

THE COUNCIL OF
INDEPENDENT COLLEGES

*E*NGAGING COMMUNITIES AND CAMPUSES

*Building College and University Capacity
to Engage with Communities
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To educate students for a lifetime of contribution to society, colleges and universities accept an enormous challenge. Toward this end, they help students pursue a broad range of goals—prepare for careers, acquire a sense of civic responsibility, gain self-awareness, and learn how to learn.

The rich learning environments important in realizing these educational goals certainly include the range of experiences accessible without leaving the campus, from classrooms to labs to websites to dorms to athletic fields. Increasingly, however, these on-campus experiences are insufficient, by themselves, if we expect students to achieve these ambitious, liberal education outcomes. Institutions will also need to enable students to participate in the world beyond the campus as a part of their formal educational program, via experiences such as internships, community-based service, and even paid work. Indeed, students have been actively seeking these kinds of experiential learning opportunities and their presence in educational programs has grown.

The increased use of experiential learning in colleges and universities, however, raises basic questions about the evolving character of higher education. How essential for students is this experiential, beyond-the-campus aspect of education? How much does it change the way faculty teach...and are evaluated? What kind of knowledge is generated in this way? What relationships with outside organizations—businesses, governments, schools, community groups—will colleges have? Are different kinds of staff needed?

CIC/CAPHE Projects

Serving to Learn, Learning to Serve (1993-95)

Serving to Learn, Learning to Serve in Promoting School Success (1996-98)

College/Community Partnerships
(Phase 1:1993-96) (Phase 2:1996-99)

Implementing Urban Missions (1997-2001)

Engaging Communities and Campuses (1998-2002)

Effective Practices Exchange (2004)

Examples of experiential education

- teacher education practicums
- business internships
- voluntary service in community organizations
- clinical training (e.g., nursing, social work)
- tutoring K-12 students
- community-based research
- service-based experiential learning

This paper proposes a set of answers to these questions, arguing that this type of learning in the world is increasingly essential and should be woven into the fabric of institutions, and that this learning requires significant changes on the part of individual faculty as well as institutions. The document presents our best present understanding of what should be addressed as institutions and communities engage more interdependently with each other.

Learning and Acting in the World

Many institutions are beginning to understand that learning in the world beyond the campus can bring profound educational benefits. Yet this learning differs in a fundamental way from on-campus learning—it is in the world. A campus, in part, creates safe spaces unhooked from the world; and what students and faculty do on campus in the pursuit of learning does not necessarily have immediate consequences beyond those boundaries. But when students and faculty are in the world, engaged in activities with learning potential, they are inevitably in contact with community residents and organizations, so what students and faculty do in this context can have real consequences for others. That is, students are not only learning but also acting. Thus all parties—community groups and campus representatives—have an ethical mandate to attend to both intended and unintended consequences of their shared work and learning in the midst of community situations.

Therefore, a vision of the full potential of communities and campuses to engage with each other begins with two guiding considerations—student learning and community interests. The argument at the heart of this paper is

that these two sets of purposes can, when taken together, provide significant mutual benefit, but that important work lies ahead if institutions and communities are to realize these benefits.

Ambitious learning outcomes

Learning is obviously a central consideration, especially for private liberal arts institutions, which not only consider student learning their preeminent goal but indeed set their sights for this learning intentionally high, nurturing students to aspire not just for jobs but for meaningful careers that contribute to society, not just for a knowledge of civics but for sustained involvement in responsible and active citizenship. The intent is for graduates to find a moral imperative in improving their world, and to care deeply about larger public purposes such as democratic engagement, justice, economic vitality, and a pluralistic society.

