Envisioning a Literacy Partnership: The University of Nebraska at Omaha's Criss Library and Girls Inc.

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Abstract

The history of academic library involvement in service learning is varied. This paper provides an overview of service learning and the literature on academic libraries' participation in service-learning activities. A vision of service-learning participation is described, as well as the implementation of service-learning activities in two library science courses. Strategies for future library contributions to service learning are also presented to encourage more widespread involvement across the profession.

A recent study indicated that when patrons think of libraries they think of books (De Rosa et al. 2011). However, a review of the historical literature of library science reveals an intense interest in serving the community (Curley, Broderick, and Bonk 1985; Drury 1930; Haines 1950; McColvin 1925; Oder 1997; Ranganathan 1964). Books are merely the tools libraries use to serve their communities. Despite a shared interest and community focus between libraries and service learning, academic libraries have struggled in the participation of formal service-learning programs. For academic libraries to develop strategies for service-learning projects, it is important to understand how the principles of service learning and the purpose of the library science complement each other, and to examine current library science service-learning activities.

Service-Learning History

Service learning and community engagement has been an important component of a college education for more than 100 years. Service learning started with the Cooperative Education Movement founded at the University of Cincinnati in 1903 (Roy et. 2009). In 1985, Campus Compact, a national coalition of college and university presidents, was founded to help students develop the values and skills of citizenship through public service (Heffernan 2001). Campus Compact began with 682 higher education institutions and today has almost 1,200 colleges and universities representing over six million students. Campus Compact provides training for faculty wishing to add community-based learning into their curriculum, provides staff to coordinate community engagement efforts with campus personnel, and offers support for campuses to create community partnerships. The service-learning tradition continued with the 1993 legislation of the National and Community Service Trust Act. This act encouraged universities to take their research and knowledge into communities (Roy et al. 2009). In 1997, the initiative titled *Service-Learning in the*

Disciplines was launched by the American Association of Higher Education (Westney 2006). This initiative described eighteen disciplines where service learning was integrated effectively as a part of the curriculum.

Research has shown that service-learning and community engagement projects benefit all parties involved: students, community members, and faculty. Faculty not only witness their students grow and learn from service learning, but faculty also learn from the experience themselves. Faculty see students experience the connections among community, democracy, access, information, and research (Mehra 2004). Service-learning projects give students a taste for real-world experiences, an opportunity to work as a team to accomplish meaningful goals, and develop strong connections between research and practice (Mehra 2004). In addition, faculty learn more about the community through the eyes of the community members and students (Roy et al. 2009).

Both Campus Compact and *Service-Learning in the Disciplines* emphasized the traditional disciplines rather than library information science (LIS) or academic librarians for service-learning or community engagement projects. Academic librarians are at a disadvantage when trying to organize service-learning projects, as these projects work best when coupled with credit-bearing classes and not all academic libraries offer classes for credit. Heffernan, who wrote in 2001 about the Campus Compact, suggested that the contribution of the academic library to service learning and community engagement was limited to making resources available, being strong advocates for literacy and reading programs, and building ties in the community to develop new community partnerships (Heffernan 2001). The 1997 initiative of *Service-Learning in the Disciplines* included eighteen disciplines, leaving out the library or any library education discipline. It was noted that the library education discipline has always been viewed as separate from other teaching faculty (Heffernan 2001).

Role of Academic Libraries in Service Learning

Westney has written that academic librarians have been "conspicuous by their absence" from service-learning and community engagement projects and literature on service-learning projects has been sparse (Westney 2006). Some issues that help to explain librarians' absence from service-learning projects and literature are the same issues that face faculty in other disciplines. Librarians find it difficult to identify projects and gain entrée into social justice settings and activities or have a problem maintaining service-learning projects from one semester to the next (Mehra 2004). Herther suggests that librarians lack the opportunities to deepen their involvement with classes and students beyond one-shot library instruction sessions or brief encounters over the reference desk (Herther 2008).

