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Higher education institutions interact closely with a multitude of external communities. The diversity and multitude of communities have resulted in new relationships within higher education stakeholders. These relationships have ranged from local, regional, national, and international discourses. It has led to internal and external functions. Internal functions, including teaching and research, apply to work-based industry and affect the external functions of economic and societal change. Taking the initiative to reach out to communities will create fundamental social change, take on civic engagement and warrant the necessity that teaching and research hold the public accountable and adjust to societal needs. Market-based societal changes reconstruct the context of higher education and mandate that academic teaching and research be responsive to societal needs. The academic pursuits and entrepreneurship of higher education are intertwined as higher education and communities are interconnected and interdependent.

Introduction

As nationalization and globalization bring about dramatic demographic change and inevitable exchange dialogues, the trajectory of American higher education is tremendously influenced. The fundamental changes include a large national and global pool of potential students, various resources for student access, partnerships among community stakeholders, and economic and societal change (Killick, 2011).

One word frequently appears in an institutional strategic plan – community. Traditionally, it is regarded as one tangible geographic location embraced by political, societal and economic boundaries and shared by common exchanges (Cortes, 1999). Several aspects need to be discussed, including the approaches institu-

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tions use to collaborate with external communities, the definition and functions of the communities, the role senior leaders, faculty members and student affairs professionals play, and how student navigate through higher education and the communities.

Community ranges from affinity group, intergroup, or campus-wide group, to local, regional, national and international. Whether the community is small or large, many communities at different levels are interlinked with one another (Cortes, 1999; Maurrasse, 2002; Sandy & Holland, 2006). Sustainable long-term effects of building communities require consistent time, effort and relations. What benefits do the community stakeholders pay attention to when they intend to keep long-term relations? Butcher, Bezzina, and Moran (2011) indicated that there are two types of partnerships between institutions and other organizations in the context of community engagement: *transactional and transformational.* Transactional partnership means that every party is concerned with individual purposes and achievement when stakeholders engage in the exchange of community. A transformational partnership means that every party pursues common benefits under moral consideration and the stakeholders nurture the possibility of sustainable growth over generations by addressing vexing problems (Butcher, Bezzina, & Moran, 2011). The transformational partnership between higher education and external communities must be prioritized for sustainable development since it will foster short-term and long-term benefits.

There are several organizational partnerships within community relations: one institution connected to several organizations from the local to national arena; partnership among several institutions within one country; several institutions partnered with various organizations, and international partnerships. The maintenance of community relations requires the agreement of common benefit and purposes in a moral dimension on a timely basis. Long-term community partnerships require openness and honesty to accommodate current affairs, tendency, and necessity (Butcher et al., 2011). Several studies showed that consistent community partnership entails effective communication among stakeholders, long-term strategic plans, short-term adjustment in terms of temporary changes, effective implementation and timely evaluation (Butcher et al., 2011; Cortes, 1999; Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Applying Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model to Build Up Communities

Bronfenbrenner (1979) introduced an ecological model to address how communities impact college student development. He indicated that "development is defined as the person's evolving conception of the ecological environment, and [their] relation to it, as well as the person's growing capacity to discover, sustain, or alter its properties" (p. 9). The environment Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualized includes the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined a microsystem as "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material characteristics" (p. 22). A critical term in the definition is "experienced" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22). The experience can be a mixture of encountering a given or common situation, processing different feelings, taking lessons from study and work, involving in a community, reflecting on own and others' behaviors, and acting or reacting according to received information. A microsystem can be a class, a student organization, a service learning opportunity, an internship, a residence community, a family and other settings where one student experiences tight interpersonal relations. Often a microsystem is an affinity community in which one student is highly and consistently involved.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined a mesosystem as "the interrelations among two or more settings which the developing person actively participates" (p. 25). One community does not develop without collaboration and communication with other communities. For example, a female student of color may be highly involved in both the multicultural center and women's center, tangibly assist in programming in both centers, and subsequently foster intangible relations and partnership between the two centers. This mesosystem should gradually include more students from other communities who are impacted by how this student behaves, engages, interacts, and therefore helps connect more communities. The overlapping of mesosystems form, develop, and maintain larger communities.

