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Partnerships and collaborations in higher education

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Overview

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS are advocated as a means to address problems plaguing higher education. Partnerships involve organizational joint ventures that may go by any number of names (strategic alliances, joint ventures, collaborations, partnerships, to name a few). These initiatives can take several forms—between or among institutions, through departmental alliances across institutions, or with university programs that pair with businesses or community agencies. Faculty pairings across institutions typically are referred to as collaborations rather than partnerships, though from these initial faculty collaborations, organizational partnerships may emerge. Central to organizational or individual collaborations are a series of processes. Better understanding of the components of how collaborations develop can thus result in more effective joint ventures.

Why is it important to know more about partnerships and collaborations? State policymakers want to avoid redundant efforts and duplicate state spending in education (Van de Water and Rainwater, 2001) and often look to P-16 collaborations to streamline educational pathways for students (Leskes, 2006; Yff, 1996) as one method to create efficiencies. Institutions favor partnerships as a means to leverage resources and pool talent as they tackle challenging issues (Russell and Flynn, 2000). Individuals value partnerships because they allow for professional collaboration, in particular when they are members of academic units in which they are the only specialist in a disciplinary area (Creamer, 2004). Institutions of higher education often serve as brokers in partnerships (Amey, Eddy, and Ozaki, 2007). Maimon (2006) posits that the university should be viewed as a public square that creates the ideal place for

sharing and a common place where partnerships can develop. Thus, colleges provide a fertile ground for creating a range of collaborative efforts. Although multiple reasons exist for creating partnerships, these collaborations often fail (Eddy, 2007; Farrell and Seifert, 2007).

It is important to understand more about partnerships to discern the reasons for their frequent failures and to highlight the structures and processes that promote success and sustainability. Partnerships have an impact on an organizational level, requiring layers of administrative oversight, creation of policies for the new partnership, and a commitment of resources. Likewise, faculty work has repercussions as faculty members get involved in these collaborations and often serve as the initiator of the collaboration in the role of champion. The shifting nature of faculty work (Gappa, Austin, and Trice, 2007) calls for interdisciplinary teaching to support student learning (Holley, 2009) and requires faculty to collaborate in new and different ways. What remains unknown is how faculty are rewarded for their participation in partnerships and what effect this participation has on achieving the various goals outlined for the collaboration.

A key tenet of partnering is that a benefit comes from creating a collaboration based on the ideal that the individual partners cannot accomplish their goals on their own: the partnership creates the ultimate win-win situation. But partnerships are not always successful (Reed, Cooper, and Young, 2007), even when mandated by state policy (Farrell and Seifert, 2007). As institutions enter into partnerships and policymakers contemplate mandates to encourage joint ventures, it is important to know what best supports partnering, what contributes to challenges that emerge in collaborations, and how to obtain long-term success.

A variety of reasons exist that motivate individuals and institutions to create partnerships. Lefever-Davis, Johnson, and Pearman (2007) note the need to recognize that partners exist in distinctive milieus where roles and expectations differ. Past relationships, shared goals, and forms of communication all contribute to the formation of partnerships. These antecedent rationales for partnering affect how the partnership is formed and create expectations of the partners regarding their roles in the partnership. Ultimately, success and sustainability of the collaboration have their roots in the initial context of the formation of the partnerships.

Despite the pitfalls of partnering, the push is present for creating joint ventures. External demands on institutions of higher education and shifts in college structures and faculty expectations resulting from collaborative efforts also raise a number of questions: How are partnerships formed? What are best practices from institutions involved in successful and sustainable partnerships? How do different institutional cultures affect partnerships, in particular when these partnerships are global? What shifts in faculty rewards are required to recognize and support faculty collaboration with a partnership? What type of practices best support joint faculty work? Seven themes help define the various motivations for creating partnerships in practice: (1) educational reform, (2) economic development, (3) dual enrollment or student transfer, (4) student learning, (5) resource savings, (6) shared goals and visions, and (7) international joint ventures. Examples in each section provide the foundation for a more thorough understanding of what goes into the formation and development of partnerships. Even though these themes are presented as distinct rationales and goals for collaborations, partnerships by their nature are messy and complex; thus, multiple motivators may be operating in a partnership. Generally, however, a dominant rationale exists for partnering that contributes to the culture of the relationship. The following section explicates the seven types of partnership rationales and provides working concepts to aid the reader as they approach the rest of the volume.

