

University-Community Engagement: The Fresno Story of Targeted Neighborhood Revitalization

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Abstract

In this article we take a closer look at a developing university-community engagement project being undertaken between California State University, Fresno, and the City of Fresno. A history of the project is provided, along with a review of the relevant literature and a summary of what pieces of the puzzle we feel should be in place for a successful collaboration of this sort. These include what structures should be institutionalized for successful collaboration at the university, in the partnering organizations, and in the community.

In this paper we describe what we call the ‘Fresno Story’ of university-community cooperative efforts begun in the Fall of 2009, which were the focus of several panels and a neighborhood tour as part of the 2010 CUMU conference that Fresno hosted. This paper describes the efforts to get a true partnership of engagement under way, how the key players (the university and city) developed their respective roles and how things have developed over the past year-and-a-half in this endeavor. Our goal is to share this story with *Metropolitan Universities* readers in hopes of helping other universities learn from what we have undertaken here. This is not to say things have gone off without a hitch in Fresno—there have been several along the way—but for us that is part of the learning process and it has helped us to see more clearly what works and what does not when it comes to starting a new university-community engagement project from scratch.

Reviewing the Literature on University-Community Engagement

In higher education, the involvement of students with neighborhoods and communities through service-learning, internships, and other community service projects connected to academic work has become the norm rather than the exception. As higher education has evolved, university leaders recognize the utility of incorporating the many talents of faculty and energy of students to bring positive growth and development to low-income neighborhoods. University engagement with the community connects education with research and action, enhancing the scholarly experience for university students while providing much-needed services to areas deeply affected by poverty. Without the application of theory and knowledge through practice and hands-on experience, depth of learning may be compromised as students learn many important

concepts on a more superficial level and miss opportunities to connect their work to meaningful outcomes. This could potentially leave some students unprepared to transfer knowledge and academic skills to the work place after graduation.

Engaged universities contribute to the improvement of the surrounding environment through scholarship and productive, mutually respectful partnerships (Kellogg Commission 2001, 14; McDowell 2003, 32). As the label suggests, university-community engagement benefits both the university and the community. In low-income neighborhoods, residents may not recognize that colleges and universities are members of the same community, and that their public university could become part of their experience as well. Often they do not know what colleges 'do' or how to access the resources that higher education potentially provides. For many institutions of higher education an important, often central goal is for students to leave college with more than a basic understanding of their academic discipline and broad spectrum of knowledge gathered as the result of general education classes. Increasingly common within the missions of colleges and universities is for students to leave prepared to be civically engaged members of the community. Partnerships with neighborhoods and communities provide a window into a world that many from the university are unfamiliar with. Collaborative partnerships also provide opportunities for university faculty and students to use evaluative and research skills in a setting outside of the classroom or laboratory (Boyer 1990, 76–78).

University engagement refers to an administrative policy, practice and pedagogy within an institution that integrates mutually beneficial, collaborative partnerships between community members and university faculty and their students (Kellogg Commission 2000, 10). The collaborative projects focus on application of knowledge, theoretical or research-based concepts using community volunteer work in the form of service learning, community service, internships, or course fieldwork in which university faculty and their students work with community partners on academically based service projects that support a neighborhood or community (Kellogg Commission 1999, 9–11).

Through the frame of university-community engagement, this article examines the collaboration between the Lowell Neighborhood Association in Fresno, The City of Fresno Downtown and Community Revitalization Department, and California State University, Fresno (Fresno State). These organizations have come together in an effort to improve the environment of a neighborhood in an area of the city deemed to have the highest concentration of poverty in the nation (City of Fresno 2010).

Fresno is California's fifth largest city, with a population of roughly 500,000 people. It is located in the heart of California's San Joaquin Valley, which has a rich agricultural history and is often cited as the 'breadbasket of the world.' Fresno State celebrated its centennial in 2010–2011 and serves approximately 19,500 students, offering a variety of undergraduate and graduate programs to the region.

Collaboration between universities and communities like ours has increased significantly over the last two decades as leadership in those institutions reconsider the value of the campus community using its combined social capital; expertise in research, planning, and evaluation; as well as coordination and implementation skills to support the community within which it resides.

