College and Community Collaboration: A Model

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Service organizations are faced with the changing environment of the 21st century, which challenges their abilities to respond to the increasing demands of the clients they serve and society in general. Hampered by persistent financial constraints, they need to be proactive in searching for ways to do more with less. Barry University, the City of Miami Beach, and its partnering agencies have planned a model of collaboration that provides a synergistic sharing of talents and resources to create a win-win environment for all. Named The Gateway Collaborative, this model creates a seamless accessible system for support and intervention services for the Miami Beach community. Barry University, by enlisting its students and staff (across different schools and departments) in direct and indirect service roles, can effectively address the city’s needs. In exchange for its efforts in building agency and community capacity, Barry will receive rent-free program space at the Log Cabin Training Center, a sheltered workshop for adults with developmental delays. In addition, Barry will have access to multiple program sites that can be used to incorporate learning for our students within the community as well as provide them with realistic cross-disciplinary educational opportunities.

For the School of Education, this model provides both the Elementary and Exceptional Student Education Programs an opportunity to incorporate community-based activities into their syllabi with the added benefit of on-site supervision by the course professors. Pre-professional teachers enrolled in both programs will provide remediation services to both general and ESE students at either the Log Cabin Training Center and/or the local elementary schools on Saturdays. This collaborative model provides our pre-professional teachers with the opportunity not only to practice what has been learned in the college classroom but also allows them to work in a cross-disciplinary environment. It enables our pre-professional teachers to engage in activities that research shows are most effective (i.e., service learning, action research, community partnerships).
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Revitalizing the Role of Higher Education in American Democracy

There is growing concern about the loss of interest and participation in public life in America. Reports, such as *A Nation of Spectators* (National Commission on Civic Revival, 1998), have outlined the erosion of our civic life and levels of volunteerism in the last quarter of the 20th century, while the needs of many communities continue to grow (Putnam, 1995). Civic leaders express concern about colleges’ inability to inculcate civic responsibilities into sufficient numbers of the next generation of citizens. One hundred and fifty years ago, Alexis deTocqueville noted that the strength of America’s democracy emanated from the number and quality of voluntary community organizational commitments by its people (deTocqueville, 1838). According to deTocqueville, the decline of American civic participation does not auger well for the health of American democracy.

Problems of urban living have been identified as the critical structural issues of America in the 20th century; if unsolved, these issues can affect our democratic way of life (Boyer, 1994). The futures of our cities and our universities are irrevocably intertwined. Universities are uniquely qualified to provide structural empowerment of communities (i.e., more effective schools, stronger community organizations) by using their broad spectrum of intellectual assets. The historical imperative of their primary mission to foster and transmit knowledge for a democratic society drives their need for involvement as a central institution in structural urban reform (Harkavy, 1996). Revitalization of both university and urban communities by academically based community service has its roots in the theories of John Dewey. He foretold the crucial
role of education in defining individual and societal success, and described how his trilogy of school, community, and university collaboration would strengthen our democracy by creating a more equitable society that would actively engage students in civic problem solving and research (Dewey, 1944).

Higher education has begun to reassert its role of educating future leaders and encouraging institutional partnerships that address community needs and foster community cohesion. Institutions of higher education are redefining themselves as ‘engaged’ institutions that are committed to enhancing and expanding opportunities for academic learning and discovery, while meeting community-identified needs. This engagement allows higher education to fulfill their mission statement, while strengthening their credentials to the public as an invaluable resource and a repository of knowledge and needed expertise (Holland, 2001).

The American Council of Education (ACE, 1999), using their *Listening to Community* format, has identified the universal characteristics of engaged institutions. Engaged institutions prepare innovative curricula, including community based service learning and internship experiences that not only inform students’ minds and encourage their hearts to enroll in public service to help define problem solving approaches for pressing social needs. In encouraging the development of students’ consciences, higher education must redefine achievement to include ownership and commitment to solutions of social ills in our communities. Student achievement is then defined in terms of integrating both human capital and place-based strategies to effect change in the community. Engaged institutions ensure cross-curricula and interdisciplinary experiences for students by utilizing society as the text. By requiring students to interrelate their
knowledge of their discipline in the community, engaged institutions allow students to hone their skills in a more holistic model, and to incorporate facets of social justice in a multicultural environment that raises questions of equity and collaborative problem solving, personal ethics, and student activism. Engaged institutions develop a ‘memorandum of understanding’ with community leaders to display a shared vision of their endeavors (ACE, 1999; Holland, 2001).