Service learning provides a wonderful opportunity to expand and broaden librarian roles on campus; however, it also requires time and energy beyond that normally given to student support (Herther 2008). Westney suggests that librarians forge partnerships and coalitions with community and national organizations to ensure they are engaged with the university and the community (Westney 2006). Another opportunity is to

recognize a common ground with service learning and information literacy and understand the impact of service learning on library services, information literacy, information-seeking behavior, or critical thinking (Riddle 2003).

Riddle stresses the importance of developing a community-based research project that meets the needs of the community and is defined by that community—not by the researcher (2003). A community needs-based project offers LIS students and/or librarians a way to become participants in addressing social problems, and to learn from the experience and receive and give back knowledge (Riddle 2003).

Librarians Putting Service-Learning and Community Engagement Projects into Practice

To put service-learning theory into practice, LIS students and librarians need to look at their knowledge and experience to identify what they can contribute. LIS students and librarians can contribute their knowledge about information creation, organization, and dissemination; for example providing expertise on the organization and management of knowledge or supplying useful information and resources to service-learning partners (Mehra 2004). Service learning for LIS classes gives students the ability to initiate projects in disadvantaged communities and become more committed to the needs of marginalized individuals and groups. LIS students can expand their thinking and approaches to marginalized/disenfranchised communities through service learning (Mehra 2004).

The physical library can be used to provide "civic space for deliberative forums." The civic space is a safe place to discuss issues in a non-confrontational, nonpartisan, and deliberative manner. The deliberative forums help to generate new ways of thinking about public problems and how they might be solved by working together (Kranich, Reid, and Willingham 2004).

An example of putting librarian organization and management knowledge to work in a service-learning project occurred at the University of British Columbia library. The systems librarians and the Chinese language librarian worked with a nonprofit organization to digitize, scan, edit, and store the history of the Chinese in Canada (Cho 2011). The librarians brought their knowledge of technical systems and Chinese language to help organize the Chinese material. The nonprofit brought their needs and perspective to the project. This community engagement project made it possible for anyone on the Internet to access the Chinese Canadian history.

A service-learning project that utilized librarian skills and went beyond the single library instruction session was conducted at the Clemson University College of Architecture, Arts, and Humanities (McCleskey and Allison 2000). The goal was to develop an education package for the Hospice of the Foothills located in Seneca, South Carolina. The package was to be used by staff at the hospice to explore non-traditional approaches to residential hospice environments. The librarian designed

three library instruction sessions to show students the sources available and develop the students' research skills. The students were assigned the task of defining the problem and working towards a solution, which simulated architectural practice.

Another service-learning project was conducted by a librarian at Wright State University, who incorporated service learning in an information literacy course (Barry 2011). Having a full semester course enabled the librarian to collaborate with a community partner who used the students' research portfolios to write grants and implement new projects. There were several advantages to this project: the librarian could take the time with the students to teach about research and find relevant resources, students could use and refine their information literacy skills throughout their college career, students were able to apply what they learned to help solve community problems, and the service-learning project was sustainable because it could be used for multiple semesters with the same community partner.

At the University of St. Gallen, students employed by the university took part in a service-learning project. The project was not typical in that it took place within support units of the university. The project was a competition on active learning with educational media where students submitted proposals and the winning proposal would be implemented as a service-learning project (Meier and Moser 2007). The service-learning aspects of the project included a contract signed by students covering time commitments, responsibilities of the students and pay; students defining their own project roles; and scheduled time for students to reflect on their work experience (Meier and Moser 2007). The benefits gained by students included increasing expertise in their field of study, seeing a link between what they are learning and professional life, and encountering organizational life (Meier and Moser 2007).

In another project, the nonprofit Ricks Center for Gifted Children needed to catalog their reference section of the library. The space used for the library was also used for a classroom and computer room. The space needed to be reconfigured for better flow and also be inviting for the teachers and students. Graduate students from the school media specialist program were assigned the project to redesign the space; move the furniture and books; and make the room a warm and inviting space for the children, teachers, and parents. The Ricks' students and faculty received a functioning and inviting library and the LIS students got to test classroom learning in a real-world setting (Gerrish 2006).