The relationship between these entities has not always been viewed as a positive one. Over time, the role and contributions of the university to the larger community and society were questioned by the public, particularly in matters of social activism or other problems of national pressing concern, such as support (or lack of support) for war efforts (Boyer 1996, 11). The relevance of institutions of higher education, often perceived by the public as caring more for research and obtaining grant funds than educating students, was also at issue (Boyer 1996, 11; McDowell 2003).

The image of the university was as an elitist institution, out of touch with the lives of regular people and the issues that affected the greater good of society. This conflicted with the view of American higher education as the only educational system to integrate community engagement with scholarship. These situations were, in part, the impetus for scholars to investigate the relationship of the university to its community and need for reform. McDowell (2003) mentions that American universities were at one time unique among the ranks of higher education worldwide for the strong and continuing connection between research, teaching, and community engagement (McDowell 2003, 33; Kellogg Commission 1999, 9).

The long tradition of university engagement with the community traces its roots to the early days of land grant universities in the latter half of the nineteenth century, so named because of the acres of public land “granted” to each state for the establishment of public universities (McDowell 2003, 41). The public universities, whose student body was primarily comprised of children of agricultural workers and the working classes, utilized faculty expertise and university resources to help solve some of the problems encountered by the agricultural community. The successful collaboration between faculty and farmers eventually evolved into cooperative agricultural extensions, a partnership between local, state, and national government. The early practice of bridging scholarship to real-world experience that established collaborative investigation and action-oriented scholarship between universities and their communities has evolved into an ongoing tradition across the country (McDowell 2003, 33–35; Boyer 1996, 11–12).

As a university that also serves a region steeped in an agricultural tradition, Fresno State continues to build on this early work done by the many of the land grant schools throughout the nation.

Though the history of college students and faculty working for and with community projects is long, by comparison, the term *engagement* in the context of university-community collaboration has a relatively short record. What is currently thought of as university-community engagement comes in part from two prestigious foundations: the

W.W. Kellogg Foundation (Kellogg Foundation) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (Carnegie Foundation).

In 1995, the W.W. Kellogg Foundation, at the behest of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, established a commission charged with the review of available research in order to understand potential paths that the future of education might take (Kellogg Commission 2001, 7). The resulting Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities authored six reports over its tenure, including open letters to the presidents and chancellors of state universities and land grant colleges, which examined issues affecting higher education. Key recommendations from “Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution—Third Report,” specifically called for land grant colleges and state universities to work with community members to solve some of the social issues confronting their neighborhoods (Kellogg Commission 1999, 10–11).

“Engagement” refers to universities’ moving beyond conventional scholarly and teaching activities, adapting those functions to productively support the community, while maintaining an environment of learning for students and researchers. Engagement also reflects a reciprocal relationship in which all contribute to solutions for the challenges faced by the community (Kellogg 1999, 9). Although this definition of engagement may sound similar to service-learning, the difference is in the inclusion of faculty service in the form of consultation, planning, research, evaluation, and experience. Faculty service, in the terms of engaged pedagogy, incorporates service into coursework by experiential learning, community-based research, collaborative practice, or taking action toward solutions to community problems (Rice 2002, 14–15).

Introduced in the third Kellogg Commission Report, engagement refers both to the work of faculty and students, and to the efforts made by the university as an institution to adapt policies, research, service, and pedagogy to align with issues of need identified by the community in which assistance of university personnel is feasible. Engagement is further defined by the integration of mutually beneficial partnerships in which each partner is respected regardless of education, expertise, or prestige, and is committed to an exchange of information, talents, and best practices (Kellogg Commission 1999, 13).

According to the Kellogg Commission’s definition, engaged universities meet three important goals (Kellogg 2001, 14):

1. Look to future and current students who are much different than those who came before them, with different skills, attitudes and perceptions about the world.
2. Provide academic opportunities and practicable experiences that help to prepare students for the world that they are expected to work and live in.
3. Use the talents of campus residents to help solve the problems facing the surrounding community.