An exosystem, as Bronfenbrenner (1979) defined, referred to "one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the person" (p. 25). For example, while the female student of color mentioned earlier may not be directly involved with the international community, she is impacted when the women's center and multicultural center collaborate. Once she increases her connection with other students who engage in the international community, she may regard the international community as closer to her microsystem. The student may experience transition between the exostystem and the microsystem as connections are developed between the student and community.

A macrosystem, in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) words, implied "consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems that exist at the level of the culture as a whole" (p. 26). As students live in microsystems, mesosystems and exosystems, their experiences, behaviors and perspectives will impact macrosystems directly or indirectly, tangibly or intangibly. Macrosystems include a state, a country and the entire world, depending on what world view students carry, to what extent their behaviors and perspectives impact communities, how they define various systems and what effects the systems have produced.

As diverse bodies of college students converge in higher education institutions, they simultaneously promote the diversity of campus communities and raise serious questions about the concept of community. Students shift in and out of various communities and seek the most comfortable niches. Many students primarily find a sense of community by engaging in a smaller affinity community. This affinity community may serve as a bridge to fuller participation in a larger affinity community and, finally, the campus-wide community (Cortes, 1999). Affinity groups may form around social, cultural, and spiritual norms. For example, at the University of Vermont there are affinity communities such as Hillel, Greek Life, ALANA (Asian, Latino, African, Native American, and bi/multiracial) Center, LGBTQA (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer & Questioning, Advocate) Center, International Student Community, Women's Center and other spaces. Many students build up close relations with others who are in the same affinity group (Cortes, 1999). During the process of building affinity community, "the formation of self-selected campus communities based on perceived commonalities reflects the inevitable process of group aggregation" (Cortes, 1999, p.13). Increased student involvement in the affinity community strengthens group aggregation. It is likely that group aggregation will regress into self-segregation without interaction and collaboration among different communities (Cortes, 1999). Over involvement of students in a given community undermines the fundamental concept of community. "The creation of a sense of community that goes beyond the superficial requires a serious engagement with the process of building bridges among groups" (Cortes, 1999, p. 14), which reinforces Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. Strengthening bridges among communities, nurtures and develops intergroup relations so that students will have a deeper recognition of differences and underlying commonalities.

Senior Leadership Team

Senior administrative leaders need to increase expectation, ensure the well-being of communities, present necessary formal tools, take initiative, and make concrete plans. Doing so will foster a holistic campus culture and cultivate seamless relations among communities (Caputo, 2005; Maurrasse, 2002). Higher education will benefit when it attempts to centrally incorporate community partnerships into its missions, operations, and commitments to long-term change across communities (Maurrasse, 2002). The partnerships with external communities will also propel student affairs professionals to reach out, faculty to engage in various communities, and students to be better after senior leaders take action. According to White (2006), "Universities generally maintain among the highest levels of civic reputation, political clout, expertise, and resources of any institution in their regions" (p. 2). Some community services rely on institutions as a source of revenue. There is a trend that both the institution and its communities will gain greater financial and societal benefits and collective goals based on shared interests if both strategize

deliberately and collaboratively on how to expand partnerships together (Caputo, 2005; Maurrasse, 2002).

Individual effort is not sufficient. It is imperative that the institution be engaged in strengthening and supporting community partnerships (Caputo, 2005). Effective senior leadership makes the institutional mission a shared vision that is practiced across communities. For example, students gain access to discussions, learning, activities, and reflection; faculty apply research into industry; institutions build up goals and improve their reputation; and external organizations gain economic benefits and a positive image (Harris, 2008). Although there are distinctions in motivations, purposes, and benefits perceived among stakeholders, the goal is to figure out a common interest based on which diverse perspective of long-term community partnerships will create and promote mutually tangible and intangible benefits (Sandy & Holland, 2006). Well-established partnerships will be strengthened when diverse perspectives come into one focus and experiences provide solid recommendations for implementation.

