

Presenters:

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Hand in Hand: A Regional Perspective on Building Strong Programs and Partnerships

The presenters are community service learning (cls) leaders who work at three different institutions but serve the same community. Each will provide her unique perspective and demonstrate how collaborative efforts between the two community colleges and one university have promoted best practices and addressed community needs and challenges. For them, the collaborating approach has also led to establishing strategies for problem solving, pooling resources, and developing a regional culture of service. Participants will have opportunities to engage in interactive activities that explore the barriers to collaborative work and encourage solution-driven practices.

CSL leaders and professionals have long known that collaborations are the heartbeat of a successful program and help create a strong program foundation. But are traditional partnerships and collaborations enough in today's budget climate? Can they offer the support to help solve specific program issues and solutions? Is it time to think outside the proverbial box to think beyond traditional partnerships? Our experience dictates that if we expand *who* we collaborate with, we may find the solutions for designing a unique approach that meets today's csl programs' needs while promoting student success *and* addressing community identified issues.

Although experiential learning and student service have been around for decades, most csl leaders continue to concentrate their outreach to faculty, community non-profits, and students

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as the synergistic components of their csl program. These are the components that in the past were all that were needed for a healthy program. Today's csl programs have been evolving for more than 10 years and thus, we have experienced mistakes, successes and failures, and encountered many challenges. Rather than wait for formal venues such as workshops and conferences to capitalize on those experiences, why not regularly collaborate *and* partner with csl leaders at nearby institutions? Collaborating and partnering with other csl leaders in the region opens the door to a variety of benefits including reducing work tasks, streamlining partner contracts, expanding resources, and promoting student success.

By partnering with educational institutions in the community, programs can become seamless for community partners and students. Most non-profit community partners are understaffed and often they are stretched to their limits. CSL offices that collaborate have opportunities to combine resources to co-orient and co-develop shared partners, thus limiting the number of functions non-profit personnel must be away from the office. Students also benefit from community partners that have attended orientations and workshops by collaborating institutions: expectations are the same, regardless what institution students are enrolled; site supervision is consistent; and students' service is focused on learning rather than volunteerism. Collaborations among educational institutions help create a continuum for student expectations through strong csl programs that are similarly well-organized and well-thought out; in turn, these programs provide continuous real life learning for students.

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In addition to providing student and community partner benefits, collaborations with other institutions offer a wide variety of benefits including support from colleagues at other institutions. For example, learning how another campus handles risk management, contracts, and learning plans can help stem anxiety and provide potential options without having to reinvent the wheel. It's much more efficient to learn from each other's successes and failures.

Learn from someone else's successes and failures when it comes to marketing because getting the word out about successful csl projects is crucial: if the story isn't told, then nobody will know the good work that students and faculty are doing. Ask colleagues what marketing tools have worked on their campuses, and ask for samples that can be used as models to jumpstart your own ideas. For instance, how do other campuses recognize faculty? How are students' work highlighted? Who is the intended audience? Different institutions may market to different audiences; find out the benefits of marketing to each audience.

Collaborations for student success, community partner benefits and program strength—are all positive outcomes, but note that some people tend to think of collaborations as barriers. Barriers can be real, but not all barriers are insurmountable. Ask colleagues at other institutions for feedback about what is standing in the way of forming a collaboration based on their experience. Is the barrier insurmountable or have others found solutions that worked on their campuses? Look for suggestions through your campus mission and or strategic plan that could open doors rather than maintain those barriers.

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CSUSM, and MiraCosta and Palomar Community Colleges enjoy a strong collaboration that is fed by the desire to help students succeed in their coursework and help them feel valued as community members. Each campus invites the csl leaders, faculty, community partners, and if appropriate, students, to its workshops, thus providing regional leadership that promotes csl pedagogy and fosters best practices. The csl leaders meet regularly to discuss how each campus is dealing with the economic downturn and how collaborative efforts can create change within the community.

One example of a regional effort is the team's endeavors to meet with representatives from a feeder high school to discuss how csl hours rather than volunteer hours can help demystify college courses for anxious high school seniors. Getting the high schools to commit to a csl program can improve our community that is being hurt by 50% increase in demand for social services while experiencing a 50% decrease in resources. By collaborating with high schools, we can help promote civic responsibility at an earlier age and re-enforce an expectation for a life of service.