Power and Possibility of Partnerships Between Universities and Communities

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Working with Communities
The Power of Partnerships

- The Academy and The City: A Long Tradition of Town and Gown
- Changing the Tradition: Universities and Communities at a Crossroad
- Embracing Opportunities: Learning from Others to Unleash the Power of University/Community Partnership
“If you want to go fast, walk alone. If you want to go far, walk together.”

– African proverb
The Academy and the City:
A Long Tradition of Town and Gown
The Academy

Elite, often religiously-based havens for the creation and study of knowledge.
The City

Gateways - flourishing political, economic, and cultural centers.
The Town/The Gown

• 1100s: Universities without campuses; masters rented lecture halls; students rented housing; cities provided “marketplace”

• Students /faculty wore distinctive academic garb; social symbol implying no manual work

• Students /faculty congregated in particular parts of the city

• Centuries of tension
Changing the Tradition

Universities and Communities at a Crossroad
The Town and The Gown: Why engage?

- Renews the **civic mission** of the public university
- Engages faculty in knowledge to **improve society**
- Shares **knowledge/resources** broadly, as prompted by values of a democratic society
- Connects thought to action, theory to practice
- Creates partnerships and clear expectations of consequences/benefits to **transform both parties**
- Increases **community understanding** (can impact support for university goals)
- Illustrates commitment by university to stakeholders
- Expands/adds dimension to learning and experiences
- Responds to **mutual self interest**
The Confusion

• Community engagement (an engaged university)
• Service vs. empowerment (problem with terminology: “urban-serving” universities)
• Public Affairs/ Public Relations
• Volunteerism / Service Learning
• Engagement to attain university goals (zoning, etc.)
• Public events
• Faculty as citizens and residents of neighborhoods (not as “representatives” of the university)
• Social embeddedness
Inherent Engagement

• Big employer; employees live in community
• Landowner
• Resource
• Population engine (in neighborhoods and beyond)
• University growth mirrors (and is tied to) economic development of community
• Urban dynamics impact student/faculty recruitment
• Cultural, entertainment, sports opportunities

Intentional Engagement

• Teaching that focuses on local issues; gets students out and into community
• Research focused on community-defined problems; faculty rewards for local research
• Involvement in local issues
• Working together to build community capacity (empowerment, not “service”)
• Growth of knowledge economies
Gown and Town
*Tensions/Ambivalence*

- Separate governance
- Neighborhood impact
- Dominance of University perspective in dialogue;
- Land use, parking, traffic, voting, police/fire, tax exemption
- Incentives: universities need city approvals; city needs $ for services
- Proprietary resources
- Diversity (race and class)
- University not good at listening
Universities Think Communities Are:

- Difficult to understand
- Process driven
- Disorganized
- Demanding
- Unreasonable
- Irrational
- Lacking “knowledge”
- Taking advantage of them
- Greedy

Communities Think Universities Are:

- Secretive / oblivious
- Big employers
- Bureaucratic, Corporate
- Elite (often arrogant)
- Monolithic
- Non-responsive
- Disrespectful of community knowledge
- Taking advantage of them
- Greedy
Embracing Opportunities
Learning from Others to Unleash the Power of Partnership
University Offers Knowledge

Early Steps: Sharing Knowledge

Transformation of University and Community
Case Study: Arizona State University
A Plan to Create a Socially-Embedded University
Goals of ASU Project

• Examine history, programs, perceptions, policies, people in ASU and Greater Phoenix to flesh out and give life to concept of “deep community engagement” (social embeddedness)
• Create Plan with broad vision for transformative (transformational) partnership

Process/Methodology

• 150+ one-on-one stakeholder interviews
• Visits to 15 college campuses/communities; 70+ additional interviews (with univ and community)
• Research; best practices; analysis; meetings
Lessons Learned

- It takes time to *learn* how to move beyond “service” into mutually-beneficial relationships.
- Creation of an umbrella entity often stymies university-wide ethos.
- Faculty buy-in: key within U; buy-in from community beyond the obvious leadership is key for the community.
- University reward structure needs to include support for engagement and community-based research.
- Working with community is a long-term process with consequences if commitments not fulfilled.
- Understanding complexities / dynamism of communities is an interdisciplinary undertaking (the academy is siloed).
- Communities don’t perceive universities as vulnerable (well-connected).
- University decisions generally made without regard for community.
- Activists don’t see universities producing analytical/organizing skills.
- Not all faculty are suited for community-involved work/research.
“It’s needs to be more than a program; it’s an attitude, but often university people think they just need to create programs.”

