Toward Common Unity: From Silent to More Equitable Partnerships

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Abstract

The Campus Compact Indicators of Engagement offer a unique opportunity to examine mechanisms that create transformational, "authentic, sustained partnerships" with our immediate communities. This important service-learning goal has the potential to change both the institution and the community (Enos and Morton 2003). Analyzing these partnerships often exposes inherently unequal power relationships between universities and lower socio-economic communities located nearby. Using these partnerships as a unit of analysis provides us with tools to moderate that power imbalance (Cruz and Giles 2000).

This program description and case study of the University of San Diego (USD) describes developmental efforts used over the past 30 years to move from disconnected community relationships to partnerships that provide an equal voice for all involved parties. This case study is evidence that institutions and communities are constantly evolving. Institutional change can take many years, but with vision and dedication, it is possible to create genuine campus-community partnerships.

The mechanisms used to do so include the central role of USD's service-learning center, student leadership, faculty development, and the strategic use of grant-money. The Campus Compact Indicators have been especially useful as a tool to help document the accomplishments of service-learning at USD. Of particular worth to USD's overarching mission are the indicators within the community-campus exchange theme, especially the allocation of internal and external resources, community voice, and student voice.

Background and Context

On a mesa overlooking San Diego's Mission Bay and the Pacific Ocean, the University of San Diego has the "beautiful view" for which its community is named. Today the entrances to the community are marked by signs that state "Welcome to Linda Vista, Home of the University of San Diego." Yet for many years, the university and community developed separately, each relatively ignorant of the other.

They began very differently. In the 1930's, San Diego's Bishop Charles Francis Buddy envisioned building a great University, an institution of academic significance. He expected the process to take 50 to 100 years (Engstrand and White 1989). Delayed by World War II, the church purchased property in 1945, the campus was constructed in

the late 1940's, and classes began in 1952. A College for Women and a College for Men eventually merged in 1972 to form the university. Under the leadership of Reverend Mother Rosalie Hill, the nuns of the Society of the Sacred Heart formed the teaching core of the university that was built in Spanish renaissance style, with beautiful gardens, strong Catholic values, and a tradition of excellent scholars dedicated to teaching. Today, with nearly 5,000 undergraduates and 2,500 graduate students, the university is well on its way to fulfilling the Bishop's vision. In addition to the College of Arts and Sciences, USD has an esteemed Law School, Business School, and School of Leadership and Education Studies, and an emerging School of Peace Studies at the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice.

In contrast, the community surrounding the university was quite different. Linda Vista was built as temporary housing to accommodate workers in defense-related industries during World War II. As a consequence, small, two-bedroom homes, duplexes, and apartments were hastily constructed in the 1940's; however, even today, much of this housing still exists as low-income rentals. The San Diego city fathers in the 1930's envisaged a growth pattern that would double the city's population by the 1960's. Instead, the influx of military personnel and defense workers during the 1940's doubled the population in a decade. Because families were camped in tents while working in defense-related factories, the federal government reluctantly agreed to sponsor the largest low-income housing project in the country at that time, envisioning a community of 13,000. Upon its completion, Linda Vista was showcased as a successfully developed community with the country's first shopping center—dedicated by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt herself. But infrastructure was limited, and many of the problems that faced Linda Vista continue to this day (Killory 1993).

In 1975, the federal government evacuated thousands of Vietnamese citizens, rendered vulnerable by their association with the US military, from Vietnam and ultimately resettled them in Linda Vista. New federal, state, and local agencies were established to help the refugees adapt to their new environment. However, continued political instability in Southeast Asia during the 1970's and 1980's created a continuing influx of refugees fleeing to the United States. Once resettled and anchored in Linda Vista, Vietnamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and Hmong newcomers forged a chain of migration for their family members to join them. The new immigrant character of the community has continued ever since, and today 24 languages are spoken in the three-square mile "heart of Linda Vista." The Latino population has increased as well, much of its growth due to the demographic changes occurring in California. The Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986 allowed undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Central America to gain legal resident status, and many were drawn to Linda Vista because of its affordability and relative proximity to available jobs. Included among Latino newcomers are immigrants from the Oaxacan area of Mexico who speak the indigenous language of Mixtec. Although 97% of Linda Vista's population was white in 1950, that percentage decreased to 55% by 2004.

