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*An innovative University of Central Florida collaborative project has provided 56 university students with a structured hands-on learning experience. The students, in turn, have produced more than 10,000 hours of free assessment and case management services to the juvenile offender population. The author encourages replication of the project and identifies specific considerations and challenges in the project's development.*

# **Mental Health Services for Juvenile Offenders: A University- Community Collaborative Project**

Developing collaborative partnerships between universities and community agencies presents a wide range of challenges. Sometimes different philosophies, agendas, and goals make these relationships difficult (Susman, 1989). Despite the challenges, university and community partners continue to successfully pool their skills and resources in efforts to address community problems. Successful collaborations can be a win-win venture that provides all partners with opportunities. Community agencies sometimes receive additional staff, research assistance, and evaluation findings that allow the agency to better allocate decreasing resources. The university benefits from community involvement that creates research opportunities for its faculty and learning avenues for its students.

One such university-community collaborative partnership is the internship model located within

the Orlando Juvenile Assessment Center, which was successful during its first year and has been funded for a second year of operation. This cross-sector project provides direct assessment and mental health services to juvenile offenders in the central Florida area through the collaborative efforts of the Florida Department of Children & Family Services, the local Department of Juvenile Justice, Orange County government, juvenile judges, and the local state university and its students. Since its inception in 1995, this innovative internship project has provided 56 (to date) undergraduate and graduate students with a structured, hands-on learning experience. These students, in turn, have provided more than 10,000 hours of free assessment and case management services to the community partners and directly to the juvenile offender population.

### **Description of The Project**

The University of Central Florida (UCF) Juvenile Assessment Center Intern Unit was a response to its provost's Strategic Initiative Awards Program in January 1995. Selected from more than 90 proposals, the cross-sector collaborative project is one of eight new projects funded university-wide in 1995-96. The project's goals are to:

- provide a hands-on learning experience for students;
- collect data on juvenile offenders; and
- work collaboratively with community agencies.

This interdisciplinary effort provides field placements for undergraduate and graduate students from the departments of social work, criminal justice, psychology, and the Statistics Institute. Most interns have been undergraduate and graduate students from the School of Social Work. Undergraduate and graduate level interns contribute from 10 to 32 hours weekly for one to two academic semesters.

### ***Services Provided by Interns***

Students provide assessment services to juvenile offenders under the structured supervision of an experienced, full-time, master's level social worker, completing their internship requirements in the Booking, At Large, or Comprehensive Assessment Units and providing face-to-face biopsychosocial evaluations, case management services, and comprehensive mental health assessments. They also assist intake case managers in assignments such as writing state attorney recommendations and pre-disposition reports, and conduct other assessments, including a Supervision Risk In-

strument, a State Integrated Substance Abuse Report, a Community Arbitration Screening Instrument, a Serious or Habitual Offender Worksheet, and the HIV Risk Assessment.

The project has expanded this year to include short-term support groups for parents and youths, co-facilitated by advanced second-year graduate social work students working in teams to provide psychoeducational material to juvenile offenders and their parents. The group curriculum includes a short-term module format that incorporates educational information and experiential activities to help prevent offenders from reentering the juvenile justice system. Simultaneous groups provide the juveniles' parents with similar information on topics that include anger management, effective disciplining, and communication skills.

## **Reasons For Collaborative Effort**

### ***Increase in Juvenile Crime***

Juvenile crime has increased in Florida over the past few years. The Florida State Department of Juvenile Justice reports an eight percent increase in the number of delinquency cases received in 1995-96 (Department of Juvenile Justice Report, 1995). In 1994-95, Florida juveniles committed 63,361 felonies—20,602 burglaries, 8,604 aggravated assault/battery cases, and 7,060 auto thefts—and 85,742 misdemeanor crimes. The largest percentage of delinquency cases involved individuals between the ages of 13 and 17.

### ***Meeting the Community Need***

After years of community planning, the implementation of the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) in Orlando, Florida, became a reality in 1994. The center is an innovative facility designed to alleviate the longstanding systemic problems of the juvenile justice service delivery system, by serving as a one-stop centralized facility that provides assessment and case management services for juvenile offenders and their families.

Juveniles officially charged with committing offenses receive an initial assessment at the Juvenile Assessment Center, followed by a case disposition recommendation from staff. Disposition examples include home arrest or referral to a crisis stabilization unit, the Juvenile Detention Center, or a nonsecure detention facility such as a shelter. The center also houses a 20-bed, short-term addiction assessment and referral unit that emphasizes assessment and stabilization of substance abusing adolescents.

