

Sustaining a University Engagement Center at Borders: Taking Risks in a Risk-Avoidant Atmosphere

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Abstract

Community-university partnerships are at the heart of much of what institutions of higher education are trying to achieve: build bridges to opportunity, bring research to the solution of social problems, and bring interdisciplinary perspectives to bear on the challenges in contemporary society. Despite the promise of partnerships, they remain challenging endeavors. This paper analyzes the challenges faced by those who seek to strengthen partnerships in the face of a time of limited and diminishing resources but where there is also heightened need and interest on the part of communities in working with universities.

We work at a medium-sized Hispanic-serving institution of 20,000 students at the U.S.-Mexico border in Texas. Borderlands are special places. A border can be viewed as an obstacle, or a hybrid zone of interaction and crossing. The interdisciplinary field of border studies is filled with metaphoric and real images (Anzaldúa 1987; Staudt and Spener 1998; Bhabha 1994). University engagement programs can also be viewed in border terms, as people cross the invisible historic lines separating campus from community.

In this article, we draw on organizational theory and on our participant observation to analyze a university Center for Civic Engagement (CCE) that recently celebrated its decade anniversary, from 1998–2008. (Notions about organizational structure, context, and culture come from conceptual literature in organizational theory, spanning political science and sociology, analyzed in Staudt’s manuscript.) During that decade, its leaders sought to institutionalize its mission within the overall university, gradually moving from a faculty-led dependency on external funding to a professional-led entity with internal operating funds. The analysis of this move to sustainability merits some consideration of place-based particulars in the community context and university’s organizational culture. In any complex organization, and universities certainly fall within that category, the context must be understood and diagnosed in order to strategize for successful change.

Context Matters

Our article is organized into the following sequence. First, we analyze the context and specific choices made at the center’s birth. All organizations, including units therein, might be viewed in “life cycle” terms: birth, growth, maturity (Downs 1966). To this life cycle, we could add death, but in the context of public institutions, we would prefer to view the last stage as mainstreaming, that is, the incorporation of a mission-

like engagement into everyday organizational practices (Shirin 2007). Second, we analyze the engagement center's growth period, one blessed (and cursed, some might say) with external resources—generous funding from philanthropic foundations. Without such funding, growth and gestation would have been stunted. Third and finally, we examine the maturation phase, including the preparation for sustainability and the sometimes risky strategies we pursued in a risk-avoidant atmosphere.

I. The Place: Diagnosing Context

At the institution we call Border University, students of Mexican heritage comprise approximately three-fourths of our student body (Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals who commute daily to campus). It is located in El Paso-Ciudad Juárez, a large metropolitan region of more than two million people. In El Paso, a city of approximately 700,000, there is just this one comprehensive university and one community college—another aspect of place that deserves analysis. Such contexts make university leaders risk-avoidant given their fund-raising imperatives; leaders aim to make single universities in this sometimes-polarized city respond to everyone—rich, poor, and in between—whether benefitting or burdened by the status (Staudt 2008). In such contexts, the university means all things to all people, creating a political minefield for new initiatives.

In a city with one comprehensive university, with a full range of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs, city leaders and community members have high expectations for the one, single institution that either meets or dashes those expectations. As state governments reduce their subsidies for public higher education, campus leaders are forced to raise tuition rates and to raise money, much of it from local community leaders. Structural contexts like these heighten campus leaders' sense of risk and impel a risk-avoidant strategy. Risk could create public relations problems and imperil the ability to raise local funds. In a state well known for its stingy funding for social and educational programs and an economy and culture that emphasized "scarce resources," CCE leaders needed outside funding to staff and legitimize the initiative.

Community engagement programs often involve risk. Such programs encourage faculty members, students, and community members to collaborate around tasks that might highlight problems (albeit with collaborations aimed at solutions), thereby challenging the status quo. Leaders in these programs cross institutional borders to heretofore relatively powerless organizations and communities and/or to organizations that challenge the status quo. Outside funding makes university leadership more receptive to the invariable risks necessary in engagement initiatives.