From "Volunteerism" to "Service-Learning"

Three mechanisms were utilized to change the prevailing lack of university-community interaction into USD's commitment to a bona fide community-campus exchange. The first of these consisted of an allocation of internal and external campus resources to create an institutional culture committed to social change. In USD's case, the university created an institutionalized "space" to develop a viable community service-learning program. The Center for Community Service Learning (CCSL), as it has been known since 2003, has evolved significantly over the years. Conceived as the "Volunteer Resources Office" (VRO) in 1986, the center became a vital link to the local community. Dr. Arthur Hughes, university president from 1972-1995 and one of the first to join Campus Compact, and Sister Sally Furay, USD's provost from 1972–1996, provided critical support in those early years. Judy Rauner was hired in 1986 as the first director of the newly created VRO. The office was housed in both Student Affairs and Academic Affairs, with a fiscal connection to Academic Affairs.

Dr. Rauner—an experienced program developer—began laying a foundation for institutional growth that included forming an Experiential Education Committee composed of the faculty coordinators of internships and field experiences across campus, developing extensive co-curricular programming with the Associated Students and transforming the Social Issues Committee from a small cluster of dedicated faculty into a large coalition of faculty, staff, students, and community members capable of sponsoring a speaker series and an annual conference. A full-time Assistant Director was finally added in 1990, and her responsibilities were to coordinate the co-curricular community activities for the Associated Students and clubs and organizations.

From a "Soft" to a "Solid" Foundation

Dr. Rauner constantly responded to funding opportunities for the office. These funds were crucial in creating the resources to enhance community voice and develop institutional culture. In 1987, the center acquired a strategic Student Literacy Corps grant and an Urban Plunge endowment to address the rich multicultural nature of the community. In 1994, grant funding from the Irvine Foundation addressed issues of cultural diversity. Dr. Rauner and Dr. Judith Liu (who was Director of Faculty and Curriculum Development Programs during the Irvine Grant) sponsored curriculum development workshops and provided stipends to attract faculty to transform their curricula to incorporate cultural diversity and community service components. The models created with these grants served as the impetus for USD to apply for a three-year, Corporation for National and Community Service grant.

With funding provided by the Corporation from 1994-1996, the university created a course-based, service-learning program (Lazarus, Rauner and Villis 2004). The purpose of this grant was (1) to develop a culture where faculty incorporate service-learning into their courses, (2) to develop student voice and leadership, and (3) to form a San Diego regional network with other local colleges and universities that fostered public dialogue

and the exchange of resources. Top priorities for this grant included meeting real community needs while simultaneously meeting USD course-learning objectives.

A critical moment in seeking community voice for this work occurred when all Linda Vista community partners were invited to campus to learn about the grant. Not only was a grant-mandated Steering Committee created, but also a community advisory committee emerged when a community partner suggested that the group continue meeting as a way to explore other funding opportunities for both community partners and the university. Additionally, this served as a way to involve personnel from non-profit organizations, public school staff, and residents. USD's service-learning center cultivated these informal connections, and they have evolved into the present-day Linda Vista Collaborative that fills important roles in the community, including working on major grants, sponsoring community forums, and generally serving as a means for disseminating and exchanging information among community members.

A subtle but significant shift evolved as the understanding of the difference between "volunteerism" and "service-learning" emerged; a shift that involved moving away from a more philanthropic and charitable view of community—"doing something *for* the community"—toward a reciprocal view—"doing something *with* the community." To reflect this change, the "Volunteer Resources Office" was renamed the "Office for Community Service-Learning" (OCSL) in 1995. The staff connected faculty with community partners, sponsored curriculum development workshops, and facilitated logistical responsibilities through a student leadership program. A new Community Liaison position was established to maintain community connections and orient new partners. The position's responsibilities expanded further to include conducting orientation sessions for students enrolled in service-learning courses, monitoring student on-site participation, and linking community partners' and faculty members' academic expectations of service-learning. The community partners comfortably communicated their emerging needs to the liaison during his/her frequent visits to the sites.

Finally, directors of the service-learning offices of local colleges and universities were invited to a series of meetings and workshops to establish a regional network. During these workshops, service-learning successes and failures were described and discussed in the hope of sharing "best practices" for achieving more meaningful community service-learning outcomes. This network helped establish an alliance where professional staff, faculty, and students from the various institutions would support one another by presenting at service-learning conferences held at network institutions.