In its efforts to address the needs of juvenile offenders, the Juvenile Assessment Center invited the university to house the internship unit at its location.

### ***Meeting the University Need***

The UCF Juvenile Assessment Center Intern Unit meets four of the university's five strategic planning goals: undergraduate education, graduate education and research, diversity, and community partnership.

***Excellence in undergraduate education.*** The collaborative initiative provides undergraduate students with a structured interdisciplinary internship program that integrates curriculum content with hands-on practice experience that helps undergraduate students learn to work in an interdisciplinary professional setting and learn to deliver direct assessment and case management services to assist juvenile offenders and their families.

***Graduate study and research.*** Graduate students have the opportunity to enhance their assessment and counseling skills through direct service delivery. In order to meet the expected graduate level competencies in each of the disciplines, students work in one project area for the entire academic year. To date, research activities include developing a profile of the population and measuring the effectiveness of short-term psychoeducational groups. Involvement in these research activities enables graduate students to further develop critical thinking skills, learn about research design, and collect and analyze data. Classroom policy analysis assignments allow students to review, analyze, and recommend changes in agency policies and procedures.

***Diversity.*** The project has included students of diverse cultural and racial backgrounds and experiences and this diverse intern group is reflective of the client population served by the unit. The presence of a bilingual on-site supervisor and bilingual interns is extremely valuable in delivering service to Spanish-speaking juvenile offenders.

***Community partnership.*** The internship project strongly supports the university's commitment to developing collaborative relationships with community partners and focuses on the delivery of vital services to a growing juvenile offender population in the Orlando community. Its research relationship with two of the largest human services agencies in the county, along with funding from both the university

and the community partners, reinforces a strong commitment to a productive collaborative effort.

The downtown Orlando location of the project's field site affords students the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of agencies that provide services to the juvenile offender population, to learn about social issues that affect modern metropolitan areas, and to identify solutions within sophisticated service delivery systems (Levison, 1990; Conrad & Hedin, 1990).

The state and the county have recognized that one of the largest potential dangers to the area's economic health is its degradation through increasing rates of juvenile crime, violent crime in particular. Crime rates have a chilling effect on business investment, and can have a ripple effect in discouraging new business formation and the relocation of other businesses in the area. The internship project provides direct intervention aimed at services reducing the rate of growth and recurrence of juvenile crime. We hope that the long-term success of this intervention will have a positive effect on the area's business climate.

### **Project Partners and Funding**

The project has received \$247,257 in funding since its inception. While all partners supported the collaboration, the Department of Juvenile Justice was not a funding source until the second year of the internship. The total amount of funding from each partner for each of the two years is as follows:

TABLE 1  
*Collaborative Project Funding—Years 1 and 2*

Funding Source	1995-96-Yr 1	Spring 1996	1996-97-Yr 2	Total
Dept. of Children and Family Services/Human Services Associates	\$ 40,000	\$ 0	\$ 50,000	\$ 90,000
University	35,000	0	32,325	67,325
Dept. of Juvenile Justice	0	28,744	49,302	78,046
School of Social Work	6,278	0	5,608	11,886
<b>Totals:</b>	<b>\$ 81,278</b>	<b>\$ 28,744</b>	<b>\$137,235</b>	<b>\$ 247,257</b>

Each of the collaborative partners provides the unit with office space, supplies, training, phone access, and personnel processing services in addition to financial contributions. The Department of Juvenile Justice arranges some tuition waivers and stipends (Boust, 1991). The university's share of funding covers some of the faculty and research expenses, while the Department of Sponsored Research provides fiscal management of grant funds.

## **Development of the Cross-sector Collaborative Project**

### ***Planning and Implementation Phase***

The planning and implementation phase that began in July 1995 moved very rapidly after the collaborative partners completed the contractual procedures. The biggest challenge for the project director during this phase was working with three large funding sources. Specifically, the collaborative grant included three separate funding agencies with very different fiscal and contractual policies and procedures, requiring time-consuming meetings with the university's Department of Sponsored Research to ensure that all fiscal matters were in order.

The focus then shifted to the development of policies, procedures, and the training and research components for the collaborative internship project staff. The following is a list of those early priorities for Phase One:

### ***Policies and Procedures***

- letter of agreement between the university and the host agency (the Juvenile Assessment Center);
- development of supervisory and communication procedures for students and on-site supervisor;
- development of an orientation packet for students, an on-site supervisor, and community agency partners;
- development of separate on-site orientation manual for interns;
- development of statistical tracking forms.