II. Birthing Context within the University: Structural Location and Discourse

With purpose and intent, our center was birthed in the academic operation of the university, rather than in student affairs. In U.S. higher education, a great divide—perhaps viewed as a border—exists between academic affairs and student affairs, with the former lodged in the technical core of the university: teaching and research (Staudt 2008). In university academic operations, the curriculum and courses are the core operational units. Therefore, our strategy addressed the challenges of building support among a critical mass of those at the core—faculty members—and the incentives in which front-line bureaucratic workers operate (Wilson 1989; Lipsky 1980). At its helm, CCE leadership consisted of a faculty member, also grounded in the core teaching mission, and a full-time professional staff member.

Initially, we named the initiative with a bulky, complex name: the Institute for Community-Based Teaching and Learning. The Institute reported to two academic deans, formally the Principal Investigators (PIs) of a generous grant from a progressive philanthropic foundation. Day-to-day operations gradually built a core of faculty members in the different disciplines of the Colleges of Liberal Arts and of Business who incorporated community-based teaching and learning into their courses and course syllabi. Immediately, we worked on the incentive systems associated with faculty evaluation, tenure, and promotion. We used some material resources to make high-profile awards at celebratory events at which chairs, deans, vice presidents, and the president attended.

It is a daunting task to align such incentives with the inevitable turnover in university administration. Administrators come and go: some leave the institution or return to their faculty positions, so engagement leaders must continuously orient and build support among the newly recruited administrators. Our university has been blessed with stable leadership at the highest level and core support from the dean of the college from which CCE initially emerged. Other administrators changed, but fortunately the most recent provost came to the university with knowledge of engaged campuses. For each faculty member across the many departments and multiple colleges loosely affiliated with the CCE, a change in department chairs could involve change in support for or doubts about community-based teaching and learning. Departmental chairpersons at our institution generally rotate every three years, although some continue through multiple terms in what is generally perceived to be a thankless task: one vilified in public administration terms of responsibility with few discretionary resources.

The Discourse of Engagement: Strategic Choices

The faculty members involved in community-based teaching and learning bring multiple perspectives to their work. At most universities, faculty members exercise autonomy over their course syllabi, albeit in an atmosphere of accountability, learning

outcomes, and assessment specifications associated with accreditation. Elsewhere, Staudt conceptualized four programmatic approaches to engagement programming: service learning, technical assistance, social justice, and the combination thereof in the comprehensive urban university (Staudt 2008). Each state has its land-grant institution, which provides comprehensive connections to the entire state, including rural areas and the diminishing farm population, but comprehensive urban universities represent a category of more recent vintage. Several engaged institutions come to mind: Portland State University, University of Wisconsin/Milwaukee, and Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis.

The bulky language of community-based teaching and learning, favored by the philanthropic funder, eventually gave way to the discourse of service-learning. The service-learning model provides a long trajectory of research and advocacy in the academic and professional association worlds (Zlotkowski 2008). (See also the Campus Compact website: www.campuscompact.org). In adopting this language, we joined a host of many higher education institutions that adopted the discourse, especially those approximately 1,000 higher education entities that belong to the Campus Compact and/or the 35 state campus compact organizations. The term service-learning has the advantage of pedagogical research that validates the method of course integration, reflection, and writing. In risk-avoidant contexts, it is safe language that seems to minimize the potential threats that active or social justice teaching pose to the status quo.

Despite the advantages of the term service-learning, it poorly addresses the incentive structure of universities that devalue faculty “service” or “charity.” At our institution, the term service-learning sometimes confuses the highly valued assessment criteria for faculty members of teaching and research (in the case of community-based research) with the low-valued assessment criterion of service. Leaders at hundreds of institutions, nevertheless, must recognize that the widespread use of the term “service-learning,” a sound pedagogical practice, also serves the purpose of alleviating risk or creates the appearance of diminished threat associated with public engagement.