Cultivating Community Voice—Partnership Building Grants

In the spring of 1996, USD began exploring the expansion of university partnerships with community groups, schools, and other agencies in Linda Vista as part of the Linda Vista Collaborative. Additional meetings were held, and representatives from USD and the community identified those areas with the greatest potential for

collaboration. These areas included community leadership enhancement, education, health, housing, and economic/job development.

The Collaborative decided to apply for a Community Outreach Partnership Centers Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to address these neighborhood concerns. The University of San Diego was awarded a $400,000 Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) grant in Fall 1996. The initiative enabled USD to join with Linda Vista organizations to strengthen and formalize the university's partnership with the local community in order to enhance the quality of life for residents, businesses, the university, and other neighborhood institutions by facilitating citizen action.

The USD COPC proposal moved from viewing the community as having problems that needed to be corrected (a deficit-based model) to emphasizing the resources already in existence (an asset-based model). From the beginning, the university considered Linda Vista residents as partners in the development and implementation of the grant. After it was awarded, continuing forums affirmed the five major focus areas of the grant. It would not only strengthen university-community collaborations, it would also increase campus-wide cooperation by bringing the College of Arts and Sciences and the Schools of Nursing, Business Administration, Law, and Education together to support the project.

Another important grant for building community partnership was the "National Community Development Program" (1996-1998), sponsored by the National Society for Experiential Education (Bailis 2000). USD was chosen as one of three institutions of higher learning to participate in a three-year study to identify strategies for developing sustainable university-community partnerships. USD partnered with the City of San Diego Recreation Department, a high school, and a middle school after-school program to create an organization called "Youth Empowered through Service" (YES). This collaborative effort was formed to develop skills that could be applied in all community-university partnership contexts and was highlighted during a conference on "best practices" as well as in a publication (Torres and Schaffer 2000). The practices developed by this collaborative will continue to be utilized even though a lack of funding and changes in Linda Vista school leadership resulted in the demise of YES in 2003.

A subsequent "Partnership for the Public's Health" grant from 2000-2004 expanded the health-related work of the COPC grant and included ongoing strong participation by the School of Nursing, particularly Dr. Mary Jo Clark. Extensive focus group interviews conducted as part of the grant identified both community assets and needs (Clark et al. 2003). Assets included location, the diversity of residents, the social services available, local businesses, and faith communities. Needs included housing, environmental issues, safety concerns, language barriers in the school, the lack of certain facilities and transportation, domestic violence, economic development, and legal aid. The grant not only sponsored a community organizer to assist with

community outreach and leadership development, but also fostered a series of public community forums. These important and well-attended events dealt with housing and healthcare access. Community concerns identified through focus group interviews resulted in another collaborative grant proposal for an additional HUD/COPC "New Directions" grant that would focus on affordable housing issues and grassroots capacity-building in Linda Vista.

What began in 1986 with a part-time director and some student volunteers as USD representatives in the community has grown to three full-time service-learning staff, six part-time graduate students, and six faculty members assuming leadership in community projects. In addition to providing extensive assistance through the Public Relations Office, the University partnered with the community on jointly-created grants, participated in key community organizations, maintained formal school partnerships with all six local public schools, and assisted with resident organizing. All paid positions required by these various initiatives have been funded by internal university budgets and federal funds capable of ensuring their sustainability.

Student Voice in the Community

Initially developed to strengthen USD's relationships with its community sites, the role of student leaders became the principal link for many of these partnerships. Students not only found a voice on campus, but also became external resources with a voice in the community. This was due in large part to the fluid nature of schools and non-profits with regard to personnel and changing interests. Although a significant amount of time was devoted to on-going community relationship building, turnover rates at community partner agencies made sustaining those relationships difficult. Budget cuts also forced many coordinators in social agencies to do double-duty as staff positions were slashed, and many agencies found it increasingly hard to retain volunteer supervisors.

To address this personnel strain, USD created student leadership positions known as "site-coordinators" who work 10-12 hours per week. Created informally in 1996, these positions were eligible for work-study funding by 1998, and this made it possible to formally increase the number of student site coordinators from four to fifteen. These student placements help create a balance in the relationship between the university and community that is unique and powerful. Without this student support, community partners would not be able to manage the numbers of students serving at their agencies. These student site-coordinators, working with the Community Liaison, collaborate with the student leaders recruited from course-based, service-learning classes to solve coordination problems while enriching learning experiences for students and providing much needed help for community agencies.

