



Client Partnerships and Service-Learning: An Outreach Center's Role

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Abstract:

Pedagogical literature documents service learning's impact on students, the community, and educators alike. Benefits aside, concerns remain about the time- and resource-intensive nature of building, cultivating, and sustaining client-partnerships. This paper is a case study of the development of a nonprofit outreach center, its operating practices, its cultivation and maintenance of client partnerships, as well as a consideration of some of the challenges it faces.

Introduction

Scholarship in service learning and its effects on students clearly articulate benefits in a variety of areas. Service learning proponents indicate that service learning is a more effective application of core concepts and principles than if simply provided in a classic lecture model (Gray, 2005); that it is an engine for strong professional development and civic development (Lewis, 2002; McCollough, 2020a); and it is a natural extension of the philosophy of John Dewey (1933, 1938).

Service learning is common to upper division and capstone courses in public relations and mass communication. Research on the practice demonstrates social, professional, and educational benefits among students (Bourland-Davis & Fall, 1997; Daugherty, 2003; McCollough, 2018; 2019; 2020b). Justification for the adoption of service learning includes client relations skills development, as well as portfolio

building. Scholars extended service learning integration to professional writing courses (Wandel, 2005) and public relations courses (Wilson, 2012). Fall & Bourland-Davis (2004) established service learning's value to faculty members' promotion and tenure process noting that "service-learning is a relationship- and time-intensive pedagogy for both students and faculty" (p. 4). The demands on faculty in managing relationships and time are a core focus of this study.

This is a case analysis of the development of a nonprofit outreach center (2007-2012), the integration of client relations with nonprofit partners and integrating those partnerships into a mass communication curriculum (2012-2020). It also documents the challenges faculty faced in operating the outreach center (2012-2020). The author will explore the challenges present in the development, implementation, and maintenance of the center and the client partnerships it generates.

Keywords: Service Learning, Public Relations Education

A Nonprofit Outreach Center Designed to Facilitate Service-Learning Partnerships

In the spring of 2013, a regional comprehensive university launched a nonprofit outreach center for the public. In the eight years since its launch, the center has been in great demand in the region for its services, and its faculty and students have earned strong reputations for their work. The center routinely partners with a dozen local nonprofit organizations each semester. The center has created over 100 local partnerships by improving organizational communication, developing digital content, and launching strategic communication campaigns. The quality of video production and social media messaging provided by faculty, staff, and students working at the center has brought in small-scale contract work providing a self-sustaining business model for the center. Finally, faculty in the communication department has leveraged the center to build innovative partnerships at its host university and other higher education institutions.

The center functions as an engine that supports a growing service learning curriculum that constitutes the core of the department's curriculum across its communication studies, integrated media, and public relations concentrations. Recently, the attention drawn by the center facilitated the addition of a film concentration, as well as a graduate program emphasizing leadership and civic engagement through the lens of strategic communication. The increase in number and public profile of the partners also means that the center is not only growing in its capacity to serve, but also raising the profile of the department.

Literature Review

Service learning became a broadly accepted part of mass communication education in the 1990s, particularly in public relations programs (Bourland-Davis & Fall 1997; Daugherty, 2003). It continues to be a relevant field of study and practice (Fraustino, Pressgrove, and Colistra, 2018; McCollough, 2018, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Motley & Sturgill, 2014). I begin this study by discussing the benefits of service learning in mass communication classrooms.

Established Value of Service Learning in Mass Communication Pedagogy: Scholarship on service learning integration in the teaching of mass communication suggests some tangible benefits to students. Educators in journalism and public relations have identified benefits to students in the cultivation of knowledge

in community issues (Silverman, 2006), as well as on matters of race and privilege (Endres & Gould, 2009; Motley & Sturgill, 2014), and students and recent graduates ascribing active engagement with nonprofit and civic organizations beyond the course and their programs of study (McCollough, 2020a).