Growth with Dependency

Within two years, after a summer American Association of Higher Education (AAHE) retreat that offered space for a university team to do strategic planning, we proposed to rename ourselves from the Institute for Community-Based Teaching and Learning to the Center for Civic Engagement and to operate on university-wide bases with all faculty members, chairs, and deans—an ambitious agenda! The proposal was successful, and we remained in the academic affairs operation of the university although in practice, worked through supportive deans rather than the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA). The VPAA office would later transform into a Provost office, with VPAA and associate provosts, to which we now report. Our success, in part, was related to our success in obtaining external grants. Our university, like many others, counts external grant sums as primary indicators of achievement.

Initially, a local foundation approached us about providing technical assistance and capacity-building in community organizations. Although we successfully obtained grant sources, two problems emerged. First, as a public university in a heavily bureaucratized state government, we lacked the flexibility and sustaining money (in between grants) to operate. Second, we ran into competition within the institution from a technical research operation (Staudt 2008).

Our growth spurt coincided with a remaining window of opportunity from philanthropic and federal granting sources to plant seed monies to institutionalize efforts. By institutionalization, we refer to operational permanence in the university and its ongoing budgetary support. After one unsuccessful try, in a second try we acquired federal money for a HUD (Housing and Urban Development) Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC). For readers who have not applied for such funding, we must stress the overwhelming time and labor commitments associated with responding to federal RFPs (Requests for Proposals) that are posted in the *Federal Register*. Each proposal is minimally 20 pages and maximally 50 pages with scores of attachments and numerous meetings with community partners and stakeholders in the effort. With a rate of one in ten proposals funded, we counted ourselves fortunate to have survived the year-long review process in a way that met the expectations that invariably grow among community partners each time a proposal is submitted. And two strong nonprofit organizations emerged from the COPC, among many goals set forth in the proposal.

As engagement programs grew nationwide, many universities sought outside grant funding, and thus, competition over grant monies abounded, especially at the federal level. For example, the Corporation for National Community Service (CNCS) cast the net widely through AmeriCorps and Learn & Serve grant opportunities, although the more successful their outreach, the greater the competition for funding. We seemed to be a perfect fit for one of these CNCS grants to institutionalize initiatives, but the daunting proposal requirements involved frustration. Not only did the feds specify page and word limits, but even character limits! And like the HUD grant proposals, the assessment indicator software submission systems contained flaws and sure-fire aggravations in the submission process. When we did not acquire that grant, we later learned of the funding odds: less than one in twenty funded-to-submitted grants. We wasted precious labor investments, risking problems with other time-intensive commitments with community partners. After chasing two more federal grants—one of them rejecting all applicants nationwide and another, rejecting our proposal after a year of pro bono, extensive partnership labor to the city for reasons that probably had more to do with the city than with our proposal—our strategy moved to the acquisition of funding from local sources. Additionally, the cabinet-level HUD department eliminated the Community Outreach Partnership Centers in the waning war years of the Bush administration.

Several philanthropic foundations still managed to support university engagement efforts, despite the overall reduction of their investment earnings and the many pressing needs after the tragedy of September 11, 2001. Unlike wealthy, well-endowed

private colleges and universities, we could not expect or rely on generous multi-million-dollar donations from alumni.

The external funding allowed CCE to use funding for maintaining both a faculty director, working additional summer time with occasional one-course reductions, and a fulltime professional staff person to organize and operate a successful, labor-intensive but efficient operation that might be viewed in border-crossing terms—crossing the border between the university and community partners. We had raised over \$4 million of external money since our birth.

Like most universities, our institution historically worked with public schools and health institutions for the placements required to certify teachers, nurses, and social workers. But the center connected with community-based organizations, nonprofit agencies, and public schools on other-than-student-teaching initiatives: court observations, tutoring in ESL and citizenship classes, presentations in high school classes on public engagement and interpersonal violence, and musical performances in senior homes, among others. External funding also allowed us to hire half-time student liaisons who managed the ten service-learning programs. They made presentations in classes about the initiatives, worked with the community partners, and helped train and log student hours. We collected data and evaluations on all efforts, both for the service-learning students in courses who contributed about twenty hours over the semester and for the student liaisons who worked nineteen hours weekly. For each group of students, engagement added value and commitment, opening also new possible pathways for their futures in the nonprofit world.