The purpose of this paper is to describe a specific collaborative model, *The Gateway Collaborative*, which has mutual benefits to Barry University, the City of Miami Beach, and its service providers. In particular, it describes how the model positively impacts Barry’s School of Education by providing course materials that include more effective teacher preparation, greater opportunities for research and professional development for both faculty and students, and more realistic activities that incorporate best practices.

**Purpose and Shared Vision**

*The Gateway Collaborative* model forms a coalition of partners to improve and expand delivery services to meet the multiple needs of the population of the northern quadrant of Miami Beach. The major partners consist of Barry University, Miami Beach, and community-based educational, social, and civic agencies. The shared vision of the partnership includes purposive integration of the assets of each partner that can expand programmable public space; this space is needed in order to address the empowerment of the citizens, strengthen the community, and increase direct services. This integration of assets can help to provide a “seamless” system of service delivery that avoids service
duplication; expands access and optimizes existing resources; provides a universal intake process; strengthens interagency referrals; and facilitates agency evaluations.

Participating Partners

All partners have an extensive history and expertise in community based service delivery, program design and implementation, and resource building in a multicultural environment. The outcomes for this collaborative venture are based on the needs outlined in the *Miami Beach Five-Year Action Plan* (1998-2000), which identifies individual and group requests as well as current service gaps.

*Barry University*

The following schools within Barry University and how they are involved in some aspects of meeting the needs of the North Beach citizens include:

- School of Social Work  Social services and referrals in multiple community outreach programs
- School of Education  Remediation of students, especially ESE
- School of Nursing  Health services provided by Physicians Assistant Program
- School of Arts & Sciences  Psycho-social evaluations by the Department of Psychology
- Academy for Better Communities  Counseling and mentoring services

*Community Agencies*

- Ayuda
- Dwight’s Computers for Kids
- Miami Beach Housing Authority
The following agencies of Miami Beach are involved in this cooperative venture and provide needed documents and services:

- Direct involvement of several municipal departments – e.g., Office of Community Services, and Housing and Economic Development Department
- Assignment of Division Director to Project Management Team (25% of time)
- Analysis of Miami Beach demographics
- Needs Assessment of *Five-Year Action Plan for Miami Beach*
- Access to public facilities

**The Need**

Colorful brochures depict Miami Beach as a much-desired locale for vacationers, well-to-do retirees, and people who appreciate an up-scale lifestyle. However, this picture can only be painted for the South Beach area of Miami Beach with its quaint Art-Deco hotels, expensive condominiums, and elegant dining. North Beach has not shared in the glamour and economic revival of South Beach. The demographics of North Beach show that the residents are typically poor with 60% of the population earning less than $25,000 annually. Sixty-six percent of the residents are uneducated immigrants whose first language is Spanish (US Census, 2000). Almost two thirds of the North Beach population
lives in aged buildings that require more than 30% of their monthly incomes (US Census, 2000). The largest employers for the residents in this area are in tourism and entertainment, two industries notable for their low wages and long hours. This area is rated as having the third largest crime rate in Miami-Dade County (FL Department of Law Enforcement, 2003). Thus, the North Beach community is a microcosm of physical, economic, and social factors evident in poor urban areas throughout America (City of Miami Beach Full Time Resident Profile, 2003; US Census, 2000).

A Win-Win Process

The Gateway Collaborative project establishes a collective integrated approach to the aforementioned needs of North Beach by utilizing the administrative, logistical, and community-building expertise of Barry University, Miami Beach, and various community agencies. This collaboration provides a synergistic sharing of talents and resources that creates a win-win environment for all partners. Barry’s role in this collaborative endeavor includes building and expanding agency capacity to administer to the needs of this community by enlisting its students and staff from the various departments. Barry personnel from various schools will maintain interagency collaboration using:

♦ Monthly meetings- attendance by representatives of all partners has been agreed on and formalized
♦ Training sessions
♦ Setting up and maintaining e-mail and web page sites
♦ Project brochures
♦ Public workshops
Barry personnel will be responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of the programs within the model and for collaborative problem-solving within the community.