Other scholars are looking directly at the benefit of service learning in the context of impact on professional practice. Strohm and Baukus (1995) identified several benefits in the practice, including (1) flexibility to ambiguity, (2) strengthening professional adaptability, and (3) dealing with delineation using diagnostic thinking and evaluation. Other pedagogical scholars have outlined skills development in client relations (Daugherty, 2003), portfolio development (Wandel, 2005), organizational, group, and interpersonal communication acumen (Bollinger, 2004), as well as critical thinking and problem solving (Wilson, 2012).

Literature also shows the value of modeling industry practices in service learning. The application of competition between classes (Rentner, 2012) and among student groups in the public relations campaigns course (McCollough, 2018) demonstrated value in enhancing student projects, client-partner satisfaction, and student perceptions of the course experience and course value. Recent scholarship also outlines the value to professional development in service learning in a student-run agency (Bush, et al., 2017; Ranta, et al., 2020). There are, however, challenges for educators in the logistical effort to establish client-partnerships.

Practical Challenges and Campus-Community Cultivation and Management: A well-established aspect of service learning is the need to successfully cultivate strong relationships with community partners. (Morton & Bergbauer, 2015). Since the work of educational philosopher John Dewey (1933), educators and scholars have considered the relationship between the university and its community. One challenge in the development of campus-community partnerships is conflicting cultural and philosophical dynamics. Bringle & Hatcher (1995) described the process of establishing and maintaining campus-community partnerships as complex. Giles (2014) notes the challenges posed when students work with community partners whose mission or stated purpose does not align with their personal beliefs. Morton (1995) observes that campus-community partnerships are too often focused on charity, rather than justice. Long-

standing consequences associated with cultural clashes and missteps in approach are now the focus of critical research on service learning pedagogy addressing inequity and misperceptions about what is of value or necessity to community partners (Bortolin, 2011; Davis, et al., 2019; Hicks, et al., 2015).

Contributing to the clash of cultures is the perception among many faculty members of their work as separate from local communities (Bender, 1993; Keener, 1999) and adopting the charity model. Benson, Harkavy, and Puckett (2000) note that the expert model, often used by faculty members, is one in which establishes elitist, hierarchical, and one-dimensional relationships rather than collegial, participatory, cooperative, and democratic relationships. Growing inaccessibility and faculty isolation from the public sphere also complicate its respect for and acknowledgement of other forms of knowledge construction (Bender, 1993; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002).

These cultural differences present barriers from effective communication, respect, and coordinated action toward mutual goals and shared vision. Scholars point to the need for universities to prepare resources that allow faculty members to cultivate sustainable community partnerships (Curwood, et al., 2011). The past 20 years of scholarship, stressing service learning's value, has changed the mindset around its adoption. Recent research illustrated that among faculty's top priorities in training to effectively adopt a service learning pedagogy is training in effective development of community partnerships (Lewing, 2020).

Service learning is a demanding approach for instructors and is documented in mass communication literature. Fall and Bourland-Davis (2004) have described a service learning pedagogy as a "relationship- and time-intensive" process with the establishment of client-partnerships (p. 4). Wandel (2005) offered up several examples commonly discussed as instructors address challenges in delivering the approach in the classroom. She notes a pragmatic challenge of time management on an academic calendar, assisting students in clearly defining a community need with partners, helping the community partner in creating goals that will effectively help meet their need(s), effectively executing work that progresses towards a solution, and allowing for the reflection that students must embrace to maximize experiential learning.

Research Questions

Considering the literature on the development of the

process of establishing and maintaining campus-community partnerships, the author posed the following research questions.

RQ1: How did faculty and staff develop its nonprofit outreach center?

RQ2: How does the nonprofit outreach center operate daily?

RQ3: What process is used in the center to establish and maintain partnerships?

In addition to a consideration of the development of the center, its function, and the partnership development and maintenance processes, the author also posed the following research question:

RQ4: What are some of the current and future challenges for the center?

Method

This study examined the launch and development of a nonprofit outreach center housed in an academic unit at a regional state university serving an access mission. The researcher adopted a case study approach to analysis (Yin, 2018), consisting of a mixed methods approach examining archival data reporting on the program, as well as personal reflections of the researcher on the daily operations when engaging in the center.