The third Kellogg report provides a description and definition of themes commonly observed in engaged institutions as well as a seven-part test that defines characteristics of engaged institutions (Kellogg 1999, 9–13). The five recommendations made by the commission in this report provide key strategies (13) for universities to establish or improve engagement with their communities (10). Bridger and Alter’s (2006) definition, though broader in scope, shares characteristics with the Kellogg definition, and further emphasizes the significance of the mutual benefits of collaboration and the potential for social well-being as a result of university-community interactions (170).

Developed in 1970 and first published in 1973, the Carnegie Classification provides an independent classification system of colleges and universities. The Carnegie classification system was developed in response to the need for an empirically based taxonomy that described, grouped, and characterized the various types of colleges and universities based on self-reported information, including the number and types of degrees granted, undergraduate and graduate programs, and enrollment. Originally established by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education for research and policy analysis, the taxonomy has enjoyed wide use over its history (McCormick 2000; McCormick and Zhao 2005).

The interdependent nature of universities, communities, and their shared environment provided the basis for much of Ernest L. Boyer’s work on university-community collaboration. The former president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Boyer’s report, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), looked at many of the changes taking place on college and university campuses around the country, in addition to the social, economic, and environmental conditions of the contiguous communities which prompted his now widely accepted view of the scholarship of engagement.

Writing that “the human community is increasingly interdependent, and higher education must focus with special urgency on the questions that profoundly affect the destiny of all” (77), Boyer gave voice to the need to “connect thought to action” in higher education in order that young people moving from the role of university student emerge as civically engaged and productive members of society. Boyer further recognized the significant roles that faculty, university leadership, accrediting bodies, and the campus community play in university engagement as the institution continues to evolve in order to meet the changing needs of society (78–81).

Effective University-Community Partnerships and Collaboration

Academic service projects generally revolve around two broad objectives: 1) to provide a meaningful service to the community, and 2) to teach young people to understand and appreciate what it means to be civically engaged with the community. In engaged partnerships, each party benefits from the relationship and at times must compromise in order for the group to reach consensus. What universities bring to collaborative partnerships are the intellectual skills, capability, and a variety of “intellectual resources” that provide neighborhood and community partners with expertise in areas that most are unfamiliar with (Bridger and Alter 2006). Communities

and neighborhoods provide the raw social data from which researchers draw information and problems to study; they make up the audience and are the providers of anecdotal information about current social and economic issues reflecting life and the various areas of need (Kiltz 2010).

Effective community-university partnerships share common elements, assets, and challenges. Central to the success of many collaborative projects are the people involved and the relationships that they develop, often lasting longer than individual projects (Carlton et al. 2009). Communities and neighborhoods frequently develop long-standing relationships with the groups, organizations, and businesses that are located within or adjacent to them. Universities, like many large organizations, have incorporated neighborhoods and communities into their sphere of interest, particularly in the areas of service and research. University faculty regularly seek out and participate in opportunities to serve to improve the social environment of a community, both as private individuals and with their students (Boyer 1990, 75). Engagement is viewed by both community and university as a mutually beneficial endeavor requiring compromise and commitment, but ultimately addressing social concerns of the community and individuals residing within it (Bridger and Alter 2006, 166). Successful university-community collaborative partnerships combine talents and skills from each partner, such that each partner is viewed as an equally important contributor (Carlton et al. 2009).

Several foundational and defining characteristics have been found to be common to successful collaborative relationships. In their research into the characteristics or factors that define effective university-community partnerships, Carlton et al. (2009) identified four that are necessary for successful partnerships to develop. People are the most significant factor and are mentioned most regularly by participants in their study. Relationships based on mutual respect and shared goals, a vision of the goal, and future possibilities of the collaboration serve both as the beginning of the collaborative process, and as a reminder of the reason for the existence of the partnership and the shared end goal. Structure, consisting of a well-thought-out and defined foundation and process, completes the list (4). The resulting framework defined by this study's four factors and refining characteristics may assist early efforts at collaboration in the development of a strong partnership to work on issues confronting communities.