“University people don’t see themselves as part of the community and they don’t have a passion for change.”

- from ASU interviews
The University/ Community “Quilt”

Creating positive change in the Community and also in the teaching, research, and service responsibilities of the University

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Universities and the Urban Fabric

Examples
Universities and Communities Visited/ Observed

• Large Public Universities:
  • University of Washington Seattle
  • University of Minnesota, Minneapolis
  • Georgia State University, Atlanta
  • Georgia Tech, Atlanta
  • University of California, Los Angeles and Berkeley
  • University of Maryland, Baltimore County
  • University of Baltimore
  • Portland State University
  • University of Illinois, Chicago
  • Metropolitan University, Minneapolis
  • Rutgers / The State University of New Jersey, Camden

• Large Private Universities:
  • University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
  • University of Southern California, Los Angeles
Universities and Communities Visited/ Observed

• Small/ Smaller Private Universities:
  • Trinity College, Hartford CN
  • Occidental College, Los Angeles
  • Loyola University, Chicago
  • Roosevelt University, Chicago
Best Practices (some no longer operational)

- Georgia State University – RFP process for Freshman Learning Centers (multidisciplinary clusters – Atlanta-based Learning)
- Georgia Tech – commitment to adjacent community (evidenced in transparent master plan)
- University of Maryland Baltimore County – recognition of differences between experiential learning, internships, volunteerism, etc.
- Trinity College – massive financial commitment to The Learning Corridor; intensely engaged service learning
- Portland State – faculty-driven process to integrate engagement and city-focused research
- USC – definition of “neighborhood” with showcased results
- Occidental – patience!
Best Practices (some no longer operational)

- University of Minnesota – Council on Public Engagement reward system; college liaisons to spread the message
- University of Wisconsin Milwaukee kick off of “The Milwaukee Idea” – 10 initiatives; president’s pledge of support; pulling programs together under one banner
- UCLA –relationships with nonprofits; small funding across city
- USC definition of “neighborhood” as tightly defined area surrounding campus; showcasing results
- University of Illinois Chicago Great Cities Initiative/ Institute
- UC Berkeley willingness to take risks, invest funds, in now defunct Metro Oakland Forum, commitment of highest level Univ, city, corporate leaders
Place-Based Engagement – Best Practices

• Campus is integrated into the surrounding neighborhood
• Community activities occur on campus and vice versa
• Easy-access, on-campus storefronts enhance community life and provide economic development opportunities
• Campus “green spaces” and sports facilities are pedestrian-friendly and open to the public
• Importance of regional signage and local “way-finding” from outside to inside and inside to outside
• Public transit specifically serves campus and surrounding neighborhood (esp bus & light rail)
• Campus presence and its activities attract other community institutions; community institutions attract university participation
University of Washington Tacoma - History

- Historically working class city; can do attitude; “in shadow of Seattle”
- Community fought for UW campus to be created; active leadership
- Re-purposed, renovated vacant industrial buildings; seamlessly integrated into downtown; created new center of city with UWT as hub
- Within the urban fabric
- 20 years later credited by community as having revitalized city
• Positioned as “urban serving;” mission solidified in 2012 with new chancellor
• Served as “attractor” creating downtown arts/museum core
• Attracts students/faculty dedicated to community issues
• Strategic regional/community partnerships; child care, housing for students with children; YMCA
• Pedestrian-, transit-friendly
• Totally open campus as hub of city
• Currently searching for new leader: Will purpose be intensified or diluted?
Key Questions

- Where does community fit in? Have they helped to design the current goals? Do they want to be involved? Are they part of the thinking?
- If this thinking is to be university-wide, how does that happen?
- Who controls the syllabus? How does this thinking get integrated into curriculum?
- How do you define community? Who really benefits?
- How do you spread the word? What’s in a name?
- How do you make it last? How does it survive transitions and leadership changes?
What Does it Take to Be Successful?