The time frame for this case study spans from the fall 2007 to the end of fall 2020. The research analyzed annual program review data for the program over 14 academic years (2007-2008 through 2019-2020 AY) to construct the timeline and identify the information essential to the justification for and development of the center. Each annual program review consists of demographic data capturing the composition of the department enrollment and its faculty. Also captured are the curricular and student organization offerings available to students to assess the quality of achievement of learning outcomes, in addition to evaluating the quality of students' learning experiences. Finally, the annual reporting data captures faculty and student accomplishments of note, which have value in establishing the impact of the center on the community, and its value to faculty and students as members of the discipline and as aspiring professionals, respectively. This mix of data enabled the researcher to establish a timeline for development and implementation of the nonprofit outreach center, as well as to note key accomplishments or challenges during the operational life of the nonprofit research center.

In addition to the annual reports analyzed, the researcher also reviewed personal notes and reflec-

tions during the researcher's tenure, working on the development of the nonprofit outreach center, as well as experiences when engaging with the center and community partners. This data set proved valuable in providing context in performing an analysis of the development process and reinforcing themes found in annual reporting in the researcher's experiences in community partnership development and maintenance. A thorough analysis of both datasets facilitated the development of the themes that make up the following narrative report on the nonprofit outreach center, its operation, and potential challenges it faces.

Findings

The findings present an interesting body of insights on launching the center and perspective about how faculty members establish and maintain community partnerships. The data also illustrates fiscal and resource challenges born of institutional pressures, a desire to build on success with emergent opportunities, breakdown in the reciprocity between the community partners and the academic unit, a pressure to demonstrate fiscal sustainability, and provides some perspective on the impact of COVID-19 on operations.

Timeline of Conceptualization, Approval, and Development

2007 – Need for Campus Identity and Local Opportunity Provides the Inspiration: The concept of a nonprofit outreach center came from the gradual growth of service learning as the predominant form of instruction in the academic department that hosts the center. In 2005, three faculty members in the department had service learning requirements in five courses. At the time, management of the partnerships occurred on a class-by-class basis. As demand grew for service learning, faculty incorporated it into more courses. The work of incorporating service learning and growing the department continued into 2007, when faculty members began to identify the effect of service learning on students. More importantly, the students' consistent positive reception of service learning led the faculty to the realization of building a brand identity around service learning. The department now offers 26 courses that include some service learning assignment or project.

The department used end-of-program assessment interviews to gauge effectiveness in teaching students principles of practice. Students were assessed on coursework and were interviewed about what they

most valued about their program of study. Students overwhelmingly supported service learning, noting that it helped them to network, to learn about the challenges in their community, and to effectively learn concepts through practice rather than writing a paper or taking a test. The comprehensive program review offered faculty the perspective that wider adoption of service learning practices and a focus on community partnerships could be an engine for faculty recognition, for marketability of students, and to encourage departmental growth from its 175-student enrollment at the time of the 2007 study.

The comprehensive program review led faculty to take a deeper look at the community to identify partnerships. Faculty discovered that among 10,000 regional businesses, 6,800 of those registered were classified as 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations. This allowed the department to differentiate itself from other academic units. The university's College of Business had claimed proprietary control of small business economic development. In 2008, the department embraced a storefront small business development model for connecting with community nonprofit organizations to create more service learning opportunities.

2008 – 2011 – Reorganization and Economics Provide Justification: The 2008-2009 academic year brought the Great Recession, a new university president, and provost. This created an opportunity to improve the profile of the department and to make progress toward launching the center. The shift to service learning partnerships enhanced the department's service contact hours, the students' marketability, and the department's cost per credit hour production, all of which endeared it to the administration. Teaching students to be adaptive and using service learning to cultivate portfolio pieces enabled students to be competitive in a workforce now full of professionals with five years of experience, or more. This permitted the department to thrive and garnered the new university president's attention.