Developing a Vision of Partnerships

Like many campuses, every fall semester the University of Nebraska–Omaha (UNO) hosts an orientation for all new faculty members. In 2007, the Service Learning Academy director spoke to attendees about the numerous service-learning courses and community partners UNO had in place. Captivated by the effect these courses had on students, the community, and instructors, library faculty began contemplating how (or even if) a library could be a part of this inspiring learning method. How would

librarians, without semester-long classes, be able to participate (Heffernan 2001)? Where does a person even start?

These questions were just the beginning. The progression of a new endeavor, if it is to be meaningful, is based on continual questioning and searching for answers. Through the process of discovery, answers are found but new questions are raised, often leading to new possibilities previously unseen. In the case of service learning, often the discoveries are new partners. An appropriate metaphor, and one used at UNO to describe this type of partnering, is "community engagement link." Throughout this article, many engagement links will be described with the intention of demonstrating the often time-intensive process of finding and engaging community partners (Mehra 2004).

Knowing community engagement is one of UNO's key goals in the mission of the university, Criss Library seeks active participation supporting these goals and exists to serve the UNO community. Anytime the library contributes to the university's mission, it reestablishes the library's place in the campus community. Additionally, at a time when academic libraries have been called to demonstrate their value, connecting to the university's mission and goals is ideal (Oakleaf 2010).

A significant discussion exists on college campuses concerning the role of service learning and community engagement in the tenure process. According to Thomson et.al., "Service learning (a pedagogy that deliberately integrates the service function of the university into its teaching function) has stimulated a renewed commitment to civic engagement. . . . Furthermore, it departs from the traditional tripartite division of teaching, research, and service . . . it is a particular way of *doing* teaching, research, and service *in and with* the community" (2011, 220). At UNO, faculty are supported and rewarded, both monetarily, with a small stipend for community engagement link participants, and professionally through recognition in the tenure process.

If libraries are seen as providing services as Mehra suggests, " . . . librarianship and LIS education—which has been, and will always be a service-oriented profession trying to meet the information needs of diverse users," (2004, 3) then service learning by its very essence would seem to be a logical fit. Mehra adds to this observation, "Over the years, a common feature in the function of libraries is their role as a service-oriented information resource center that provides local, regional, and global information to the public in terms of what is useful to them" (2004, 4).

To answer the question about where one starts, the librarians at UNO began with the university's service-learning director. The first community engagement link was established by expressing the library's interest in service learning in general, and potential projects and partners in particular. The service-learning director described many past and current partnerships. He also shared the life changes he had personally witnessed over the years. Clearly, the meaningful interactions between all partners resulted in significant impact for participants. A handful of possibilities were identified, and so began the search to discover suitable partners.

One of the key issues we uncovered immediately was the fact we, as librarians, had no semester long class with which to design a service-learning project. Most academic librarian–student contact involves one-on-one consultations or one-time library instruction sessions integrated into subject courses (Cox, 2002; Nardine and Meier 2010). These "one-shot" sessions leave little time to go beyond the prescribed content. As Nardine and Meier described them, "The one-shot is a balancing act between delivering the information literacy skills students will need throughout their lives and addressing the specific demands of a course or professor" (2010, 25).

Clearly, we would have to look for ways we could perhaps fit into an already established class or look for a different means of engagement. UNO has a graduate cooperative agreement with the University of Missouri–Columbia and partnering with this program would satisfy the importance of involving a university class and students. Opportunely, a Criss Library faculty librarian was teaching a collection development class for the UNO library science graduate program, resulting in our second engagement link.