In colleges and universities, the potential exists for service projects to make a significant and practical change for the community and its residents. The students benefit as well, gaining an understanding of the reality of the world outside of the university. Participating in a meaningful service activity also allows students the opportunity to apply what they learn in their classes to the real world, increasing their knowledge about their social environment and of a community that many are unfamiliar with (Brownell and Swaner 2009, 29; Sedlak et al. 2003, 100). For many academic disciplines, this type of experiential learning may be an automatic fit. For others, it takes some thought and effort for the experience to make sense in relation to the topic of study, making participation more feasible for some disciplines than for others. In the past, service projects were more common to the social sciences, health,

or education fields than in the sciences and other majors that did not readily lend themselves to service projects or field work related to academic work. Recently, however, faculty in math, technology, and the sciences (Kafai et al. 2008), business (Fairfield 2009; McRae 2010), and other disciplines are finding community serving projects that provide their students with relevant experiences. In the case of Fresno State, we found these types of disciplines to be particularly good fits for our targeted neighborhood projects, several of which are described below.

For our students, one of the main goals is to have them benefit directly from the process of application of classroom knowledge to real-life situations. We know that careers in education, health, business and industry are very likely to include internships or other educational experiences (Kiltz 2010, 18–19). The literature also suggests that once they graduate, students are more likely to participate in civic activities such as voting and volunteering, and that service learning helps many students to improve their grades, in addition to developing feelings of connection to their community and concern for issues affecting the community (Brownell and Swaner 2009, 27)

For our faculty, we also wanted to increase their experiences relevant to the complex issues and needs that impact neighborhoods, communities, and the organizations that provide services. This makes partnerships with such agencies that much more essential (Kiltz 2010, 20). For new faculty, the impact may be felt in the process of working toward tenure. Recognizing the need for new faculty not only to participate in scholarly activities in pursuit of tenure, but also to further develop their teaching and research skills, many institutions are taking a new look at their promotion and tenure practices, to facilitate faculty engagement with multifaceted community needs, without sacrificing professional promotion (Sorcinelli 2002).

Summary of the Literature Review

As a result of this review, several common themes emerged that define effective university-community engagement and successful collaboration.

- Leadership enables university engagement with the community by ensuring structural development that supports collaborative campus and community environments.
- The university mission reflects the significance of community engagement to the university.
- Committed people provide the inspiration, motivation, and manpower; their relationships and networks often bring resources that help to sustain projects.
- All individuals involved are recognized to have assets or strengths to contribute to the partnership, regardless of their standing or education.
- Opportunities for shared research and reflective practice in teaching and learning are encouraged.

The Building Blocks Fresno State Provided

We know of several universities that have engaged with local neighborhoods and we are pleased to be building on that rich tradition; but we realize, as well, that the Fresno situation is unique.

The Boston College-Allston/Brighton Partnership is one example of a university collaborating with a local neighborhood. Allston/Brighton is described as heterogeneous with a significant immigrant population and a poverty level that is higher than average for the city (Walsh et al 2000, 11). The partnership was the result of joining two projects that shared a common goal. First, university faculty from different disciplines determined that they were all working on similar issues affecting the community and sought ways to collaborate across a range of disciplines and across professions to produce better service. At the same time, an independent community group had been working for several years on strategies that were similar to those of the faculty group. The two groups were brought together when the principal of the neighborhood elementary school asked one of the researchers for help in improving service delivery of academic and non-academic services to meet the needs of the school's students (12).

This partnership led to various grant-funded projects, beginning with the Boston College Center for Child, Family, and Community Partnerships, an interdisciplinary program which continues today, still housed in the College's Lynch School of Education. The Center serves as the central point of engagement for the college and houses all of the major projects that partners participate in (Walsh et al. 2000, 13; Boston College 2010).

Other examples include the University Outreach and Engagement office (UOE) at Michigan State University (MSU 2010) and the collaborative efforts undertaken by Ohio State University and several surrounding neighborhoods in Columbus (OSU 2009, 1-2).

California State University, Fresno, is proud to enjoy a strong and impressive profile in community engagement and service learning. In 2007, Fresno State was one of the first seventy-six colleges and universities to be awarded the Carnegie Foundation's "Community Engagement" classification. Then, in 2009, Fresno State received the Presidential Award for General Community Service from the Corporation for National and Community Service, and made the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll in 2007 and 2010. Last year alone, over 12,000 students, faculty, staff, and administrators provided the community with over 1.16 million hours of service, for an estimated total economic impact of over \$28 million.