Learning in the world must become a key component of educational programs seeking these ambitious goals, since that is where students can engage the actual problems that connect students to the common hopes of the society. Many colleges do, in fact, accommodate an array of learning experiences taking place beyond campus boundaries, including internships, community-based volunteer activities, service-learning, problem-based learning, and action research. These educational approaches, typically labeled experiential learning, share certain basic characteristics. First, learners are engaged in experiences in the world that provide both educational context and content. Often, these experiences are connected to disciplines, professional fields, or other structured educational programs. Second, the college or university provides opportunities to reflect on these experiences in order to promote deeper and broader learning. Importantly, research has begun to document the considerable educational power of this learning. In addition, many students also combine education with full- or part-time work; and colleges may also find an untapped experiential learning potential there, especially for students beyond the traditional college age.

We think that most institutions could enhance student learning not only by expanding their use of these approaches but also, more subtly, by acknowledging and enabling their full power. As these pedagogies have gained ground within higher education, the learning benefits have often been cast too narrowly. For example, internships have been seen as largely for career preparation, with community-based service principally developing civic responsibil-

ity. But in reality, not only do they both hinge upon activities beyond the campus, but the common outcomes are also more striking than the differences. Both provide opportunities to learn similar skills and gain similar understandings, require a pedagogy of reflection for full benefit, and enrich student resumes and portfolios. And, of course, both allow students to develop the sort of self-knowledge and habits of learning that lie at the heart of liberal education.

Accordingly, this paper assumes that these various forms of experiential learning have much greater educational power than has typically been granted. We think that this range of ways to learn in the world can contribute to all of the most frequently mentioned goals of undergraduate education—preparation for careers, nurturing of civic responsibility, learning how to learn in multiple settings, and development of self-knowledge and personal habits of learning—often simultaneously. As institutions seek to help students gain more specific competencies, such as critical thinking and problem-solving, or cooperation and communication, learning in the world has the potential to assist students in pulling together these abilities in an integrated way. We encourage institutions to treat learning beyond the campus and in the world as one of the most basic and widely used educational strategies available to achieve broad student learning outcomes. The dynamic of this learning is richly complex. Students (and also faculty), engaging with community defined dilemmas and ideas, are pushed to seek new understandings—of ways to apply disciplinary knowledge, of new information or perspectives they did not know they needed, of their own inner motivations, of their compassion or passion, of an ethic of service, and of the intertwining of all of these. These experiences in the world require deep reflection not only at the level of the student and faculty, but also with community residents and organizational staff as well. If conceived by institutions and their faculty as intentionally linked to the academic or extracurricular program, such experiential learning can influence the overall educational program itself as well as the roles played by faculty. For instance, the educational program will draw on a wider set of resources in creating learning opportunities and realize the broader range of learning outcomes espoused by liberal arts institutions. Mastering disciplinary content can be more compelling within a meaningful context; skills such as team work and communication will assume a reality often lacking on campus; attitudes of inclusion can be nurtured through greater contact with diverse communities; and motivation to learn can be enhanced.

Interests of the community

The second conceptual building block of community and campus engagement is valuing the voices and challenges of residents and organizations within a community.

Community residents, as individuals, family members, small interest groups, or neighborhoods, often experience a current reality of struggling *for* something (e.g., dreams, better jobs, housing and education, cleaner environment, quiet, dignity, respect) or struggling *against* something (e.g., aggressive power, poverty, poor public services, limited job opportunities, violence, inadequate housing or police protection, addictions, or “urban removal”). These struggles define, on the terms of the people who express them, action and learning tasks for students and faculty from the colleges as well as action and learning tasks for the community residents and organizations.

Within a community a variety of organizations—for-profit businesses, governmental/public service units, non-profits, and community based organizations—serve, in a myriad ways, the interests of the community. Community residents involve themselves in this organizational web by deciding to procure goods or services, by electing public officials with particular points of view, or by forming new groups for special purposes. Generally, therefore, individuals work through or rely on these organizations as they pursue their struggles *for* and *against*. Community residents as well as students and colleges must discern the extent to which these organizations understand their communities and express the voices of community residents.