Our Center for Civic Engagement grew. Every year, approximately a thousand students each contribute twenty hours in community-based learning, producing striking annual and decade-long totals of people engaged, hours invested, and evaluation data about impacts on students. The CCE continues to operate out of academic affairs (again, rather than student affairs), working with faculty in ALL colleges. The CCE combines teaching, research and engagement, though the ‘one university in the city’ place-based context makes the engagement aspect challenging in a risk-avoidant institutional political culture operating with budgetary scarcity in a state with miserly allocations to social, health, and educational programming (ranked in the bottom 40s on most comparative state indicators). University leaders periodically initiate legacy campaigns to generate local support, so an atmosphere of caution prevails in the region.

We now move toward discussion of institutionalization and sustainability, involving strategies associated with structural reform, the retirement of the founding faculty leader and her return to teaching, and a pioneering collaborative effort with the community college. Each strategy poses its own risks, but risks well worth taking. We took these risks because we had deep relationships of trust with community partners—a trust perhaps earned with our own leadership and service to organizations in the region.

Risking Death, but Surviving: Budgetary Strategies

On several occasions, in between funding commitments, the center nearly died. As we waited for a grant that foundation staff approved, in which the funder took over a year to disperse the money, we lost the founding professional staff leader. While that era had its discouraging days, albeit predictable in hindsight without firm internal budgetary support from the university, the transition opened yet another opportunity for a staff position.

Learning from the valleys of the CCE's operation, when funding was scarce and the contingency operations were just sufficient enough to keep its doors open, the CCE acquired two large grants for a grant period of three years and began to gradually secure funding from the university. The new professional staff salary for a short period of time was funded at a 100 percent from one grant, and shortly after in the span of six months, grew to be funded at 70 percent by the grant and 30 percent from the dean's office—the administrative office that provided support to the center from its inception. At the beginning of the following fiscal year, the commitment and contribution from the same college grew to a 50/50 percent distribution, to a 30/70 percent distribution the next, and to 100 percent by the beginning of a no-cost extension granted by one of the funders.

Two years out from the expected end date of the larger grant, the CCE began meeting with administrators to inform them about the budget needs of the center. Graphs, charts, line-item descriptors, and bare-bone budgets were prepared for those audiences. A constant obstacle we faced was—in the administration's eyes—the unattractiveness of designating a new operating budget to a center that for seven years had managed to operate at a large capacity without any university state-designated funds. The proposed amount was basically a 200 percent increase in budget when factoring the salary commitment for the staff professional. The rate of increase is pertinent when some similar challenges were faced with the community college merger to be analyzed in Section III.

The institutionalization-focused grant gave us leeway for exploring new ventures and accepting what the philanthropic foundation and its evaluators called noble failures. This authorized and facilitated risk-taking on our part. We focused on building partnerships with key community leaders often meeting and gathering business-like expertise to explore a revenue-seeking approach. Collaboratively, we posed common business model questions: "What services do you provide that others don't?" "Who is your clientele?" "Who is your competition?" "Who benefits from your services?" Through a series of strategizing exercises, the answers to these questions led to an understanding that the university was our client because its faculty and students needed our work to meet part of its mission. We also realized that our competition, though it was silly to think in such terms, was non-existent because we are the only comprehensive university in town. This quickly led to the realization that the community college could benefit from our lessons learned as we had previously provided some technical assistance for them to resuscitate their service-learning program.

Building community-partnerships and fostering strong networks led to key conversations with community college personnel. The connection with someone who had the “ear” of the community college leadership was ironically made through serving on a common community (prestigious) board. We both have served on nonprofit boards of directors and built relationships of trust; and one of the lessons learned has been that trust is an important factor when building partnerships and collaborations between the university and community organizations. Without trust, half of the opportunities we offer our students and faculty would not be in place. This trust is built by working together in give-and-take partnerships—everyone gains while working collaboratively. The CCE has been respected in the community throughout its existence precisely for this reason—trust.