A key ingredient to our campus' success is the presence of the active and highly visible Jan and Bud Richter Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning (RCCESL), which mobilizes students and faculty to work with nonprofit agencies, public schools, and other community-based organizations in Fresno. For example,

RCCESL currently works with Jumpstart Fresno and Fresno READS (Fresno Reading Enrichment and Academic Development through Service) to serve children and families in Fresno. RCCESL also offers modest scholarships, grants, and academic credit to students; sponsors a community-service-based Alternative Spring Break program; and hosts an American Humanics Certificate Program offering Fresno State students specialized training and fieldwork hours working in nonprofit management. Furthermore, RCCESL provides workshops, grants, and incentives to train and support faculty in creating and teaching service learning courses, of which there are now about 170 courses.

Additionally, Fresno State's strategic plan and its current academic plan emphasize the importance of community engagement and service-learning. They are foundational to the university's mission. Integration of service learning into coursework and the use of faculty expertise to help address local issues are also included in the university's academic plan (CSU Fresno 2006b; CSU Fresno 2006a).

Like many universities, the connection between university and city remained positive, but loose. In spite of the university's significant record of community engagement accomplishments, we had not established formal relationships with the mayor's office and we remained largely unaware of the detailed plans of City Hall to rejuvenate parts of the city. Fresno State had clearly made a difference for Fresno by deploying hundreds of students and faculty to fan out and work in a large variety of nonprofit agencies, but at that point, the campus had not considered a focused partnership with the city to mobilize our students and faculty to work on joint projects of interest.

The Neighborhood Setting

The Lowell neighborhood of Fresno is unique.

First, why Lowell? In the 2006 Brookings Institution study, "Confronting Concentrated Poverty in Fresno," Fresno was found to be number one in the nation in concentrated poverty—the degree to which its poor were clustered in high-poverty neighborhoods. The Lowell community is one of the "extreme poverty neighborhoods" referred to in this study with 49 percent of the individuals in this community living below the poverty line of \$15,219 for a family of three; this compares to the U.S. average of roughly 13 percent. Of the nearly 14,000 living in this neighborhood, 70 percent speak a language at home other than English, with Spanish being the dominant alternative. One hundred percent of the children attending Lowell Elementary School receive free or reduced-cost lunches (Berube 2006).

The City of Fresno made a calculated move to assist the Lowell neighborhood in spring of 2009. A new mayor had been elected in November 2008, Ashley Swearengin, and one of her goals was to deal more directly with areas of blight within the city. Previous mayors had attempted to revitalize downtown and local communities, but usually by looking for that one 'silver bullet' project. The previous mayor, Alan Autry, had often described Fresno as the classic Dickensian 'tale of two cities,' where the

northern parts of town often received the majority of city services and the southern areas (including downtown) remained systematically neglected. Others pointed out that the northern regions paid the majority of property and sales taxes into city coffers, which was true conceptually, but this did not mean that city growth or upkeep should take place only in those regions, as Swearingin pointed out. Indeed, the argument was made that neglecting the downtown neighborhoods would only cause more of a drain on city resources in the long run and that downtown was really everyone's problem—regardless of where you lived.

The Building Blocks the City of Fresno Provided

Swearingin's approach then would be just the political and organizational impetus needed at the city's end of things to see to it that manpower and funding was spent in the Lowell area. Swearingin, who was thirty-six at the time of her election, had a background in economic development and entrepreneurship, which helped solidify for many the belief that she would take the issues seriously. In terms of another connection with the university, she was also quite friendly with many faculty there, had served as a regional jobs coordinator working out of a campus office prior to being elected, and she held two degrees from Fresno State—a bachelor's and master's degree from the business school. Needless to say, part of the success of this Fresno model is due in no small part to the personal and professional connections between City Hall and the university. We consider these relationships a truly critical link in any joint university-city engagement.

The Downtown and Community Revitalization (DCR) department of the city was formed in early 2009 with the mission of revitalizing downtown Fresno and the neighborhoods of poverty surrounding the downtown corridor. The DCR was also important to the project as a home for several university students doing internships at City Hall. Other city departments were also called upon to focus their efforts in Lowell—including the Department of Public Works, the police department, the Department of Public Utilities, Code Enforcement, and the parks department. The director of DCR, Craig Scharton, was fond of saying, "Lowell is the neighborhood where the City learns revitalization." The mayor often called Lowell "ground zero" for the city's revitalization efforts.