Faculty Members

It is very important to include faculty in community partnerships. Usually faculty instruct students to pursue academic excellence by putting theory into practice, doing research, and applying research into industry. Huber (2001) elucidated the integrative benefit of faculty engagement in community partnerships:

> Faculty members who can extend their intellectual curiosity into their service activities can unify their professional lives, bringing together their teaching, research and service in a synergistic way, to the benefit of each aspect of their work and the benefit of those with whom they work. (p. 3)

As community partnerships are sensitive to emergent changes, it is vital for faculty to know societal needs and what is the tendency for research to be geared toward. Only by being applied to industry and producing economic effect can the value of research be realized to the largest extent (Harris, 2008). To encourage faculty members to engage in the community and play their role requires communication, negotiation and strategic planning (Harris, 2008; Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Traditionally, faculty members focus on teaching and researching because their tenure depends upon their professional performance. (Harris, 2008). It is critical for administrators to create opportunities to encourage faculty to do more campus service, which will better the community and enhance their growth and career. The research faculty conduct can be applied to community service or faculty can do quantitative and qualitative research on community. Both ways will involve faculty's contribution, enhance research value, and promote community development in many ways and in a long-term cycle.

The involvement within community includes outreach, consulting, service-learning, community involvement, civic engagement and other forms beyond campus responsibilities. A professor in counseling can be a very good resource for non-profit organizations. A professor in the math department can develop a training program for organizations that help students from first-generation college families and refugee and low-income families. When faculty incorporate scholarly work to community work, value is realistically realized. The value of community work is structured and documented so that it has a theoretical framework, shared value, and further research.

Community service may help faculty improve their reputation, advance their research and obtain external funding. These benefits will not interfere with teaching and research. Instead they will enhance their quality. As higher education institutions are largely sensitive to the change of a more culturally diverse society, offering space and chance for faculty members to apply their scholarly attainment outside campus is much needed (Cortes, 1999; Harris, 2008). Community service allows faculty to have a positive role outside of the traditional classroom, contribute to different communities, and bring about a shared value across communities. The accumulating effects faculty members are able to produce play an indispensable role in higher education and external communities.

Student Affairs Professionals

Since student affairs professionals are physically present everywhere on campus, it is vital that they take steps in accordance with institutional missions, communicate with professionals in other communities, serve more students beyond targeted groups, send verbal and behavioral messages, and expand communities.

Whether an office is big or small, it serves a certain number of students. Bridging different campus spaces and connecting students with external communities causes students to understand the meaning of community, apply what they learn, and enrich their life experiences. Simultaneously, the partnerships among different communities offer professionals opportunities to relearn what their students need, consider what they can do to better accommodate students' needs, sense the relation between higher education and the outside world, and take appropriate approaches in front of new trends (Butcher et al., 2011; Maurrasse, 2002). Through partnerships, student affairs professionals can update their format of advising, programming, workshops and events to help students get a better sense of the community they are tightly engaged in and other communities they might not have the chance to understand.

Previous research has shown that role models directly impact college students (Caputo, 2005; Cortes, 1999; Maurrasse, 2002). Once student affairs professionals

nurture partnerships among different communities, make good use of their relations, and present a measurable accomplishment, it is likely that students will have an intention to engage in communities they are not familiar with, and see how they feel about the underlying interconnectedness (Caputo, 2005; Maurrasse, 2002).

Conclusion

As higher education accommodates nationalization and globalization, the relationship between higher education and external communities needs to be revisited, maintained and developed. Senior leaders, faculty members and student affairs professionals need to take initiative, make strategic plans, strengthen communication, and develop partnerships between higher education and external communities based on shared common interests. Interconnecting higher education institutions and external communities helps students to realize societal needs, adapt to the outside world and present the value of a theoretical framework.

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