Student site coordinators are carefully selected by the Center for Community Service Learning (CCSL) and/or the relevant community agency. By choosing an exceptional student working at their site to assume this position, community partners give voice to

how university resources are allocated. These cases exemplify relationships where acceptance and loyalty on the part of both community and student are readily apparent. As a representative of the university and the community, student site-coordinators help produce a more seamless blend between school and community that decreases the usual power differential while simultaneously experiencing a unique learning opportunity.

To strengthen nascent leadership skills within student leaders, an innovative, one-unit class was developed. Each semester, former student leaders recruit new leaders from their service-learning courses. Once selected, students have an opportunity to attend seminars and enroll in the leadership class that meets once a week. Workshops on communication, ethical reflection, power and privilege, social change skills, conflict management, and social vision provide a context for students to practice leadership skills with their peers. Students also attend social justice events on campus and write a reflective summary of their experiences. Student voice serves as an important conduit of information between peers, faculty, the CCSL, and the USD site-coordinators ensuring better connections between the service and its academic relevance.

Faculty Development

Initially, as students went into the community, their involvement was seen as "community service" or "experiential learning" rather than "service-learning." Faculty unfamiliar with the pedagogy of service-learning were learning to make the necessary connections between course content and experiences in the field. However, professional staff from the formerly-titled Office of Community Service-Learning (OCSL) were not as strategically positioned to suggest curricular changes as easily as faculty themselves. USD needed an experienced cohort of faculty members to act as service-learning mentors. Although the VRO and OCSL were under the joint auspices of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs, and OCSL professional staff were held in high regard for their work in both co-curricular activities and course-based work, faculty members were still better situated to make curricular and pedagogical decisions.

Being housed in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs from its inception gave the office leverage to solve the dilemma. Course-based service-learning necessitated the creation of a faculty position comparable to the Community Liaison; this was achieved by creating the Faculty Liaison position in fall 1994. The Faculty Liaison was envisioned as a bridge between the faculty and the OCSL. The Faculty Liaison would have responsibility for (1) helping faculty build quality integration of academic course content into community experiences and (2) offering effective curriculum development workshops that clearly articulated the theoretical learning that could be obtained through service. In addition, for faculty members incorporating service-learning into their courses for the first time, one-on-one or small group meetings with the Liaison would offer the opportunity to reflect on their courses. Ultimately, the university institutionalized faculty development funding for all three of these pedagogical functions, thereby further strengthening USD's commitment to service-learning.

Thus, what began as classic volunteerism in the community has developed today into innovative faculty-designed projects in Linda Vista. USD students from teacher education courses, such as English as a Second Language, prepare focused tutoring sessions. Japanese and French language classes, media criticism, and graphic design classes present workshops in local schools. In addition to math tutoring, students have e-mail math "pen-pals" and create projects for Family Math Nights. A Health Psychology class has created an annual health fair that involves middle school and college students working together throughout a semester. Every year at Thanksgiving individuals from the School of Business Administration renovate a home belonging to an elderly or low-income Linda Vista resident. Advanced Spanish-language majors meet weekly with Linda Vista residents who are native speakers from numerous Latin American countries to converse in Spanish and celebrate on campus at the end of the semester. Chemistry students monitor environmental changes in a local canyon.

In 2004, recognizing the importance of elevating community voice and fostering public dialogues to balance the power dynamic between the campus and the community, Dr. Liu, together with the Center for Community Service-Learning and the Consensus Organizing Institute (COI), developed an upper-division Sociology course titled "Community, Consensus, and Commitment." Although USD has made significant progress in developing an embedded culture of service-learning, interchanges between the campus and community still tend to be largely one-sided – a one-way traffic-flow with students and faculty going out into the community. One of the goals of the new course was to change this arrangement by bringing community members onto campus. Furthermore, the course was unique in that it not only included traditional USD undergraduates but also members of the Linda Vista community who were recruited to attend the 14–week course free of charge. Upon successful completion of the course, all participants were issued a certificate, and community members—referred to as Community Fellows—also had an opportunity to obtain three-units of continuing education credit. For some residents, it was the first college-course they had ever taken; for USD undergraduates, it was the first college-course that included community residents. This course has been institutionalized and will be included as a capstone experience for the Ethnic Studies program.