The exercise of finding a suitable partner, as stated previously, is both a test in commitment and time management. It was determined the best approach would be to identify multiple potential partners with the expectation that some would not be possible. With that in mind, another internal prospective partner was identified in the computer science department: an established service-learning class teaching computer skills to inmates at the Douglas County Correctional Facility. Two Criss librarians met with the instructor and discussed potential roles. The instructor expressed interest in additional help with teaching, but there was no clear path to involve library science students.

Not dissuaded, the next attempt at a partnership with the Douglas County Correction Facility was its Read-To-Me project. This program was designed for inmates to read and record a book for their children. Volunteers sat with the inmate, helped them to record the book, including help with reading if necessary, and then the cassette tape and book were mailed to the inmate's children. This program required going through two training sessions at the Douglas County jail. If students were to participate in this program, the librarians determined they needed to know what would be involved, so they went through the training themselves.

As previously noted, a hallmark of service learning is the amount of time required, which is also, not inconsequently, part of what makes it so rewarding. The Read-to-Me initiative would require a lot of extra time outside of the classroom for students: first two two-hour training sessions, then time with the inmates reading and recording. While this experience was found to be rewarding in and of itself, it was ultimately too problematic for students with demanding schedules. However, another relationship or engagement link emerged when Criss Library arranged for approximately thirty new children's books from the library's Scholastic book fair to be donated to the Read-To-Me project.

For those considering delving into this intensely rewarding experience, it is critical to note the importance of understanding the effort level required to seek out partners. Community partners do not just appear; it relies on academic librarians making the first move. Confident a good fit with the library and librarians would eventually be discovered, the next attempt was to build a partnership with Girls Inc. of Omaha.

Girls Inc. was formed in 1864 during the Industrial Revolution to provide support for young working class women who migrated from rural communities in search of employment in textile mills and factories. Currently, the network of local Girls Inc. nonprofit organizations serves 125,000 girls ages six to eighteen annually across the United States and Canada. (Girls Inc. 2013) The majority of Girls Inc. centers are located in low-income areas and provide a weekly average of thirty hours of after-school, weekend, and summer activities. Omaha's Girls Inc. demographics for 2011 included 40 percent ages five to eight, 32 percent ages nine to eleven, and 27 percent ages twelve to eighteen; 70 percent are African American, 7 percent Caucasian, 6 percent African, 5 percent Hispanic, 1 percent Native American, 9 percent Multiracial, and 2 percent Other. A total of 3,696 boys and girls were served in 2011 (Girls Inc. 2013). Literacy is a key piece in this organization, so a partnership between Criss Library and Girls Inc. looked to be a good match.

The director of the UNO Service Learning Academy informed Criss librarians about Girls Inc.'s rudimentary library at each of the organization's two locations. Essentially, these were reading rooms full of mostly donated books. Two librarians from Criss Library met with the program director for Girls Inc. to explore the possibility of a partnership. In the meeting, the Program Director Emily Mwaja stated, "It would be wonderful if our members could actually check out books from our library. Right now they have to stay in the library to look at the books. It would also be great if they could find a specific book they were looking for" (2009). This joint discussion challenge led the partners to see that the ultimate goal would be to create sustainable working libraries for both Girls, Inc. campuses.

Implementation of the Vision

A meeting with the library science coordinator to match Girls Inc. needs with library science classes was the primary piece needed to move forward. Matching classes with the schedule at Girls Inc. resulted in the following classes identified as potential participants: collection development, cataloging, young adult services, reference resources, and leadership and management. Students in the collection development class would be the first group to engage with Girls Inc., conducting a thorough evaluation of the existing collections. Eventually, two collection development classes would be involved.

At this point a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was written detailing what UNO and Girls Inc. were or were not responsible for and setting an end date for reevaluation and/or completion of the agreement. This also served as a legal document

about our services and their expectations. Walters and Van Gordon speak to the value and purpose of an MOU, " . . . establishes: expectations for service levels, ongoing financial commitments with funding for upgrades, and life cycle maintenance of the facility and technology, continuing human resource commitments; and a documented shared vision for continued service" (2007, 390).