The administration wanted to reorganize the university's colleges to highlight its arts programs in a college of their own. The pragmatic challenge of this move was the high cost of credit hour production that grouping those units together would mean for a new College of the Arts in a state system that prioritizes credit hour production and large enrollments. Thus, the administration asked the communication department to move to the College of the Arts. Such maneuvering put the department in a college of fewer

units competing for resources. Additionally, being part of the college with the university's most popular program also increased the department's profile through proximity. After a discussion with the department faculty, the department moved to the College of the Arts, and moved to the downtown campus in 2011. The added value of the move was to bring the department closer to its own physical space and closer to the center of the city's government, chamber of commerce, and nonprofits, while garnering administrative support, which enabled future requests.

2012 - 2014 – Making the Ask and Negotiating Institutional Barriers: During the 2011-2012 academic year, the department was in a position to make the formal ask for support of the center. By the beginning of the fall semester, the department had become the institutional leader in service contact hours between its students and community partners using service learning. The department then refined its senior assessment tool to provide data to gauge the presence of service learning in student work and the value of that approach to their learning experience. Consistently, students stated the value of service learning, specifically to their program of study and professional development.

Having built the rapport and reputation with the university administration to be good stewards of resources, the chair began to lobby the university for support. Negotiating resource and policy barriers between the university administration and department proved minimal. For the department faculty, it was a matter of establishing a culture in which the growing body of young faculty see the center as an engine for developing a 21st century faculty members' agenda: a balanced emphasis between scholarship and teaching, empowering greater capacity for service. Chairs competing for resources did not perceive such drive for the center as a threat. This permitted the faculty to work in isolation. It required no shift in curriculum, making the process even simpler to incorporate partnerships into class projects. The acts of service raised the profile of the department, faculty, and students, making it harder to encounter public opposition. Students became more effective in demonstrating full skill sets through project work in their classes.

During the 2011-2012 year, a bit of serendipity made the work of launching the center simpler. The sitting department chair was named Dean of the College of the Arts. With the former chair now in the dean's role, this strengthened the department's ability

to advocate for the center and added college support of the outreach center. The department and college could now lobby for the center and established a profile aligned with the administration's entrepreneurial strategic and philosophical mindset. The department secured a storefront space for the 2012-2013 academic year.

An Operational Model for Establishing Partnerships

Operationally, the center adopted a client relations model akin to many public relations firms, marketing agencies, or even economic development centers. A nonprofit organization interested in partnership reaches out to the center's director, who facilitates a meeting between the organization and faculty members whose expertise most closely aligns with the organization's needs. The meeting provides a baseline assessment of the broad needs of the organization.

Once the needs are established, the director works with departmental faculty to review the service learning courses offered that can meet client needs. Many nonprofit organizations have diverse needs, which can be met in multiple courses. One clear example of this came in a partnership between the university and the local school district in the summer of 2017, tasked with designing an integrated curriculum that spans from early childhood education to completion of graduate fields of study. The emphasis of study was high-impact learning practices.

The aim of this model was to establish enduring community partnerships. The local partnership between the school district and the university was an example of an ongoing partnership that allowed for continued success both for the organizations and for student learning; it was a means for professional development of practice and a means of providing better resources in community problem-solving. In the fall 2018 semester, a public relations campaigns class project facilitated a third semester of collaboration. The project passed from a campaigns course to a public relations management course. The students assessed the work of previous student groups against best practices in public relations, before completing their own refined strategic plan.

A continuing hand-off set up another group of students in the fall 2019 to execute and evaluate the updated campaign. The goals of the campaign shifted as both the clients and the students refined their understanding of challenges and needs through re-

reflection on each project. Combining this reflective experience with direct communication with the client permitted each student group to develop digital video and social media platforms to promote the program, as well as to execute on-site support of event-sponsored workshops.

Maintaining Partnerships Through Constant Communication

Reflecting past literature on campus-community partnerships that work to maintain and grow partnerships requires effective communication that cultivates mutual respect, coordinated approaches, and a shared vision for the project's outcome. The nonprofit outreach center's model facilitated open channels of dialog with the community partners, effective coordination, and building a shared vision.

