

Match.Com: Finding Your Perfect Service Learning Partner

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Session Description:

How can you find your perfect service learning partner? Come to this session to find ways to develop true reciprocity and collaborative partnerships between institutions and community partners. We will cover some of the challenges of working with community colleges, examples of "best practices" projects, and the roles faculty, students, and community partners play in the learning process. Finally, we will explore how we can become co-educators through a quality service learning match.

Motivations/Foundations:

Valuing our Partners, the theme for this year's conference is a theme we are also working on with our partners at Portland Community College (PCC). PCC's Service Learning program began as a grassroots movement of faculty about nine years ago. Numbers grew and this group looked for ways to "grow the program."

Upon becoming a Learn and Serve grantee, PCC was able to hire a Partnerships Coordinator. This position was instrumental in building partnerships with the Portland community. These partnerships were more than the "Invisible Partners" as described by Bailis and Melchior (2004) where the college defines the needs of the community on their own and set out to "fix" the community. At PCC, partners were invited on to campus to participate in forums, trainings, and classroom presentations. The partners were able to

access resources of the institution and work with faculty to determine community needs and learning outcomes for students.

At the end of that grant cycle, PCC was able to institutionalize the Partnerships Coordinator position. Currently, PCC is working toward the types of partnerships Bailis and Melchior describe as “sustainable partners” (2004). These types of partnerships are often discussed, using a variety of terms, “authentic, democratic, reciprocal” (Jacoby, 2003), “effective partnerships” (Points of Light Foundation, 2002), “equal stakeholders” (Abravanel, 2003). Invisible partnerships are easy. Sustainable partnerships take time. They also require trust, communication, sharing of resources, shared vision, and established roles.

Sustainable partnerships are a challenge at community colleges. At PCC, we are on the quarter system. Ten weeks is not a lot of time to coordinate the schedules of the faculty with the schedules of the partner to engage in collaborative teaching. This coupled with the frequency of when courses are taught (some of our courses are taught only one quarter per year), make sustaining a partnership difficult. Many of our faculty are “freeway faculty” driving between colleges, teaching one or two classes at each school. The challenges are not limited to those of faculty. Our students are often parents, caregivers, working part- or even full-time, on top of their full load of classes. The partners are similarly stretched, working with reduced staff, limited facilities, and multiple colleges requesting partnerships. It is a wonder that service learning happens at all. Yet, when there are true partnerships, amazing things happen.

Session Goals:

There are several goals for this session. First, we hope to move beyond the theories of sustainable partnerships and highlight some of the best practices in sustainable service learning partnerships. In addition, we will explore the challenges of working within a community college environment and move to developing a deeper understanding of the ways in which some of these challenges can become strengths. We will also consider the roles of faculty, students, and community partners in the process of developing sustainable, collaborative partnerships. Finally, we hope this session helps to identify the elements necessary to work toward true partnerships on your own campus.

Presentation Design:

Participants will be able to:

1. Identify and locate stakeholders and demographic information in local communities.
2. Understand requirements of service learning, and roles of faculty, students, and community partners.
3. Create an action plan to address challenges of service learning partnerships.
4. Expand the action plan to become co-educators.

To address these objectives we will:

1. Explain how community colleges differ from 4-year institutions (handout).
Provide a general organizational structure (overhead) of where service learning fits at various colleges. We will identify key stakeholders in service learning programs.

2. Provide a general overview of service learning and how at best practice institutions, the roles are structured.
3. Participants will work in groups to brainstorm challenges they have had with service learning and form a plan for overcoming these challenges.
4. We will have an open discussion about being co-educators, what that means, how to move toward reciprocity.

Citations:

Abravanel, S.A. (2003). Building community through service learning: The role of the community partner. *Education Commission of the States: Civic Engagement and Service-Learning*.

Bailis, L.N. & Melchior, A. (2004). Promoting and sustaining civic partnerships: A conceptual history, framework, and a call to action. *Constitutional Rights Foundation: Service-Learning Network*.

Points of Light Foundation. (2002). Introduction to effective partnerships.

www.service.learning.org/static/article/pages/106.htm