Just as colleges and universities have much to gain as they engage with communities, so to do community organizations as they engage with higher educational institutions. Students who are properly prepared and placed can make genuine contributions, and other institutional resources can often be part of the mix (e.g., collecting and organizing information, leadership training, planning, extra hands). Institutional representatives must realize, however, that including students and faculty in these settings becomes a challenge for these community organizations as they seek to meet their priority obligations to their customers, staff, share holders, or the general public. These workplaces are often characterized by a practical impulse to address concrete situations rather than worry about theoretical relevance. Results are measured in terms of goods produced, services delivered, and the proverbial “bottom line,” creating a cultural

milieu where issues of power, control, role clarification, and getting the work done on time and with high quality are real and omnipresent.

Higher educational institutions seeking to address community interests must discover authentic voices of individuals and of organizations, and in so doing acknowledge the values of these residents and recognize organizational priorities to serve the community. Community residents and organizations can provide a kind of “practice wisdom” based on their experiences that can create learning resources for students and faculty. When colleges listen over time to community residents’ stories and situations in a relationship of emerging trust, it becomes possible to develop shared definitions of problems that can be tackled collaboratively. Community residents are more forthcoming when the organizations of the community and the colleges relate to them as acquirers (they have a voice in determining what it is that will go on in their lives) rather than as recipients (others coming to fix them). Community residents will also fulfill the dual roles of being teacher for faculty, students, and staff of community organizations as well as having to help in clarifying their own learning agenda to get their own work done.

Engaging... an ecology of community-campus relationships

Discovering common ground at the interface of the two starting points—student learning and community interests—is the primary challenge for engaging communities and campuses.

To do this, we need to see higher educational institutions as members of a living web of individuals and organizations that jointly contribute to a community. As integral members of the communities in which they were founded and have made their histories, colleges are employers, land owners, landlords, purchasers of goods, procurers of services, gatekeepers of educational opportunities, and cultural centers. Many students come from nearby communities and many return to work and contribute as members of those communities. Faculty and staff also contribute as members of those same communities. Elements of an educational program are often based on needs of local organizations and increasingly use experiential learning pedagogical approaches such as internships and service-learning.

We might even detect an inherent institutional groundedness—perhaps reminiscent of the mythical

Antaeus, who renewed his strength by touching the earth, and indeed could only be defeated by Hercules when Hercules lifted him off the ground and thus away from his sustenance.