Conversations began about how the university could better assist the community college in its efforts to build a similar center. At this point, we seized the opportunity to explore a what if? scenario: What if the university and the community college shared a center, the CCE, to run both of its community engagement efforts? This model would not only be revolutionary or pioneering because of the two education institutions coming together to fully collaborate in a joint effort, but it could also prove to be a strong sustainability strategy. Both institutions could contribute to its budget, thus lessening the burden of sustaining separate professional staff; the university could bank on its expertise while the community college could jump start developing a center in much less time than the university did.

Part of the growing pains of establishing a community partnership center, besides budgetary constraints, also revolve around strategies for approaching faculty to employ community-based teaching and learning methods in their classroom. Not only does this process take time but it is also a challenge to develop effective models of engaging students in a way that satisfy faculty, students, and the community organizations simultaneously. The community college could more quickly establish a center by using the knowledge gained from employing both successful and unsuccessful strategies without having to reinvent the wheel.

In due course, when the time came to talk about what was to come next for the CCE, we presented three scenarios, discussed in Section III.

III. Sustaining the Center for Civic Engagement: Strategic Risks

After promising institutionalization to a philanthropic funder, a promise we took seriously, and the sheer exhaustion from applying for big grants from the federal government, our strategy moved toward local funding, including budgetary commitments from the university. We pursued a risky but successful strategy to force the sustainability issue with the administration. This strategy, we hope, offers a potentially replicable strategic analysis for those engagement programs like ours that

had acquired considerable outside funding for their universities, starved for and/or depending on internal units like a CCE to generate external grants.

We sought and acquired internal funding commitments and proposed a new partnership with the community college which will generate an internally supplied operational budget from both institutions. The task to mesh funding commitments from two institutional budgets on different funding cycles is itself a nightmarish risk. One must always envision budgets in bureaucracies in political terms: distributing or redistributing funds in a political process with skilled players, some who win and others who lose.

The Scenarios: Spreading Risks from Inside Out

As we prepared for the site visit from the philanthropic foundation—itsself always useful for leverage in ongoing discussions with the administration—we went to administrators with a one-page set of three scenarios for the Center for Civic Engagement. In the first, the CCE would close down, notify its approximately one-hundred community partners, turn off the costly phones, and post closure notices on its website asking site visitors to contact an already-overworked university relations office. After 10 years, the center had acquired a track record of respect. Engagement is in the university mission statement; the center was featured as one of the two most successful programs in re-accreditation visits (on 10-year cycles); and the Quality Enhancement Plan incorporated engagement goals and activities. Thus, key administrators rejected

Scenario #2 strategized a bare-boned survival strategy with a coordinator funded by the university. Given the way that the CCE had been incorporated into core university operations, administrators also sought to avoid this strategy.

Scenario #3 proposed a partnership with the community college. This partnership would serve the institutional self-interests of both campuses, their student populations (many of which concurrently enroll or transfer from the community college to the university), and the innovative early-college and high-school dual-credit programs which require quality oversight and support. To build this proposed model of partnering (one that could be utilized for other ongoing partnerships) would require an unusual institutional architecture, one that would be developed with joint leadership and a joint steering committee.

Toward Strong Maturation and Growth (and the Accompanying Risks)

When administrators labeled the first two scenarios as unacceptable and the third scenario as optimal, we pursued a more deliberate approach to make the possibility a reality. The director position now had to be formalized as an administrative position rather than a faculty position in order to share administrative costs and oversight of the operations in both houses. An organizational chart was constructed, visually depicting

the shared administration and leadership from the newly structured Office of Undergraduate Studies under the Provost's office at the university, and under the President's office of the community college where the link had initially been made. A steering committee/advisory board was also conceptualized to oversee the center's strategic visioning that would have participation from both institutions (faculty and administration) as well as community input.