An additional engagement link was established when Cornhusker State Industries (CSI) was chosen as the supplier for new furniture for Girls Inc. libraries. This is a self-supporting industry program for the Nebraska Department of Correctional Services (NDCS) that markets goods and services produced by inmate workers within NDCS facilities. "CSI exists to develop marketable job skills and a work ethic among the inmate workers, aiding their return to society as responsible citizens." (Cornhusker State Industries 2013). Purchasing furniture from NDCS was another potential means of engaging with an often over-looked population while also supporting Nebraska industries. Funding for the purchase of new library furniture, computers, and software to complete the library had to come from grants. Applications for three different grants over the three years were submitted, but unfortunately were not successful in part due to the large number of grants Girls Inc. themselves write each year. Many of the granting organizations only give to a specific organization once a year. Girls Inc. depends heavily on these grants to operate, and because of the significant number of grants applied for each year, the opportunities for the library to submit an additional grant was minimal. The project would have to work with existing furniture and facilities.

Collection Development for Girls Inc.

Criss librarians determined the best approach was to begin with collection development to evaluate the current Girls Inc. collection. Students in the collection management class were able to engage in the full process of collection development with the Girls Inc. library as the focus. Collection development involves a set of activities focused on selecting, assessing, and maintaining a collection of resources for a particular population (Evans and Saponaro 2005; Johnson 2009). While it is a core process for all information centers, Evans and Saponaro (2005) note that different environments will result in different emphases within the collection development process. Hence, collection development can be tailored and focused on the community it serves and is informed by an assessment of the information needs of that community. These ideas of community focus and community awareness are also central to service learning. Additionally, the conceptual framework of collection development is structured in a manner that is consistent with service learning in that the theoretical perspectives can be broken into distinct units, matched with sequential learning activities and applied to real-life experiences (Mehra and Robinson 2009).

The semester-long class began with students doing a community analysis of the constituents served by the two Girls Inc. facilities. UNO students had assumed that the students served by Girls Inc. were of Latino descent; however, during the community assessment phase the class discovered that most of the young women served by that

particular branch of Girls Inc. were the children of Sudanese refugees. With this information, the class developed criteria for evaluating the existing library collection to reflect the unique needs of Girls Inc.

Two faculty librarians conducted a general evaluation of the mostly donated collection. Approximately 5,000 books were loosely organized in fiction and non-fiction areas. In the fiction area, all age groups and book types (hardcover, paperback, picture books, and novels) occupied shelf space in a random order. The condition of the books ranged from new to heavily worn and included many duplicates. Several young reader series books were also haphazardly placed.

After consideration of the end goal and the immediate needs of Girls Inc. it was determined the best approach would be to divide the library science students up into groups of three to five and assign each group a section of the collection to evaluate. This required the UNO students to take all the books off the shelves in their assigned area, evaluate each book based on selection criteria (appropriate for age and community, condition, relevance, etc.), box up discarded items, thoroughly clean the empty shelves, and organize the remaining books, first dividing into fiction/non-fiction then placing non-fiction on designated shelves previously labeled by Criss librarians with categories loosely based on the Dewey Decimal subject classification system. Fiction books were organized by age group, then by the author's first letter of their last name. Picture books were organized by genre (non-fiction/concepts/fairy tales, etc.) and by the author's last name. We also designated several shelves to series and early readers.

In March 2010, twenty-seven collection development students, two Criss Librarians, and two class instructors arrived at the north Girls Inc. campus armed with boxes and cleaning supplies. Controlled chaos ensued with faculty members providing oversight, while students provided the labor. Gerrish describes this well, "This was a new role, decision-making as librarians for the first time. Everything that had been read, discussed, and studied in the library program had provided the necessary skills for this library renovation" (2006, 32).