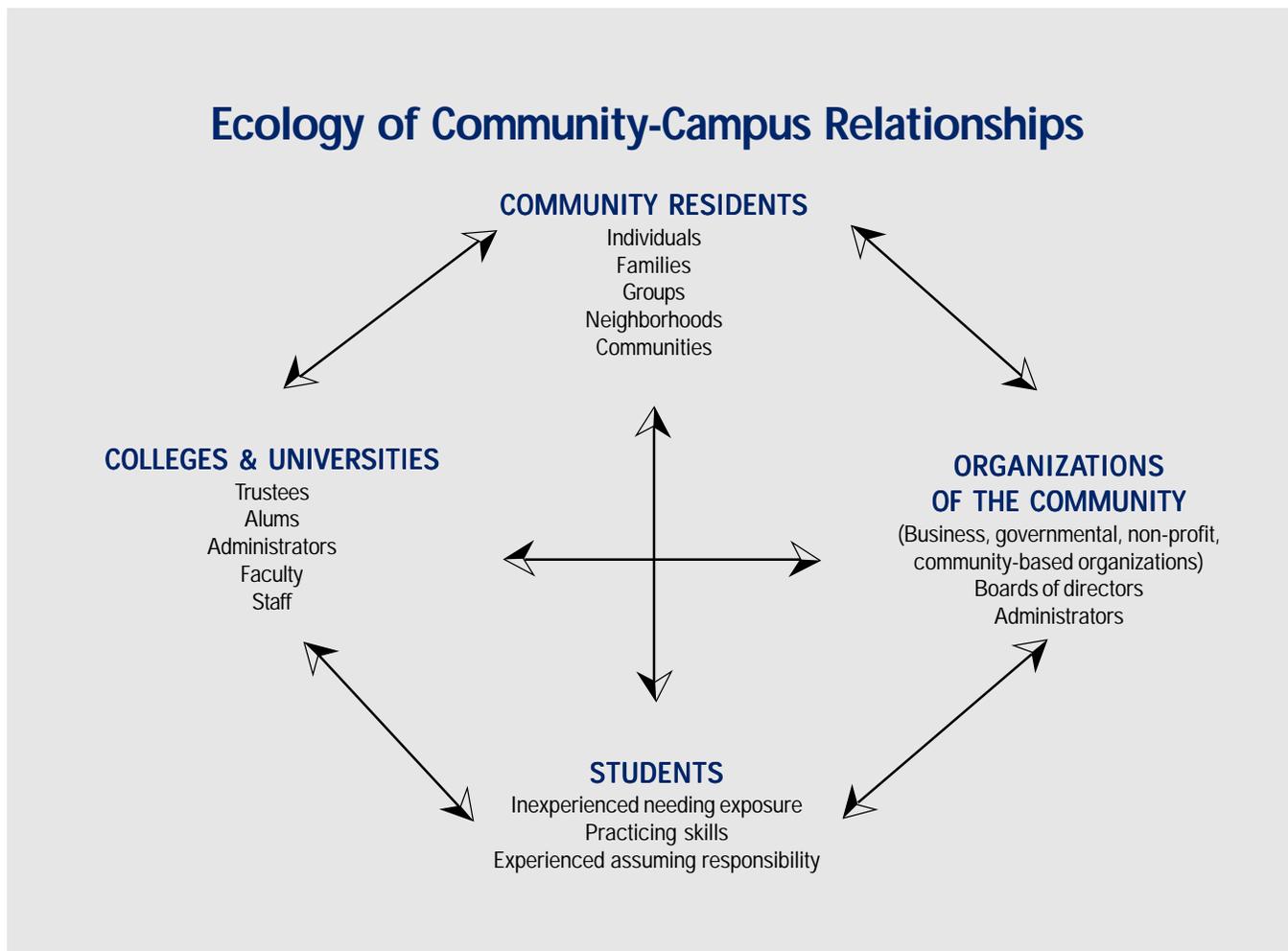
Such profound connections to surrounding communities are not inevitably valued in higher education, but we think that this concrete richness of educational setting and experience can, for those independent colleges and universities who fully engage, provide one more pillar of institutional vitality.

As a way to envision this ecological space, we highlight four (of a larger number) of distinct constituency groups: community residents, organizations of the community, colleges and universities, and college students. (See

diagram below.) Importantly, each has its own needs, dreams, and assets. Each is teacher and learner, contributor and beneficiary.

This ecological picture draws our attention to the multiple relationships not only possible but inevitable as students learn and act in the world. To move in the direction of sustaining partnerships, these relationships require a common ground of shared understanding, interdependence, and reciprocity that have not been frequently enough practiced between higher education and communities.

The rest of this paper outlines the steps that many institutions have begun to take as they seek to realize the significant benefits of engagement.



Building Institutional Capacity

To achieve a synergy that enhances both student learning and community interests, colleges and universities must create four types of institutional capacity: *faculty knowledge and skills*, *institutional infrastructure*, *academic culture*, and *partner relationships*. Many private institutions have taken some steps in this direction, but lessons from a number of institutions working in this area suggest that more comprehensive and interconnected approaches may be warranted. It is unlikely that all institutions will establish identical strategies, although an institution serious about weaving experiential learning into the fabric of the institution will need to consider the four areas of institutional capacity.

CIC's Effective Practices Exchange, a web-based collection of brief descriptions of successful initiatives that promote student learning beyond the campus, is organized according to these four areas of institutional capacity building that were developed for the Engaging Communities and Campuses initiative. The Exchange includes descriptions of initiatives undertaken on nearly 50 campuses. Information on the four types of institutional capacity may be found on the following pages, and on CIC's website at www.cic.edu/projects_services/epe/index.asp.