### ***Training and Supplies***

- development of a student training session;
- schedule of the year's training sessions;

- setting up space, supplies and equipment;
- pairing students with agency staff; and
- development of student schedules and caseloads.

### ***Development of Research Component***

- development of research protocol;
- development of research study forms; and
- research meetings for training agency staff and students.

Phase Two began in September 1995 and continued through early summer 1996. This phase consisted of direct service delivery and the initiation of data collection.

Phase Three began in May 1995 and focused on student learning and project evaluations. Phase Three marked the end of the project's first fiscal year and concluded with final project reports to the university and the funding sources. Most research data collection was completed at the end of this phase, and students beginning their summer internships provided program continuity during the summer months by overlapping with the student group that entered during the summer.

### ***Decision-Making Procedures***

Decision-making procedures within cross collaborations can be complex and often frustrating. The actual project staff consists of two faculty members, one on-site supervisor, and one part-time clerical person. There are times, however, when the director consults with several other university and agency departments. In this case, there are two external agencies that guide the work of the unit. The on-site supervisor handles all daily operational issues, and keeps the director closely informed. The on-site supervisor must also work with the university's coordinator of field education to ensure that the student's learning needs meet academic standards. For the most part, the project director, in consultation with the on-site supervisor, makes project decisions.

There are times when problems arise in special areas such as budget management. Usually, the director consults with the co-investigator, the on-site supervisor, and the university's Department of Sponsored Research on budgetary matters. Occasionally, fiscal matters also include input from the college and university levels. Frustration can increase when as many as four or five university departments and at least one external funding source participate in fiscal management and it is important for the

project director to be aware of each collaborative partner's fiscal policies and procedures and work toward mutually satisfactory outcomes.

Cross-sector collaboration projects require that the project director be aware of and involved in all aspects of the process. While the university is the overall umbrella for collaborative projects, it is the individual faculty members who implement the program (Horowitz, 1990). To foster good working relationships, it is crucial to have regular telephone and face-to-face contact with the community partners. We have found that developing a positive relationship with the partners helps to solve issues as they arise and also conveys commitment to the collaborative process. The development of flexible and reciprocal working relationships with community agencies reinforces a positive professional reputation, helps others take an interest in the project, and reflects well on the representatives of the university community. A good sense of humor and a willingness to be a team player will also reinforce positive relationships with the collaborative partners.

Of equal importance is providing the proper supervision and support for the on-site supervisor who handles daily project operations. In this program, weekly meetings between the project director and the on-site supervisor worked well during the project's beginning phase. After a six to eight-month period, supervisory meetings occurred only on a biweekly or monthly basis. Respecting the on-site supervisor's style, independence, and creativity has resulted in the development of new services and successful operation of the project.

Decision-making is an easier process when the project director has been proactive in monitoring various project activities. During the first year, the project director set aside a significant weekly amount (perhaps two days) of project management time, which worked particularly well with budget management issues. Meeting regularly with the clerical staff member who handled all budgetary matters, we reviewed expenditure patterns, inconsistencies in the accounting system, and other fiscal matters. Contacting the appropriate university departments or external funding sources became an important aspect of constructive problem solving.

## **Key Elements of the Cross-sector Collaborative Project**

### ***Interdisciplinary and Intercollege Effort***

The intern unit consists of students from four university departments in two different colleges. Students from the School of Social Work, the Departments of

Psychology and Criminal Justice, and the Institute of Statistics have participated in the project. These departments represent the College of Health and Public Affairs and the College of Arts and Sciences. In addition, during the academic year 1996-97, the project added eight students from the university's work-study program who were assigned for two semesters to provide clerical support to the community partners. The assistant director of the Institute of Statistics provided statistical consultations on the project's research and data collection activities. The project has been supported by the dean of the College of Health and Public Affairs, the director of the School of Social Work, the chair of the Department of Criminal Justice, the chair from the Institute of Statistics, and the director from the Psychology Department's Gerontology Initiative.

### ***The Role of the On-Site Supervisor***

A full-time, on-site M.S.W. supervisor ensures quality learning and adherence to academic standards, provides students with a structured internship, and acts as the administrative liaison to the principal investigator (Bloedon & Stokes, 1994). The internship supervisor organizes the experience to allow students to achieve their learning goals. The on-site supervisor's role is pivotal, given the complexities of the community partners, the differences in philosophies, and the continually changing nature of the systems. Located at the internship site, the supervisor is responsible for the following:

- mediating between students and community partners;
- assigning student cases;
- conducting student evaluations;
- identifying intern team issues;
- providing weekly individual and group supervision; and
- serving as the administrative liaison to the project director.