Each group evaluated the collection and identified books to remove from it. Many students felt that leaving books, however beloved, in poor physical condition was disrespectful to the members of Girls Inc., noting that the girls deserved new materials. Brehm-Heeger concurred stating, "No matter how many great new books arrive every day, if teen shelves are overloaded or stocked with items badly in need of weeding, teens have a difficult time browsing and locating the good stuff they really want" (2008, 212).

The evaluation process also involved administrative issues of maintenance. Students debated and decided that less full shelves would not only be easier to maintain but would also increase usage of the books (Farber 1997; Hibner and Kelly 2010) as the Girls Inc. members could also more easily find favorite titles. Another group of students considered how the age of the girls should influence the storage and display of books. They decided that picture books should be placed in bins or baskets so

young girls with small hands could more easily flip through the books and not deal with books tumbling off of shelves.

After five long hours, the library had been transformed into a clean and attractive space with thirty-two boxes of discarded books, a rudimentary organized collection, and space to grow. Two more trips were necessary to finish labeling shelves and to deliver new books donated from the Scholastic Book Fair at Criss Library.

After the evaluation of the collection, students identified new titles to be added to the Girls Inc. library with the idea of building a completely new collection using the same criteria as used in the evaluation of the existing collection. For the selection of resources to be successful, selectors must not just consider the information needs of the community, but also the financial and personnel limitations and the mission of the environment (Johnson 2009). The Girls Inc. libraries had to be organized so as to ensure the collection would be both low maintenance and easily accessible. Expensive and sophisticated CD-ROM products would be beyond the bounds of what the library could easily support. As a result, the selections focused on print titles that would inspire continual reading, such as series fiction, to support the Girls Inc. literacy initiatives. Other library science students looked to works that encouraged students academically or that would motivate their professional aspirations. The titles were combined and presented to the project coordinators for future use.

This whole process was repeated the next spring with another collection development class evaluating the Girls Inc. south campus library. This collection was half the size of the collection of the North campus, so the process was not nearly as time consuming but nonetheless worthwhile for all involved.

All the participants in the collection development service-learning project benefited greatly. Girls Inc. received an approachable and usable collection that was appealing to their members. The service-learning students developed skills transferrable to future employment opportunities. The overwhelming and intimidating piles of books became open and inviting reading spaces designed to showcase enticing titles. In reflections, UNO students commented that they developed a greater understanding of the responsibility involved in selecting resources that could enrich a community. The faculty witnessed the development of increased motivation in their students and observed that students submitted more thoughtful and meaningful assignments.

Initial plans and goals for this community engagement partnership also included purchasing new library furniture, new computers, installation of cataloging software, and sustaining support through the use of library science student internships and practicums. As mentioned previously, grant proposals to fund these actions were not successful. The goal was to provide a viable and living library for Girls Inc., while at the same time enabling library science graduates a place for service learning and experience in real-world activities. Although not all of the goals were met, the connections and networks established with Girls Inc. still exist and future possibilities may allow for the completion of the original vision.

Building on the Service-Learning Project—Library Science Young Adult Services Class, Omaha Public Libraries, and Girls Inc.

Reading programs, book clubs, and giving books to children in deserving communities are just a few examples of service-learning and community engagement projects developed by librarians. One book club example has taken place in Burlington, Vermont. Here a VISTA volunteer working in a Burlington public library organized a Long Journey book and film discussion series (Shatara 2010). People from all different cultures, including teenagers, parents, college students, and other adults, met to discuss books and films about immigration and assimilation. Discussions were held for six weeks and were led by authors, scholars, and professionals who work with refugees. The goals of the book and film series were to build friendships, improve cultural understanding, and continue discussions. The feedback for this project was positive and the series continued for six years.

A project where children in deserving communities received books was conducted in northern Arizona. This project, If I Can Read, was focused on building the children's collection by having a "book flood," defined as donating 1,000 books worth at least $10,000 (Roy 2010). The funding for the books came from the American Library Association's (ALA) presidential initiatives budget and a grant from the Tocker Foundation. Other events added to the project included family reading nights, storytelling, open microphone events, and reading incentives. Graduate students worked with the librarians to oversee the projects, and future plans include a national reading club for Native Americans.