The initial effort, however, did require systematic attention of the faculty member leading each class to keep the dialog flowing between themselves, students, and the partners, as well as among the students and the community partners. Each faculty member maintained communication and contact with the client throughout the semester. This came in the form of quarterly or end-of-semester email updates on team efforts on the organization's behalf. On occasion, organization contacts would maintain meeting-by-meeting contact to keep the professor in the conversation. The outreach center became an asset for helping faculty mitigate the time, effort, and energy that went into researching, identifying, and connecting with potential community partners ahead of a class. However, the time- and relationship-intensive aspect of sustaining the dialog and partnership throughout and following the course remains a challenge specific to the individual faculty member.

Current and Potential Challenges

Institutional Demand: In discussing how to make a university outreach center viable and sustainable, Skivington (1998) pointed out the need to demonstrate value of an outreach center to university administrators. Along with the needs for launching and sustaining a center, there was discussion about prioritizing projects and knowing that the need to always say "yes" would turn into having the ability to say "no."

The department dealt with some of these challenges in sustaining the early success of the center. In earning institutional buy-in, and after granting support to launch the center, the administration wanted

to be a client. This consistent demand made sustaining community reputation and institutional trust a challenge. It stretched resources, limiting the potential scope of community impact. There was also a minimal return on investment compared to other community partners because much of the institutional project work came at no or low costs.

Managing Early Success: Germane to Skivington's (1998) point about saying "no" to institutional pressure to provide support upon request is being discerning with seemingly immense opportunities that might undermine your program. As the center elevated the profile of the department, it also created offers that proved to create large challenges for sustaining quality and strategic focus. In the fall of 2015, the program's state announced that it was launching a partnership between its state's Film and Television Production Office and the university system. The goal was to generate a homegrown workforce to support the growing number of television and film programs being produced in the state. In August of 2020, *Business Facilities Magazine* produced a report ranking Georgia first among U.S. states in film production output (Business Facilities Staff, 2020), prompting Georgia Governor Brian Kemp to issue a statement about the ranking (Kemp, 2020).

Because of the department's successes in its service learning curriculum, the state invited and a partnership was launched in January 2016. In the five years since agreeing to partner, the communication department's program has developed a certificate program, a degree concentration, and a separate degree program, without the benefit of supplemental resources or credentialed faculty. Instead, the program relies on the state university system for faculty and curricular support, circumventing the principles of shared governance and intellectual autonomy. This example is one that undermines elements of the original vision of the program and the center. It has also left several current and former members of the faculty disaffected by the experience of working with the center and the department.

Violation in Reciprocity in Partnership: Nonprofit partnerships sometimes proved one-sided. While organizations expressed high interest in utilizing free student help to address communication-related needs, there was a lack of commitment to invest in either the center or the students after the semester ended. This remains a valid concern for many educators who adopt service learning in the classroom with nonprof-

it partners. Chupp and Joseph (2010) noted the potential for failures in reciprocity, especially in cases of short term, individual project fulfillments. Tryon et al. (2008) also discussed at length why this is a particularly challenging dynamic for partnerships, ones that build a viable model of mutual benefit in short-term service learning projects. This experience ultimately led faculty to prioritize partnerships demonstrating reciprocity in resources and learning opportunities for students.

Another example of failure in reciprocity involved nonprofits that accepted the help of the center and students—work with the students during the project creation and enactment phases—yet failed to recognize or credit the work done by the outreach center and students. This failure of attribution, or a generative-oriented breakdown in reciprocity (Dostilio et al., 2012), hindered the department's ability to raise the profile of the center and delayed attempts by the department to move the center toward economic sustainability.

Fiscal Sustainability: Sustainability remains the biggest hurdle, but faculty members are seeing progress. Whether for the center itself or summer income, which allows a student to stay in school, projects generated out of the center have begun to support its budget. A local interfaith center that works to support underserved and homeless residents now offers summer employment through a summer camp in degree-relevant work. The university's servant leadership program now hires the center to produce its annual highlight film and the Outstanding Servant Leader of the Year profile video. The ability to self-sustain, however, is contingent on the availability of paid project opportunities, and balancing other pressures from the institution and partners.