In exchange, Barry receives rent-free program space at the Log Cabin Training Center, a sheltered workshop for adults with developmental delays. Barry’s pre-professional students gain access to multiple community sites for experiential learning. Barry’s students also gain cross-disciplinary educational opportunities that allow them to become more knowledgeable professionals. This project adds to the credibility of Barry’s institutional mission as a caring and Hispanic-serving university.

Model’s Impact on the School of Education

Schools in Need

The ecological needs of North Beach impact the learning environment of the schools. Fewer than 60% of their students achieve mandated FCAT scores, and fewer than 70% of the remaining students achieve significant gains (FL Department of Education, 2003). The rates for free lunch and the numbers of students in ESE and LEP programs are higher in this school district than in the state. Students have lower math and science average scores, and achieve lower SAT and ACT scores than the national average (FL Education and Community Profiles, 2002).

Benefits to the School of Education

The School of Education at Barry University has committed to provide academic remediation services for a minimum of 18 sessions to approximately 50 students drawn from both the general and exceptional education populations from the North Beach community. Barry faculty and pre-professional students will conduct the sessions on Saturday mornings at the Log Cabin and/or local elementary school. The faculty and pre-
professional teachers gain many benefits, which include:

*Effective Teacher Preparation*

Using the *Gateway Collaborative*, the Elementary and Exceptional Student Education (ESE) faculty can provide their classes with more hands-on, multi-cultural, and multi-disciplinary experiences. This model provides a source for intern placement and job opportunities, including two paid internships at the Log Cabin. Pre-professional teachers can now provide academic remediation in an inclusionary setting. Elementary Education and ESE faculty will collaborate on a coordinated schedule of commitment by course for both departments.

*Best Practices*

By being present with these pre-professional teachers, university faculty can model best practices and encourage innovative instruction. Additionally, having a common working classroom experience for all members of the course provides opportunities for post-analysis, evaluation, and reflection of program outcomes. These opportunities create a true learning environment whereby feedback from pre-professional teachers provide a more effective evaluation process for *The Gateway Collaborative* and individual courses.

*Research*

Sharing common access to a classroom environment with the *Gateway* partners fosters faculty intra-school collaborative projects as well as identifies critical areas of need that promote student action research. Being on site facilitates faculty exploration of grants and research opportunities to ameliorate problem areas or investigate the
effectiveness of various innovative programs. Being on site can also help pre-service teachers craft and implement high-quality service learning projects.

**Professional Development**

Joining in *The Gateway Collaborative* highlights opportunities for intra-school collaboration that can create added meaning to course content. College students begin to see the range of services that different disciplines provide. They also begin to build their repertoire of knowledge about the types of community services available, thus becoming more effective advocates for their future students and parents. Partnering with intra-school and community is beginning to change the types and quantities of activities required by course syllabi. Syllabi are changing to reflect more activities that require using the community as a classroom. Assignments have been streamlined to include one or two intensive community-related projects that require reflection and problem solving activities. Partnering with the different collaborators provides opportunities for faculty to become actively involved in community and professional activities, and to complete their ‘recency of experience’ requirement for the state.

**Conclusion**

According to John Dewey (1944), universities should be more attuned to the need for authentic engagement in the community in order to fulfill their mission of educating future leaders and implementing the ideals of democracy. As one of society’s service institutions, universities are also faced with a shortage of funds to meet the increasing needs and demands of our society today. Research continues to prove that collaborative community projects allow universities to gain relevance and impact. These community projects provide opportunities to prepare college students for their chosen careers;
encourage faculty to engage in professional activism outside the walls of the university; and allow colleges and universities to fulfill the promise of their mission. In this synergistic partnership, in contributing to the community, universities are strengthened by their problem solving involvement in the needs of the community. As repositories of knowledge and expertise, universities can institutionalize funding central to the continuance of needed community collaborations.
References


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