Within a semester period, a new center structure was formulated on paper—with a new name to make sure that it was seen as a new entity, and not one wherein a university department overtook the community college program—and a preliminary budget was proposed. To contextualize this further, this progress was made in Fall 2008, when every other news story was about the economic downfall and worst crisis since the Great Depression. Though both presidents supported the initiative (for example, both presidents agreed to host a launch event, or unveiling, of the new center to the community), when the time came to solidify the actual financial commitment from each institution, the numbers were daunting. A couple of proposals were put on the table: one that would allow for the community college to build from a nonexistent budget to a gradually increasing one; and the other, one that would call for a 50/50 share from the inception of the new entity.

Community College Structure

The community college's journey with service-learning was not that different from the university's journey, except for external funding. Similar to the university, the operations relied heavily on the leadership of a faculty member who was allotted course-release time for the oversight of the program. Their service-learning programs were not fully structured, but allowed for volunteerism/community service activities for its students. Given the community college's more natural connection to the community, participating faculty embraced the opportunity to take a more active role in the learning objectives of the students.

Conversely, at the university, the purpose of the CCE is to facilitate such activities in a way that do not require much more additional work on the faculty's part. The CCE's programs are structured to make the connection to the academic course much easier because of the specificity of the activities that the students engage in along with the expected learning outcomes. When such specificity does not exist, it is difficult to assess what numerous students are doing on a large scale in connection to a shared learning objective for a given course.

While community college faculty members' acceptance of the academic base of the program was greater at an earlier stage in comparison to a similar stage at the university, their funds had never been either dependent on grants or on the institution on a large scale. Thus, the program existed at the will of enthusiastic faculty members willing to take the leadership role. When faculty members would move on, however, the program would fall through the cracks until another willing faculty member led its efforts.

Budgetary Tensions and Opportunities

At the time the conversation began between the two institutions to formulate a joint center with a common single budget, the CCE had accrued about 30 percent of its budget in institutional commitment and another 15 percent in temporary funds to help bridge another year of operation between grants (something that did not occur during the first valley in CCE funding). On the other hand, the community college, operating under the budgets of two other departments and no programmatic funding specifically designated to it, had less than 10 percent of the funding for the new proposed budget. Not to mention the economic downturn again, but the proposed increase in their budget was more than 600 percent. The idea that the institution would come up with an equitable amount to what the university had already contributed was not realistic.

To put it in clearer terms, the university had managed to build its institutional support from 0 to 30 percent in four years and it was now being asked to almost double that amount (something it was seemingly ready to do if the community college contributed the other half of the budget). On the other hand, however, we were asking the community college to increase its initially non-designated funds six times over. The willingness to build this joint center became less exciting. The community college had to put this project on hold until funding was secured from the legislature, and the university did not have to commit to anything further because the collaborative project was temporarily stalled.

The Next Steps

Collaborations with the community college continue at a minor level, impacting the CCE budget at about a 5 percent level, currently with no budgetary contribution from the Community College. Seven professors were selected via an application process from the community college to participate through the center's programs as a pilot of what we intend to offer in the future. This pilot has already proven to be an interesting challenge. Sentiments of 'here comes the university to take over our program' have already been expressed by some professors, while other faculty members seem pleased with the options and the academic worthiness of the new structure. The piloting period of this project has allowed us to anticipate challenges for the future; that period has prepared us to articulate what we are trying to do with funders.

The group of individuals involved in this new structural development intends to secure seed funding for this project while we continue to gradually secure institutional funds from the university and begin the similar process with the community college. Another challenge we expect to face that started to emerge, but fortunately (or unfortunately) did not yet have to decide, is location. While the actors involved in the planning are open to being hosted on either campus, there is some indication from the university that this idea should not be carved in stone. Additionally, in budgetary terms, we learned through university-community college collaboration that sharing staff members at a 50/50 rate is cumbersome and logistically complicated. We have now decided that on our organizational chart, the joint center will depict an equally structured center

from both institutions while internally, the funds will be managed through one institution's accounting, budgeting, and human resources policies and procedures.