As these examples attest, a successful service-learning project needs to not only serve the needs of the community organization, but also the learning objectives of the academic course.

The UNO partnership with Girls Inc. was ideal as a service-learning opportunity that could link to multiple library science courses in order to enable library science students to apply abstract concepts from classroom discussions and readings to several real-life experiences. The idea of a book club project was launched through a collaboration among librarians from the UNO Criss Library, Girls Inc. members, the University of Nebraska Omaha (UNO) library science young adult services class, and Omaha Public Library librarians. The project was a summer Young Adult Book Club where the girls from Girls Inc. (members) and UNO students met to discuss the books after they were read. Four different books were selected in collaboration with a UNO Library Science professor and a Young Adult librarian from the Omaha Public Library. With grant money from the Service Learning Academy at UNO and special borrowing privileges from the Omaha Public Library, books for each of the four titles were purchased and borrowed. The books were made available two weeks in advance of the book club and were distributed to any Girls Inc. members who wanted to participate. The book club met at Girls Inc. four times in a two week period; once for each book.

For each book club meeting, students from UNO, Omaha Public librarians, and UNO faculty met with the members to discuss the book. The discussions were led by the UNO students from the Young Adult Services class and the Omaha Public librarians gave presentations on programming happening at the local library during the summer. The discussions were lively and interesting and usually moved onto discussions on the types of book each girl preferred to read.

The success of the Girls Inc. book club echo the success of the book club and book flood examples described previously. The books selected were relevant to current issues and helped lead to important discussions. UNO students had an opportunity to apply what they had learned in class to a real-world situation, plus they gained valuable experience in working with young adults. UNO students also learned about different socio-economic situations, and they realized that these issues are universal and can arise at any age within any culture. The book club discussions also fostered new friendships. One UNO library science professor developed a friendship with one of the members who was a recent high school graduate and was planning to attend the university located in the professor's home town. They exchanged e-mails and made plans to meet once the member was settled in her new dorm room.

The Girls Inc. book club and two book sales at the UNO Criss Library gave members at Girls Inc. the opportunity to receive new books. At the end of each book club meeting, each girl selected a book to be purchased from additional service-learning grant money. The books were ordered after the two week book club meetings and delivered to the girls before they returned to school in the fall. During that same fall semester, the UNO Criss Library held a book fair with Scholastic Books. Anyone visiting the fair could purchase a book for donation to Girls Inc. UNO librarians were able to deliver over forty books to Girls Inc., and with the money raised at the fair. They also purchased additional books from Scholastic for delivery at the same time.

Strategies and Ideas for Partnering

From this somewhat brief excursion into community engagement and partnerships, replicable strategies were learned. First, it is essential to be able to grasp the big picture view of the community partner's goals and vision, and then be able to see where you might fit into *their* picture, not vice versa. The importance of matching engagement to the true needs of community partners cannot be overstated. As Thompson et al. states, " . . . service activities are intentionally selected to align with the educational objectives of the course *and* with community partners' agendas to ensure that the community service is meaningful not only to students but also to third sector organizations, their clients, and community residents . . . high quality SL classes demonstrate mutual benefits and reciprocity between the campus and the community with each giving and receiving, and each teaching and learning" (2011, 224). Even though Criss librarians had their own thoughts and ideas about what might be needed, a lot of initial discussion time was spent listening to and learning about the needs of Girls Inc.

This process is not easy or quick, which partially explains the persistent reluctance of some instructors to consider community engagement or service learning. There is not an abundance of evidence for libraries being active partners in community engagement or service learning, but partnerships like this and others cited in this article point to an increasing number of libraries and librarians contributing. Patience, perseverance, and commitment are invaluable assets for those participating in this rewarding endeavor of partnerships.