1. Faculty Knowledge and Skills

The initial step in guiding experiential education programming begins by gaining the informed support of interested faculty members. The selective integration of service-learning activities into the intellectual life of higher education institutions is almost always designed to supplement, not replace, traditional modes of teaching.

The creation of faculty development programs serves as the lynchpin for honing students' capacities to reflect on their "community as text" and appreciate the broad cross-cultural context of their studies. In such settings, the assessment of learning outcomes permits faculty members and all who partner with them to measure the value of their shared projects and to decide on future action steps.

Faculty Development. Expertise in the pedagogy of experiential learning does not ordinarily emerge from graduate school instruction or by having extensive classroom teaching experience. The knowledge and skills required to promote collaborative community-based studies have been developed in a wide variety of settings and by employing a broad range of approaches.

Creating Student Reflection Opportunities. There is considerable variety in the methods by which professors urge their students to reflect on service-learning experiences. A variety of tools, including writing and discussion, are used to stimulate student reflection. Such reflection is essential in turning experiential education into a powerful vehicle for learning that not only augments intellectual growth during college but also has the potential to transform the ways individuals relate to the world for a great many years beyond graduation.

Using Community as Text. Many professors who endorse experiential education as another valid route to intellectual development contend that there is enormous academic value to be found by systematically understanding how community activists analyze and resolve complicated socio-economic, socio-political, and other thorny issues in neighborhoods and workplaces. As such, the community itself provides text for learning.

Fostering Learning in Broad, Cross-cultural Contexts. Involvement beyond the campus often means engaging with different cultures. Indeed, faculty members who sponsor such community-based activities are frequently in a position to help students understand and value the perspectives of local residents who belong to a variety of ethnic, racial, religious, economic, and cultural groups with which the students may have only limited experience.

Assessing Learning Outcomes. One of the most difficult, yet increasingly expected, challenges to all of higher education is responding appropriately to accrediting agencies' requests to document the learning achieved through experiential learning pedagogies. Measuring the impact of learning outside the classroom, particularly in partnership with staff members of community organizations, can involve the use of portfolios and multiple assessment measures. No less important are attempts that are being made to "grade" the performance of partnering activities.

2. Institutional Infrastructure

If experiential learning is to take root, it must attach itself firmly to the essential elements of institutional infrastructure. This certainly includes a shared vision of institutional direction, including strategic plans that incorporate the desired community-based relationships.

In addition, minimal staffing requirements include the designation or creation of a coordinating entity with administrative responsibility for relating to community organizations and building sufficient student leadership to support service-learning and internship programs. The tasks of brokering diverse interests and establishing clearinghouses of information about community partners highlight the need for thoughtful management at all operational levels. The practice of good citizenship also requires keeping track of existing and potential community partners so that faculty, students, and staff know where to connect with community agencies, and importantly, the community knows where to connect with the institution.

Supporting Visions, Missions, and Plans of Institutions. One of the least affordable characteristics of any program is to have it deemed “nice, but not a high priority.” Among possible tests of relevance is how well one’s programmatic purposes match up with identifiable proclamations of an institution’s past, present, and prospective identity. Loose attachments to “institutional soul” will be very hard to overcome, even if lots of good folks do lots of good things on their own. Conversely, some missteps in developing experiential learning programs will be tolerated if connections to central purposes are tight.

Creating a Coordinating Entity. In developing and sustaining service-learning opportunities, complex as they can become, the truism, “if everyone is in charge, no one is in charge,” could not be more applicable. As in all other aspects of experiential learning, the need for some clearly identifiable entity to provide predictable and reliable cohesiveness is apparent.

Building Student Leadership for Service-Learning Programs. In addition to the need for managerial oversight, one of the goals of faculty members is to strengthen the leadership skills of students—some of whom will comprise the next generation of community activists, business leaders, and educators. Many of these future graduates are likely to be instrumental in building new internships and other community-oriented opportunities. The networking experiences they gain from leading activities while on campus can pay important dividends for the institution as well as for students.



