology into a symbiotic relationship with community resources.

Organizational Incompatibility

Why do some university-community partnerships not achieve their objectives? The final two critical success factors (organizational incompatibility and complexity) specifically address this issue.

University-community partnerships that fail usually exhibit characteristics that are the antithesis of the six listed above. Although the literature seldom discusses university-community partnerships that are complete failures, there is mention of conundrums that typically encounter.

Although the significance of organization communication was previously discussed, the problem of incompatible organizational cultures requires further exploration. Unsuccessful university-community partnerships may simply involve organizations that function in such dissimilar fashions that common ground is not achievable. The academic world tends to operate under conditions that do not relate well to the off-campus environment. Both Bolton & Stolcis (2003) as well as Buckley (1998) suggest that academics need to be able to compromise when it comes to such issues as: theory versus pragmatism, data-supported versus logical reasoning, scientific method versus case study, and academic versus practitioner dissemination of knowledge. Organizational conflict in university-community partnerships frequently manifests itself in practitioners perceiving academics as slow, aloof and impractical, while academics perceive university-community partnerships as “community service requirements” devoid of scientific rigor. Although these perceptions usually indicate a university-community partnership headed for disaster, Sandmann and Baker-Clark (1997) suggest that by sharing the “status of expert,” the various participants in the university-community partnership can be pacified into achieving their goals.

Complexity

University-community partnerships often grossly underestimate the investment of time, and money required as well as the level of skills necessary for success. Additionally, partners often enter into collaborations without being adequately prepared and then become overwhelmed by the complexity of the tasks involved. A 1995 study of academics involved in university-community partnerships found that most had seriously misjudged the complexity of their projects (Sandman and Waldschmidt, 1996).

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

In summary then, what can be said about university-community partnership? Certainly, a few observations can be made.

First, and most importantly, university-community partnerships are alive and well and flourishing on the campuses of many universities.

Second, while increased academic attention is being paid to the area of university-community partnerships, the research is still embryonic in nature and (despite statements to the contrary in the literature) still primarily of a case study nature.

Third, the term “university-community partnership” has little definitional clarity. The authors’ intent was to seek out and identify some of the more useful and generally accepted definitions of university-community partnerships; this objective was abandoned due to the

dearth of relevant literature. As used today, the term “university-community partnership” has no precise meaning, but rather is best thought of as an umbrella term used to describe many related, yet different approaches.

Finally, some progress has been made on the development of a taxonomy, or classification schema, for university-community partnerships. This work is to be applauded, but much more development is clearly needed.

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