Assertiveness is mandatory. Fair warning, partnerships do not just suddenly appear at your door, you must seek out your partners, initiate contact, follow-up, and follow-through, and be ready to repeat process. At any of these points if the ball is dropped, your partnership may collapse.

Do not limit yourself to just one partner. The authors experienced multiple engagement links between these partners: UNO's College of Education, Library Science program students, Girls Inc., Cornhusker State Industries, Omaha Public Libraries, Collection Development classes, Young Adult Literature classes, area bookstores, Scholastic book publishers, and the UNO Criss Library librarians.

Where do you find community partners? The authors are very fortunate that our campus has an internationally recognized Service Learning Academy that annually hosts a gathering of potential partners where community and campus come together and talk with each other about needs. We recommend seeking out other campus members who are experienced in teaching service-learning classes and ask for their suggestions.

Increase your awareness of your community's needs, make a habit of reading the daily newspaper, or subscribing to a locally focused list serve. Non-profit organizations or networks often generate an analysis of local needs and opportunities. Churches, boys and girls clubs, literacy centers, special focus organizations, local boards and councils, school boards, and similar entities are excellent resources for exploring partnerships because their mission puts them into routine interaction with community members. Once you have identified possible partnerships, then you can go back to your campus and look for a good match with departments and classes.

A recent example demonstrates how serendipity can help you find engagement opportunities. At the American Libraries Association (ALA) mid-winter meeting in January 2013, a presentation was given by Dale Dougherty, creator of *Make Magazine*, about "maker spaces." Dale and his colleagues have been very successful hosting Maker Faires around the world. According to their website, "Maker Faire is a gathering of fascinating, curious people who enjoy learning and who love sharing what they can do. It's a venue for makers to show examples of their work and interact with others about it. Many makers say they have no other place to share what they do. Maker Faire makes visible these projects and ideas that we don't encounter every day" (Maker Faire n.d.).

The key piece of that statement is, "Many makers say they have no other place . . . ." Does your library have space? Most libraries do, and it doesn't have to be a large space. Start out small and see what develops. Contact your community hobbyists or student clubs and ask if they would be interested in partnering with your library. Talk with other campus instructors who might be interested, specifically science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) subjects. What about a gerontology class who has already established relationships with retirees who have hobbies and knowledge they would like to share with younger generations? Would your public library also like to join in this grassroots movement?

The Maker Faire site has an abundance of ideas for getting started and suggestions for tools that will be needed. As previously noted, what is most needed is space and event organization, something in which librarians have a lot of experience. The faire goers bring their own tools and lots of energy. Be willing to think in new and creative ways. Be willing to take a risk and see what happens. Even if one project doesn't work, try another.

Our community engagement was successful even though we fell short of ambitious original vision. Don't be discouraged if all your intentions are not met. Valuable experience can be gained by all participants and lasting partnerships can be formed.

Conclusion

Several library leaders have advocated for more academic library involvement in service learning (Herther 2008; Mehra 2004; Riddle 2003; Roy et al. 2009; Westney 2006). It is clear from the described initiative at UNO that service learning is not only germane to the practice of library information science, but is an enriching opportunity to demonstrate the profession's relevance beyond academia and to define new roles for librarians in partnership with the community. While the initial implementation may be challenging, the shared values of community and learning make service learning and libraries natural partners.

Service learning provides a framework for enriching the classroom experience. The service values of librarianship can be enhanced based on community engagement in an environment conducive to exploring new perspectives and opportunities. Additionally, long-term connections among library science students, professors, and communities help to support further engagement opportunities going forward.

Despite challenges, academic librarians can and should seek out service-learning projects. The community benefits from much needed assistance and the library is provided with an opportunity to illustrate the continuing role of university libraries as a resource for both campus and community. As previously discussed, service learning and library science share many of the same values and principles in their implementation and operation. Additionally, many library science concepts are consistent with the instructional nature of service learning. By adopting proactive

strategies, service learning could readily become a basic component of academic libraries and library science education.

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