COVID-19: Finally, the past two years presented a unique set of challenges for educators committed to service-learning. Policies and procedures minimizing physical contact, as well as forced migration to online learning at the institution during the first two terms following the COVID-19 outbreak, created substantial challenges for all involved. Over the first six months of 2020, it was clear many client partners were hesitant to maintain active partnerships due to the risks associated with close contact. Once the community started to return to normal operations, several of the nonprofit organizations who commonly partnered with the outreach center had ceased operations due to withering donations and volunteer support.

For the faculty and students in courses that commonly leveraged service learning, adaptation proved essential in this process. The researcher made use of digital text and time management platforms like Slack or GroupMe to enable students to connect with each other, as well as with client partners to maintain virtual work. This aspect mirrored digital public relations work that created teachable moments with students in the classroom. For colleagues teaching video production, however, the reduced contact made providing instruction on video production and editing more time consuming. This was due to reduced section sizes and the need to spread instruction over larger sections of the day to accommodate student demands.

The psychological toll on faculty was substantial, and the potential impact on students outside of the classroom proved difficult. Many of them had to suspend studies or miss class time due to being quarantined, caregiving for sick family members, or grieving the loss of family and friends due to the pandemic. Many faculty members and students are still coping with trauma and fatigue in equal parts, even as restrictions are eased and in-person instruction is now back in place.

Discussion

The findings provide valuable perspective on the development of a nonprofit outreach center, its impact on an academic program, and the ability of its faculty to better negotiate the time- and resource-intensive demands that members face in cultivating and sustaining campus-community partnerships in a service learning pedagogy. The results demonstrate the successes and challenges that emerged in adopting this approach to raising the profile of the program, transforming its curriculum from a traditional in-seat lecture to service learning, and other forms of high-impact learning.

One sees a situation where the faculty members in the academic unit leaned on their strengths and made the most of limited resources and emergent opportunities. Using these strengths, the faculty developed a plan over the course of five years for how to establish the facility, its function, and to earn buy-in from the campus administration to launch the program. Administrative changes, college reassignment, and geographic positioning strengthened the visibility of and access to better facilities for the center, enabling early success.

The researcher notes a similarity to client rela-

tions models maintained in strategic communication subfields in assessing the center's operation. This approach to establishing community partnerships aligns with previous literature on student-run agency courses (Bush, et al., 2017; Ranta, et al., 2020), and the scholars' articulation of opportunities to refine students' acumen in client relations. In considering the relative impact on the time- and resource-intensive nature of relationship management addressed in past service learning literature in mass communication (Fall & Bourland-Davis, 2004), the author finds a mixed outcome in regards to the process. Research, identification, and establishment of client partnerships are efficient and dynamic through the center. There's a rigorous process involved with maintaining relationships with partners—establishing and maintaining lines of communication between the community partner and instructor, the partner and students, and the instructor and students.

Benefits to all parties are clear in this approach to teaching. The net impact on the community partners was positive and lasting, reflecting the best of scholarship. It also illustrates the value of service learning to community partners (Fletcher, et al., 2012). Students engaged with community partners enabled personal and professional growth, aligning with past mass communication research on the benefits of employing service learning (Bourland-Davis & Fall, 1997; Daugherty, 2003; McCollough, 2018; 2019; 2020b). Gains in resources and opportunities for the academic unit also added new perspective to past scholarship on the value of service learning to the institution (McCollough, 2018, 2019, 2020b). Finally, faculty establishing a service agenda and enhancing their course offerings for students reinforced past scholarship on the value of service learning to faculty members (Fall & Bourland-Davis, 2004).