"That Was Then; This is Now"

Reflecting on the relationship between USD and Linda Vista, community leaders and former students agree that the university and community developed separately. A woman who has lived in Linda Vista since 1946 recalls that in its early years, she took pride in having the University nearby, being in awe when she attended a play or a wedding, but also regarding it as beautiful and distant, out of touch with ordinary life. On the other hand, she says "I see a lot of USD in Linda Vista now," largely in the form of students tutoring or carrying out projects. She is amazed that she was able to take a class at the University and acknowledges a much stronger connection with the school. A USD administrator, who was also a USD student from 1953-1957, says that during the early years, there were few university connections to the community and

what little involvement there was with community was aloof, often taking the form of charitable contributions.

In contrast, at the 20th annual Linda Vista Multi-Cultural Fair and Parade held in April 2005, USD had a significant presence. USD students participated in the opening parade with children from an after-school program. Students from a marketing class had done the publicity throughout the city and on-campus. More USD students than usual attended as a result of their efforts. Their booth, which gave away goldfish, attracted large community interest and made it possible to conduct a marketing survey. Bayside Community Center had students from a psychology research methods class assisting with surveys regarding the hazards of lead poisoning. Nursing students and Law School students each had booths dispensing information about their services. The USD Symphony offered a performance as one of many different musical groups. Meanwhile, the community food booths, dancers, agencies, vendors, and participants blended together in celebration of Linda Vista's multi-cultural heritages. Today, both USD and community residents can claim Linda Vista as home.

Lessons Learned

While every college campus has unique historical connections to its community, the experience of the University of San Diego demonstrates the importance of developing a reciprocal stance of "working with" and "listening to" members of the community to develop an authentic campus-community exchange. Mechanisms needed to develop this exchange include creating an effective community service-learning center that facilitates working closely with community collaborators and strategically seeking grant funding. Utilizing the voice of our student leaders in creating an on-going presence in the community and supporting faculty development, reflection, and innovation decrease boundaries not only within the university but also between the university and the community. The road to greater equity has been paved through a trial-and-error process that has created lessons USD can share with others seeking to develop successful campus-community partnerships.

First, successful community service-learning programs must have substantial administrative support to create a service-learning center. Our experience shows that perception is powerful – there is a substantial difference between the ways in which a "Volunteer Resources Office" and a "Center for Community Service-Learning" are perceived by members of both the local and the academic communities. We found that centers funded under the auspices of Academic Services and Student Affairs would support curricular and pedagogical transformation. Substantial efforts to bridge the Student Affairs (co-curricular) and Academic Affairs (curricular) gap must be made, with staff meeting regularly with leadership from both areas. The Faculty Liaison position functions well as a means to prevent community service-learning efforts from being marginalized by the faculty.

Although USD used both institutionalized and external funding to create its service-learning center, institutional budgetary support is essential for hiring full-time professional staff and secretarial support. If a center is established from the start, then strategic planning can facilitate efforts to seek additional funding that can augment the work of the center, such as by adding grant-funded positions that are later institutionalized.

Second, continuity in the center's leadership is critical. USD was fortunate to have continuous leadership for seventeen years, but measures can be taken even in the face of dramatic staff changes. Staggering or overlapping faculty and student appointments can help provide much needed stability. Too much change can be tremendously destabilizing. It is critical to have "institutional memory," so valuable time is not spent duplicating past efforts. New energy may be invigorating, but it can easily spin in all directions if it is not clearly focused, resulting in the perception that the center is merely "going around in circles."

Third, student and faculty leadership must be nurtured through creating learning environments that specifically address each group's stage of development. Both groups require beginning, intermediate, and advanced workshops, opportunities to attend community service-learning conferences, and opportunities to learn as well as to serve as teachers and mentors.

Finally, in a society that values results, frequently the process used to achieve an end result is completely overlooked. The process of establishing, creating, and fostering community relationships and networks is, in fact, itself a valuable product. Recognizing that the creation of a successful center is a developmental process places greater emphasis upon community relationship building, creating networks, and sustaining commitments both within and outside the university. A developmental approach acknowledges the fact that no individual, organization or institution has all the knowledge necessary to effectively address social issues and that community-university partnerships must be mutually beneficial.

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