### ***Human Services/Mental Health Emphasis Within Juvenile Justice***

The focus of most juvenile justice services is on the legal and criminal aspects of juvenile offenses. Interdisciplinary interns heighten the system's awareness of mental health issues. While students still address legal issues, their training in psycho-

logical and social aspects of human behavior presents an additional perspective in understanding juvenile offenders. The energy and creativity that students bring to any field practicum serve to provide the agency and staff with new ideas and new ways of understanding familiar situations.

### ***Role of the Steering Committee***

A steering committee consisting of both university and agency representatives provides feedback to the project staff, meeting about twice each semester to discuss the development, implementation, and monitoring of the cross-sector collaborative project. Agency representatives provide feedback on the project's progress and identify new agency concerns that need addressing.

### ***Support from the Governing Board, Community Leaders, Juvenile Judges, and Political Representatives***

University partners should consider some basic criteria for establishing their readiness to engage with other community agencies in a joint venture. Successful university-community partnerships should be credible, focused on the community's needs, and include other community organizations and providers (Zeldin, 1995). The cross-sector collaborative project's goals complement the efforts of local government representatives who advocate for both a legal and a rehabilitative approach to the juvenile offender problem.

Acknowledging compatibility with the collaborative project's goals, the county chairperson, juvenile judges, and the mayor of Orlando provided letters of support for university funding. The Juvenile Assessment Center Governing Board also gave support after hearing a presentation on the services of the collaborative project. Juvenile judges and court staff helped to identify the types of services needed by juvenile offenders. This, in turn, enabled the project to expand its services.

### ***Student Stipends/Tuition Waivers***

Project funding, which includes some tuition waivers and mileage stipends, makes it easier to attract quality students, some of whom receive anywhere from \$800 to \$1,600 in tuition waivers per semester. Those making community and home visits to juvenile offenders also receive mileage reimbursement.

## **The Benefits of the Cross-sector Collaborative Project**

### ***Benefits to Community Partners***

The interns provide the community partners with additional staffing to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of juvenile offenders, which is especially important when staff are absent due to scheduled leave, training, or illness. In turn, agency administrators have opportunities to observe interns at work and consider them potential candidates for future employment. In order to accommodate the parents of juvenile offenders, students also provide the agencies with continuous evening coverage.

The ongoing research aimed at developing a juvenile offender profile is valuable information that agencies can use for evaluation and planning purposes. In addition, an internship program is clearly a win-win situation for all participants and occasionally results in tangible improvements to the community agencies involved. One example here is an improvement is the agency's adoption and implementation of an intern-designed behavioral management system. Another is the specialized orientation manual for juvenile justice interns developed by the intern unit.

### ***Benefits to the University***

A collaborative partnership allows the university to respond actively to a significant community problem. It also offers an avenue for research opportunities, while expanding field placements for a growing, interdisciplinary student body.

### ***Benefits to the Students***

Interns have the opportunity to provide individual and group services to juvenile offenders through a real hands-on structured learning experience. Weekly supervision and training allow students to sharpen their assessment and case management skills while recognizing the importance of interdisciplinary problem solving.

## **Challenges, Opportunities and Responses**

### ***Differences in Philosophy—Public Safety versus Rehabilitation***

The internship project supports the community's increasing effort to address the problem of juvenile crime, some of which require that several agencies with different functions and divergent philosophies work closely together (Flaherty, 1991). The agency's leadership roles that are shared by the Department of Juvenile Justice and the

Department of Children and Family Services illustrate a team approach by two very diverse systems. The Department of Juvenile Justice, as a criminal agency, sees its mission as public safety, while the Department of Children and Family Services emphasizes treatment or rehabilitation. The marriage between these two important community agencies requires careful teamwork and respect for philosophical differences, especially true in this case because Human Services Associates (a private provider whose focus is assessment and treatment) co-directs the Juvenile Assessment Center with the Department of Juvenile Justice. The merging of a public and private agency formed a challenging yet workable marriage, and interns housed at the Juvenile Assessment Center were able to experience the many challenges presented when agencies join together to work on a common cause.

An additional ingredient is the therapeutic or rehabilitative focus that the university students bring to the situation. Students recognize the need to address the legal aspects of juvenile offenders, but they often try to integrate a rehabilitative plan into their interactions with clients, which can create difficulties if agency staff challenge a student's therapeutic attitude towards juvenile criminals. At times it has been necessary for the program director to intervene in such thorny difficulties, and to encourage discussions on the legal versus therapeutic approaches by agency staff and student interns to resolve issues of philosophical or cultural difference. It is a challenge to validate the differences between the agencies, empathize with the students, and avoid alienating the external funding sources.