3. Academic Culture

With respect to experiential education, there is a significant difference between overseeing current operations and institutionalizing expectations so that they become ingrained over time within the campus culture. For many communities, a “stop and go” pattern of offering student services—due to the nature of academic calendars—can be too disruptive to justify short-term gains. Hence, “sustainability” becomes an important criteria for the entire campus community.

The mechanisms that are used to encourage the application of experiential learning pedagogies include the provision of faculty rewards for overseeing such projects, development of related credit-bearing courses, and recognition of the value of co-curricular offerings for students.

Building in Faculty Rewards for Bolstering Experiential Education. For most faculty members, hiring expectations have been pegged to the offering of traditional coursework within their disciplines of expertise. Administrative workload analyses are usually rooted in terms of student credit-hour productivity. However, much like independent study arrangements, where a great deal of student-specific learning is overseen, the usual class-based indicators of credit generation do not hold up in a similar manner for experiential teaching activities. Consequently, it is not surprising for institutions to develop incentives for professors who choose to participate in such highly time-intensive work. The effective use of rewards can change the academic culture and raise expectations about student curricular options. Similarly, such rewards may also contribute to the willingness of faculty members to participate in the preparation of recruitment materials and policy manuals, initiate tenure discussions, and meet other administrative requirements.

Developing Courses for Credit. Departures from standard academic offerings that are likely to endure require careful curricular planning. In addition to creating singular discipline-specific courses that rely on service-learning, increasing numbers of faculty members are addressing curriculum-wide issues about the amount of credit that ought to be awarded for this purpose. They are appropriately asking about the advantages and

limitations for integrating internships and other experiential learning offerings into interdisciplinary courses, core distribution requirements, and the curriculum as a whole.

Providing Recognition for Co-Curricular Offerings.

Long-term change in campus culture can be fostered by those who are offering co-curricular and extra-curricular components of experiential education.

4. Partner Relationships

Without viable local community partners, experiential learning opportunities for students would be rendered costly and, for the most part, impractical. On the other hand, without the assistance of nearby higher education institutions, nonprofit agencies would lack an invaluable array of assets that can make a notable difference to the recipients of their services. Hence, mutuality and reciprocity, the cornerstones of robust partnering activities, are at the crux of these potentially beneficial relationships.

The functions being performed through genuine partnerships include their respective contributions to an understanding of partnering dynamics and the selection of particular partners; the creation of effective communications structures, including advisory boards; and the development of measures that assess the impact of experiential learning programs on communities.

Understanding Partnering Dynamics and Selecting Partners. At least two interrelated forms of understanding are required for developing effective partnerships. The first is theoretical—the potential gains, problems and obstacles that can be anticipated in professional, mutually beneficial partnerships between and among representatives of cooperating organizations. The second is understanding and appreciating the particular needs and customs—for example, differences in organizational culture and ways of working—of prospective partners. All parties must candidly discuss these issues. In each case, every effort should be made to carefully determine whether the value of working together exceeds expected costs of time and resources.

Creating Communications Structures and Advisory Boards. Once partnering begins, the durability of these relationships is likely to be highly dependent on the quality of formal and informal communications struc-

tures. At different points in time, especially as the individuals from the several participating organizations change, communications mechanisms may have to be modified and restated. Nevertheless, the essential functions associated with communicating clearly and often are likely to be steadily needed. In a great many cases, advisory boards with representation from all interested campuses and nonprofit constituencies, are likely to prove essential.

Assessing the Impact of Experiential Learning Programs on Communities. Just as colleges and universities will want to demonstrate that measurable learning outcomes are resulting from experiential learning programs, so will the leaders of local service organizations feel bound to analyze how much good work by students is

being done on behalf of the citizens they are responsible for assisting. The performance measures they will use are likely to parallel, but not replicate, the kinds of assessments being made by their academic partners.

These These four areas support each other in powerful ways. Thus individuals working to enhance institutional capacity in one of these areas should be cognizant of the implications for other aspects of the institution. The potential mutual benefits—for students and communities—seem considerable for those colleges and universities that can build a capacity to engage in genuine partnerships.