In short, the Lowell community was chosen as the first area to target resources and funding because of its strategic location (directly north of downtown Fresno), its relative size, and because of the neighborhood's historic status. The plan was to focus resources on one target, determine appropriate strategies and limitations to implementation, then replicate the process in other neighborhoods.

The goal was grand: Turn Lowell into a healthy, mixed-income, desirable, self-sustaining neighborhood.

It should be noted there was one other connection between the university and the Lowell neighborhood. Although the current university campus sits about seven miles

north-northeast of Lowell, at one time the university occupied property closer to the city's core that is now home to Fresno City College. In our early research on Lowell it was discovered that a sorority at Fresno State, Kappa Alpha Theta, actually had their sorority house in Lowell in the late 1950s. Known as the Amazon Sholl Hays Home, it was built in 1907 and has been maintained in the classic American Foursquare style often found in Fresno's historic neighborhoods. The connections between Fresno State and the Lowell area that we began developing in 2009, would then, in essence, be more of a homecoming of sorts—since we now knew that there was some rich history to build upon.

The First Meetings

In 2009 opportunity and serendipity collided in an interesting and productive way. During the summer of 2009, a relatively new associate provost on campus met with the new chair of the political science department, who had strong ties with the newly elected mayor of Fresno. At this meeting, the associate provost learned about the city's initiative to revitalize key at-risk neighborhoods in the city, specifically the historic Lowell Neighborhood area. Ironically, because of Fresno's profile as a major city confronting many serious economic and social challenges, instead of garnering the interest and involvement of faculty and students from Fresno, a professor and his students in a regional planning course being taught at another California campus over 200 miles south of Fresno were among the first to contact the mayor's office to become involved in service learning for the city! This fact was the critical impetus for our campus to begin forging a strong, collaborative partnership with the City of Fresno. The timing seemed ripe for the university to consider a more focused, deliberate, strategic, and collaborative approach to promoting service learning and community engagement for our city in need.

Following this meeting, the associate provost consulted with the provost, who also had just joined the campus that summer, for consideration and approval of joining with the mayor's office and the Fresno Downtown and Community Revitalization department. With the approval of the president and the provost, the campus launched the joint Lowell Neighborhood Initiative in fall of 2009.

Creating Buy-In, Excitement, and a Process for the University to Partner with the City

One of the first critical steps was to identify key faculty who would be interested in spearheading the Lowell Neighborhood Initiative with their students and their courses. The associate provost worked directly with deans, who were supportive and very helpful in identifying and encouraging two or three of the key faculty in their colleges who had a relevant track record or who had strong interests in service learning. Once these key faculty were identified, the provost, the associate provost, and the chair of political science invited members to a joint meeting of faculty and key city officials from the Fresno Downtown and Community Revitalization department.

With clear, strong support from the president, and with the arrival of a new provost, this initial meeting on October 1, 2009, created a sense of excitement and buzz for the collaborative University-City Lowell Neighborhood Initiative. The inaugural meeting was the first of its kind for both the university and the city, and spirits and enthusiasm were high as the group met and began discussions of how faculty might mobilize their courses to work in tandem with city officials in the Lowell area.

An important next step was to ask faculty to identify how particular courses in their disciplines might involve students in Lowell during the Spring 2010 semester. Faculty were requested to complete and submit proposals for service learning in their courses, and these proposals were sent to city officials to coordinate efforts and connect faculty and students with the appropriate city offices and officials.

Faculty began incorporating Lowell-specific projects into their curriculum; students became more familiar with the neighborhood through these projects, internships, and service-learning; and this outreach included courses in areas as diverse as engineering, education, public administration, psychology, art, theater, social work, construction management, and real estate finance, to name a few.

In total, during the first year we had fourteen different faculty involved specifically in the Lowell project.