### ***Continuous State of Change within the Community Partners***

The recent creation of the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice and the establishment of the Juvenile Assessment Center produced many changes designed to improve services. While the changes were positive, at times they created a sense of uncertainty for staff members and one of instability for university interns. Frequent changes in policies and procedures became frustrating for interns who eagerly sought clear-cut direction and guidance. On the other hand, the fluid state of the community partners allowed the internship director to become an important participant in discussions on policies and procedures. The following are examples of ways in which the collaborative project influenced the community agencies:

- Development of a new database for data collection;
- Staff sensitization to cultural and language needs of Spanish-speaking juveniles;

- Spanish translation of standard client forms; and
- Adoption of a policy to provide HIV literature and information.

### **Making the Collaborative Relationship Work**

The collaborative project had to cope with the challenge of entering an entirely different system (Yank et al., 1991). Agency staff initially used familiar task completion methods and were not particularly receptive to new ideas from students, and sometimes the high expectations and quality expected from the students by the university appeared to threaten some agency staff. When students began producing a high number of assessments, staff felt uneasy because they had not been able to conduct the same quantity. For example, during the project's beginning phase, the host agency did not include the on-site supervisor and the students in e-mail announcements, meetings, or special events, and it took some time to develop a trusting relationship with the agency staff that resulted in a sense of inclusion. The project director and on-site supervisor had to recognize that they were invited guests who had to prove themselves. Toward that end, during several discussions with agency administration and staff, the collaborative project staff acknowledged the agency's needs and highlighted how the interns could assist with agency workloads. Another example of such problem-solving occurred when it became evident that the agency needed to have additional evening coverage for assessments, and the internship unit responded by providing students to help with the overflow of cases. In addition, the on-site supervisor became more assertive in assisting agency staff with their work, in the form of peer consultations, assuming responsibility for a number of difficult cases that needed attention, going to lunch with agency staff, and maintaining open lines of communication.

As noted above, there were differences in service delivery expectations between the agency staff and the university students. Some staff members opted for abbreviated methods of accomplishing service delivery when dealing with the realities and demands of high caseloads and limited resources, an approach that was not always the most helpful to clients because it meant limited contact with the juvenile offender's parents and community environment. Students, however, were trained and expected to follow full procedures in providing services. While the university staff recognized that professionals must sometimes find expedient ways to help clients, student training emphasized use of full processes before considering abbreviated approaches to service delivery.

Organizational and political factors influence collaborative partnerships among universities, agencies, and government (Horowitz, 1990). Initially, one of the agency administrators expressed a desire to have the students work on weekends and be treated like agency personnel. This proposal required some reframing to help the administrator understand student learning goals and university expectations. Later, this administrator expressed concern over funding competition—the internship unit received funding from a source that typically would have gone to his own agency. Being direct and open has helped in understanding the administrator's concerns while still demonstrating to him the positive results of the collaborative process and the students' continuing service delivery contribution.

### ***Research Problems***

We unexpectedly discovered that the agency's database was insufficient not only for our research purposes, but also for their collection of needed data, which caused a delay in starting research activities. Initiating the research process required the development of alternative, and more time consuming, data collection methods.

### **Future Direction of Cross-sector Collaborative Project**

The partnering agencies have demonstrated their support for sustaining the project by committing to fund its continuation for the 1997-98 academic year, and the project director is currently negotiating to expand the project's services. The long-term benefits of the project include:

- enriched student experiences;
- a deepening university-community partnership;
- the expansion of vital juvenile services; and
- increased interventions in addressing juvenile crime.

The internship project will continue to expand its mental health and group services to this population. A further research question is the unit's long-term impact on the juvenile offender population that will examine the unit's impact on juvenile recidivism. The director is exploring a neighboring county's request for replication of the collaborative project.

The cross-sector collaborative project described above represents a unique partnership between a state university, a private provider, and two state agencies. Funded for a total of \$247,257 since August 1995, four collaborative partners have

joined to provide quality learning experiences for university students. The project also aims to provide parent and juvenile psychoeducational groups as an effort to prevent juveniles from re-entering the legal system. The project's research component is a vital aspect of providing services to juvenile offenders and of identifying client and community needs. The UCF-Juvenile Assessment Center Intern Unit serves to strengthen the assessment and mental health services provided to juvenile offenders, and it integrates both a public safety concern and a rehabilitative effort in providing the services that help meet the special needs of this population.

### ***Suggested Readings***

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