• Strong, working **definition of an empowered partnership**
• Shared **ethos** (evidenced by mission statement) broadly disseminated and understood
• The “**will**” **to be transformed** by the process and the solutions (coming from beyond the university)
• **Intentionality** of direction and transparency of decisionmaking
• Understanding of, and support for **community “empowerment”** (vs. “service” to the community)
• **Backing at the highest level** for a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach
• **Clear expectations** of university and community
• **Shared responsibility** for outcomes
What gets in the way at the University?

- Lack of consistent, ongoing leadership
- Faculty/administration resistance
- Competition for funding sources
- Bureaucracy of university; culture vs. “organic” community culture
- Academic tradition of observing and analyzing rather than “action”
- Skepticism from community
- Developing meaningful metrics
- Learning to move beyond “service” and paternalism
- Rewards for global work vs. local
- Recognition of risk; need for patience

**Change is Hard!**
Challenges

What gets in the way for the community?

• University schedule (not aligned to real life)
• Transiency of students and faculty
• Inconsistent engagement and institutional decisionmaking that doesn’t tie to ethos (causing mistrust)
• Organic nature of community
• Skepticism within the community
• Paternalism of university (“service”)
• Faculty discomfort in communities

Change is Hard!
What are the Opportunities in Coventry?

“To be truly socially embedded, a university needs to be “open” to dialogue and challenge. It needs to build different kinds of relationships that might go against its traditional self-interest. It requires building trust and being willing to be flexible and organic. The university would need to recognize the value of being interdependent with the community.”

- California Community Activist
ASU Downtown Campus – Phoenix, AZ

- Use of some existing downtown buildings + new
- Built through City tax dollars
- Public invited to use buildings; First Friday events
- Porous to community?
- Student housing; light rail to other ASU campuses
- Efforts to engage
- Some resistance to relocation; impact on local small biz?
Georgia Tech, Atlanta

• Specific partnerships with site-based schools (tutoring, leadership development)

• Real estate development incorporating neighborhoods into planning; high level Director of Real Estate Planning with community view

• R.E. Director elected Chair of Neighborhood Planning Unit

• Transparency of master plan
Trinity College, Hartford CN

- Est. 1872; 120 years later surrounding neighborhood blighted
- Abandon campus for suburbs or engage to improve neighborhood?
- Engaged deeply on multiple fronts
- Office of Community Service and Engagement; Trinity Center for Neighborhoods; Community Learning Initiative *(not all in tact)*
- Biggest effort/longstanding impact: *The Learning Corridor* ($175MM project on campus): K-5, 6-8, HS, sports center
UC Berkeley (*How not to do it*)

- 142,000 sq’ athletic facility + 900 parking spaces (improve athletic recruiting)
- Would destroy landmark Oak grove (40+ trees); lack of information
- Town highly educated, activist
- Ongoing tensions prior to this (lawsuits against other developments proposed by university)
- Protestors took to trees – 21 months
- $28M construction delays; $3M+ legal and security costs
- Damage to already fragile relations
Georgia State University

- Downtown Atlanta
- Innovative (and evaluated) freshman program to tie students into community, while simultaneously increasing retention rates
- RFP process for Freshman Learning Center (multidisciplinary clusters of academic courses focused on local topics – Atlanta-based Learning)
Occidental College, L.A.

- Small liberal arts college located in L.A.
- Community engagement highlighted in all materials
- Strong understanding of difference between service and empowerment at highest levels of institutions
- Bridging of classroom learning with lived experiences; curriculum-based experiential learning
- Three offices dedicated to connecting campus to community
- Patience!
Portland State University, OR

- 27,000 students; downtown Portland

- “PSU values its identity as an engaged university that promotes a reciprocal relationship between the community and the University in which knowledge serves the city and the city contributes to the knowledge of the University.”

- Engagement noticeable at every level of University; doesn’t need a “center”

- PSU faculty gathered for two years to discuss how to teach to ensure two-way engagement