Nonetheless, an abundance of challenges remains. Early success, prompting demands from the institution for free work—as well as the academic unit administrator's desire to consistently pursue emergent opportunities—threaten to undermine the mission of the center and the academic unit. A failure on the part of community partners to engage in effective reciprocity also makes it harder to justify the partnerships and to enable the program to be self-sustaining. Institutional pressure to monetize the serving learning model leads to administrative insistence to prioritize profitable partnerships over meaningful pairings with nonprofit partners who lack fiscal means. Such con-

straint threatens sustainability, which also looms as a warning to the long-term viability to the nonprofit outreach center and the integration of service-learning into the whole curriculum. It's a reflection from some of the grim impacts of neoliberalism on higher education, including an increased emphasis on profit and corporatizing the public sphere, undercutting traditional educational experiences (Giroux, 2009).

Conclusion

As is the case with any study, there are limitations to the scope of the findings due to the adopted method. While the use of documented personal reflections from the researcher lent valuable insights to the timeline and specific examples of the outreach center's model of practice at work, it is only one set of documented reflections, and not those of the entire faculty who utilized the center or maintained service learning partnerships. This limits the generalizability of the findings, and prompts a call for further exploration of colleagues' personal experiences in being a part of this model and their approach to service learning in class.

That stated, the case study presents some valuable findings for organizations looking to develop an outreach center, as well as for individual faculty members looking to engage in service learning or perhaps wanting to develop long-term sustainable service learning partnerships. In the development of the center, the value of research in understanding the town-gown dynamic around an institution was critical in identifying the composition of nonprofits and small businesses in the community that enabled the center to flourish because of a rich environment for partnerships. Further, a mixture of institutional changes and resource opportunities enabled the department to strategically position itself to grow and to facilitate the launch of the center, which further advanced its growth. The early success of faculty members in utilizing service learning and the sustained success of the center also enabled the faculty to broaden the application of service learning to a wider selection of course offerings. It enhanced student portfolios and learning experiences over the course of their program of study.

Once established in 2013, the outreach center leveraged a traditional client relations model to facilitate client-partnerships between nonprofit partners and the classes held each semester. This process included a formal initial meeting, an assessment of organizational needs, and a negotiation with course instructors about partnering with the organizations.

To ensure stability of client-partnerships over the course of each semester, as well as across multiple semesters, constant communication among the instructor, students, and client was essential to ensure needs were met and that both client partners and students received what they needed.

Even with the early success of the center, some clear challenges emerged. Institutional demand for services stretched resources thin when trying to emphasize the external partnerships essential to the center's success. Seeing so much early success has put additional strains on the program through the addition of academic programs, as well as increasing expectations of contributions from university and state administrators. Working with so many client partners also presented situations where client partners failed to truly reciprocate on the services provided by promoting the program or doing the work to help sustain partnerships beyond the work during the semester.

The center and academic unit's presence in a regional teaching institution also placed an immense amount of pressure on the center and academic unit to develop self-sustaining operations. It limited the capacity of the center to engage with nonprofit partners who cannot afford to financially support the program in its partnership. Finally, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic also inhibited the depth and richness of these partnerships, initially through the need to impose health and safety standards that limited student and client partner access. The insolvency of some nonprofit organizations due to financial hardships accelerated by the economic fallout of the pandemic also restrained success.

This preliminary exploration of the development of the program suggests the need to explore additional areas of scholarship relevant to the topic. Noted above, additional scholarship examining the different experiences of colleagues would build off of this exploratory study, and provide a more complete picture of how faculty leverage the nonprofit outreach center. Additionally, an examination of community partners' experiences in engaging the center would provide insight into the effectiveness of the outreach model's engagement and relationship maintenance practices.

Also of potential benefit would be a deeper critical examination of the recent engagement with for-profit community partners and the integration of external academic programs that are inconsistent with the department's focus to determine the net effect of both the quality of faculty and student experiences in

the program. For faculty, it is important to explore the equity of experience who contribute to the nonprofit outreach center and engage in service learning. How might faculty at different types of universities be assessed on integration of service learning, outside of this regional access institution? Are we accounting for additional demands and emotional labor placed on faculty who commit to student and client management as they adopt a service learning curriculum? These questions deserve further examination.

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