Projects included:

- Faculty from the Kremen School of Education and Human Development mentored Lowell elementary students and trained students as conflict peer mediators.
- Construction Management students provided analysis of neighborhood code violations.
- MBA students in Finance and Business Law courses provided real estate analysis of existing homes and properties.
- Social service information, tutoring, and mentoring in the form of internships and a service learning became components in a Human Behavior in the Social Environment course planned for fall semester in the Department of Social Work Education.
- An upper division ethnographic fieldwork class in anthropology worked with the mayor's office to develop a new, more inclusive method of conducting Lowell Town Hall meetings.
- The Theater Arts department assisted in the design and construction of street lighting.
- Construction Management students built wheelchair ramps for disabled residents.
- Students from a photography class worked with a member of the neighborhood association to plan photographic projects in the neighborhood.
- College of Engineering honors students worked with sixteen Lowell Elementary School students to develop their own team to compete in the regional Lego Robotics Tournament.
- A public relations class at Fresno State used the Lowell experience to help their students develop better ways to communicate revitalization efforts to the larger community.

In addition to the projects listed above, faculty have continued to work with students to evaluate the impact of their projects and assess any improvements in student learning as a result of working with the Lowell Initiative. For example, some faculty found that their students expressed pride and thanks that their professor and course was involved in improving conditions in poor neighborhoods. As part of their courses, students have submitted various papers, projects, and presentations describing their efforts and showing improvements in the Lowell area. In addition, students also appear to have learned more about the complex workings of city government and how local efforts can lead to progressive, positive change.

Another very useful resource was the Richter Center (RCESL), which hosted luncheon meetings of current nonprofit agencies in Lowell with faculty so their students could secure service learning hours working in the Lowell area.

The provost's office also asked our director of Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning (IRAP) to attend Lowell Neighborhood meetings as needed to serve as a resource and support for faculty in trying to assess and evaluate the work of their students in the courses.

Meanwhile, the Fresno Downtown and Community Revitalization department continued to organize and host their periodic Lowell town hall neighborhood meetings; and they invited involved faculty and students to attend and participate in these town halls, held at the Lowell Elementary School. Over time, the town hall meetings became more interactive and inclusive, provided an important feedback loop, served to chronicle progress of continuing efforts, and generated good will among all involved.

In addition, the political science department provided additional support for a graduate assistant coordinator, and the associate provost's office continued to provide infrastructure support, with the associate provost and the chair of the political science department providing leadership for the meetings.

City officials were amazed and extremely thankful for the proactive, open, welcoming and collaborative approach of the university. In fact, the city already had some preliminary evidence that conditions in Lowell were improving: reductions in neighborhood housing code violations, physical improvements in rental and apartment appearances, reductions in some crime statistics, cleaner streets and lawns, and more positive attitudes of residents.

Faculty attitudes and interest in the Lowell Initiative remain strong and enduring, with almost all faculty choosing to continue working with the project into fall of 2010. Furthermore, the strong, positive relationships developed between the university, the faculty, and the city have been invaluable and vitally important as we move forward on this and other future projects.

There was one other positive outcome of the work that was done in 2009 and 2010 to get this project off of the ground. When Fresno State hosted the 2010 CUMU

conference (October 24–26), several items on the agenda highlighted our ongoing collaboration. First, we held a ‘showcase’ bus tour on the first day of the conference. This tour took nearly forty conference participants on a tour of the Lowell neighborhood, hosted by Mayor Swearingin and a number of her department directors. The tour culminated in a presentation at Lowell Elementary, where over two dozen city departments, university faculty, and community groups presented their work in a poster-session activity. The CUMU attendees were able to see firsthand what kind of work was being done on this collaboration and the comments afterward were quite positive from the out-of-town guests. This event was followed up by two separate panel discussions on the Lowell Initiative, where faculty, city staff, and others discussed how the project was developed and where it was headed in the future. The CUMU conference proved to be fertile ground for sharing ideas with individuals from other institutions about our project and it also gave time for those participating since the beginning to spend time reflecting on what had been done and where things should move going forward.