All and all, the Center for Civic Engagement has come a long way in its ten-year operation. It has strengthened networks in the community, built a reputation of trust and partnership, and gained the support from faculty on campus. It is ready to expand and take strides to further mainstream engagement programs in the university and soon the community college. Funding challenges will always exist, but when put on a bar graph, as external funds slowly diminish, institutional funds have increased (not at the same rate but definitely in the right direction). We foresee the joint center model with the community-college to be the answer to running more cost-efficient operations that bring the level of engagement in both institutions to a higher level.

IV. Lesson Learned:

Reflections on Leadership and Risk

Looking back at the ten years of the Center for Civic Engagement's existence, three key patterns emerge: 1) community links and partnerships open doors; 2) the return on investment of our programs and efforts have to be better tracked and measured; and 3) individual commitment and perseverance are necessary when embarking on an institutionalization journey.

To engage students and faculty in the community requires full understanding of, interaction with, and commitment to the community. From its inception, the CCE built strong ties with numerous nonprofit organization leaders and public entities. It established a proven record of engaging in true and meaningful partnerships that shared the common vision of elevating the capacity of community members. Through such partnerships and linkages, the center was capable of evolving in a "learning-process approach," rather than constricted by a predesigned blueprint (as some funders require in their top-down, highly controlled, pre-planned models) (Korten 1980). At the same time by being part of the leadership base of nonprofits, nonprofit partners made an effort to include the center as a partner in grant-seeking efforts. Last, through a less obvious way of connecting with the other institution of higher education in the community, the joint center concept was developed by individuals who connected with each other through a nonprofit organization board and similar collaboration opportunities outside the respective institutions. We want to warn readers that these strategies are not only risky, but also time- and labor-intensive.

As we embarked on institutionalizing the work of the center and mainstreaming engagement opportunities, every piece of communication we developed and at every workshop or training we gave on the importance of civic engagement and community-based teaching and learning, there was wide receptivity and certainly understanding. On various occasions the center was highlighted in the media, speeches, and in overall institutional planning because its work was deemed important and necessary. However, every time the issue of financing this work came to the conversation, it did not seem to

inspire the same level of confidence on its importance. Supporting the work was not difficult; in fact, every key individual in the university could potentially give a well thought out speech on its impact on the community and the students themselves: it is stated in the mission of the university. The question remained, however, if it is so important, why not fund it and ensure its continued existence?

Going through the three-scenario strategy, it was evident that closing the center was not an option, but ultimately those conversations led to questions: How does civic engagement impact retention, graduation, and academic performance? Though this is not the sole and ultimate goal of civic engagement (we believe civic consciousness and engagement lead to active learning and the deepening of democratic process in our entire country), we had to devote our energy and thoughts to these three institutionally relevant questions, but rely on an overburdened institutional planning and evaluation office for access to student data for tracking purposes.

While we evaluate a great deal of the courses that include service-learning and the students therein, we have come to accept that we need more outcomes measured and improved tracking systems for our student academic performance. Institutions want to see an immediate return on their investment, and they will devote funds and energy to those programs and initiatives that can help address the goals that are articulated at that time. We are now 'tagging' through our internal student-information system all students that undergo service-learning activities to compare them with matched samples to determine impacts on student retention, graduation, and academic performance.

We believe that almost all significant changes depend on individuals: their leadership, persistence, and follow-through. CCE leaders have believed in the mission to engage students and faculty in the community through academic and community-based learning to solve problems and together, to improve the quality of life of in the region. Through peaks and valleys, they found a way to fulfill its mission at both grand and minimal levels. Each strategy implemented and every communication piece created led to the realization that this work was important and thus had to continue. To date, the center has generated over four million dollars in funds, and it continues to build on its strength to strategize and build community linkages. It is now up to individuals to pursue the next challenge of building a co-owned, two-institutional, joint department that will enable the community to be better connected to a wider population of students and faculty, most of whom are community members themselves.

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