One other element we wanted to explore during this period was to find students on our campus that may have lived or currently lived in Lowell. Our thinking was that there could certainly be a few students on our campus from this neighborhood and we should attempt to find them as best we could. They could act, it was hoped, as ambassadors to the larger cause and they could help us connect further with residents in a number of ways. To this end an advertisement was placed in the student paper, *The Collegian*, asking for anyone who may have attended Lowell Elementary to contact us. We also asked the principal from Lowell Elementary, Miguel Naranjo, for assistance, and he agreed to help. Naranjo organized automated phone calls to all of the households that had children attending Lowell to ask them to come by his office if they had any students attending Fresno State; he organized a mailing to all of the households in his area, since not everyone had a current phone number on file; and he announced the project during parent meetings. Unfortunately, with the exception of one student who initially desired to come on board, this particular outreach into the community was not successful.

Conclusion

This university-city partnership yielded multiple positive benefits for faculty, students, the city, and ultimately for the residents of the Lowell neighborhood. Surprisingly, this effort did not require significant monetary investments or extraordinary human capital. However, the success of this particular partnership was enhanced by several critical factors and elements.

For others wishing to establish productive university-city partnerships, some key ingredients to consider include the following:

- While it is not necessary to issue a presidential mandate, securing strong approval and interest from the campus president and provost helps to generate prestige and visibility for the initiative. However, to maintain momentum, a key, high-level administrator in

- the provost's office should provide continued leadership for the partnership.
- Make certain to have a key faculty member or other strong personal connection with someone who has close, inside contact with the Mayor's office, and hopefully with an office specifically charged to revitalize parts of the city.
 - Meet with deans who can identify and encourage key faculty to become involved in the initiative.
 - Ensure that joint planning meetings with faculty and city officials are focused, timely, and efficient. Invite key, high-level administrators (e.g., president, provost) for the first set of meetings to reflect the high level of interest and support from top university administrators.
 - Request that participating faculty submit proposals to finalize service learning in their courses.
 - If relevant, involve your campus' service learning center to provide additional resources and support to faculty and students involved in the initiative.
 - Work with the city to host periodic neighborhood town halls and meetings. It is highly advisable that community revitalization ensure active involvement by the residents in the community, with support from the city and the university.
 - Formalize the initiative infrastructure by allocating modest university support (e.g., graduate student assistant help, administrative and clerical support, creation of a website for the initiative, hospitality funds for meeting refreshments).
 - Early on in the process, assist faculty in identifying specific learning outcomes and assessing impact (e.g., provide more training in assessment for faculty; mobilize the your campus institutional research office and/or learning assessment office; create smaller, discipline-based faculty learning communities; provide more incentives to faculty to document student and community-based outcomes).
 - Consider holding a few periodic formal events and meetings to gather together students and faculty involved in the university-city partnership. By having all students from many different disciplines and courses dialoguing together, students and faculty alike may begin to see that each discipline across the university offers vital and distinctive contributions towards assisting communities and people in need. Students can further appreciate the richness of their disciplines, as well as others, in creating and effecting positive change.
 - Encourage participating faculty to collect and analyze data from the project towards publishing and disseminating the results, in order to promote the Scholarship of Learning and Teaching (SoLT).

The greatest threat to university-community engagement projects may be found in the maintenance of the relationships between the campus community and neighborhood residents. Strong partner relationships are better able to meet the challenges and develop creative solutions to problems than many disparate groups. Some of the common challenges observed during this study include the following:

- Language and cultural barriers, as well as inaccurate perceptions, are difficult to overcome.
- Increasingly limited fiscal resources require all partners to do more with less.

- Collaborative efforts may inadvertently support dependence rather than empowerment. It is critical that projects designed to support neighborhood revitalization begin with the residents; it is common for educators and other professionals to feel that as the experts, they should direct the change. However, that can be counterproductive to the eventual outcomes anticipated from the partnership.
- Sustaining improvement will remain the greatest challenge. It is important that engagement with all stakeholders remains high, even after the focus shifts to another neighborhood. The role of the university community is crucial as an ongoing source of motivation for students and faculty, providing the foundation necessary for continued community development and positive change.

In sum, this university-city partnership resulted in many positive outcomes for all involved, and has set the stage for many more future productive initiatives and activities. The experience has deeply enriched the experiences of everyone. Given the very modest levels of administrative and fiscal support, we encourage other institutions to explore and launch their own university-city partnerships. It has been an extremely rewarding and beneficial initiative, and we look forward to additional work in further strengthening the quality of life in our city.

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