Motivating Factors for Partnerships and Collaborations

Joint ventures are often referred to as partnerships, alliances, or collaborations, but these ventures vary in motivations for members to join, rationales for cooperating, and ability to sustain. As well, who is involved and the objectives of the pairing influence the definitions of the collaboration. For the purposes of this volume, partnerships refer to organizational pairings that may range from the informal to the more formal. These collaborations involve a college or university unit's working with another unit collaborator at a different institution or with businesses or community agencies. Individual faculty working together, on the other hand, are referred to as collaborators rather than partners.

Educational partnerships are formed for a variety of reasons: to effect educational reform, to provide regional economic development, to allow dual enrollment for K–12 students, to encourage transfer between community colleges and four-year universities, to improve student learning, to save on resources, to obtain a shared goal or vision, to create international partnerships. Each partnership employs definitions of partnership or collaboration that suit its distinct context and group goals that may result in a lack of shared meaning when use of similar terms in fact carries different meanings for those involved. Clifford and Millar (2008) determined in their review of the K–16 partnership literature that current research contains gaps in how partnerships are formed and maintained and that partnership is not defined. To help address this shortcoming, the following section reviews the various motivations guiding the development of partnerships based on the focal point in the partnering goals. Nuances in the definition of partnership or collaboration are apparent in how the overarching objectives of the partnership frame and define the language used to describe the group process.

Educational Reform

Reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and the Spellings Report (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) have pointed to the need to change educational systems and the need for systemic change in educational systems (Hirota, 2005; Maeroff, Callan, and Usdan, 2001). Reform requires new ways of thinking about roles and methods for change (Fullan, 2002). For example, reform efforts seek to redress educational systems that do not support historically underrepresented minorities (Baxter, 2008) and to hold educational systems accountable for student learning (see, for example, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [P.L. 107–10] and the Spellings Report [U.S. Department of Education, 2006]). At the core of educational reform are the beliefs that current systems are ineffective in obtaining desired levels of student outcomes and partnerships provide a means to achieve these goals.

Furthermore, the increase in for-profit educational providers changes the landscape of higher education, as these institutions provide an alternative for students and a means to address educational reform. The advent of for-profits

increases competition in higher education. Existing institutions of higher education often partner together to provide a larger array of services to compete with the more service-oriented and focused missions of the for-profits (Shapiro, 2002).

One reform effort taking root and driving partnerships is the notion of a seamless educational system. The intention of the creation of a P–16 pipeline is based on the belief that the pipeline requires commonality of goals to educate students across the educational continuum (Rochford, O’Neill, Gelb, and Ross, 2005, 2007). Several states have initiated P–16 initiatives that vary from mandated programs to voluntary task forces (Yff, 1996), but legislators face numerous issues each year and can address only a select few (Fowler, 2009). Thus, a lack of a continuous focus on P–16 initiatives often results in such partnerships faltering. In 2009, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities identified college readiness as one of the top ten policy issues facing states and concluded that a key strategy in addressing this issue was collaborations developed through P–16 initiatives.

Economic Development

Partnerships are seen as means of enhancing economic development. Federal funding agencies such as the National Science Foundation look to support partnerships that allow for technology transfer between colleges and business to help support economic development. Another form of partnerships with a goal of economic development centers on workforce development plans. Kearney and others (2007) studied a multiyear university-government partnership concerning workforce development and found that the collaboration helped align training to employers’ needs more closely. The findings underscore the need to understand the context and industry mission of workforce education programs.

Key to partnerships with a goal of economic development is identifying and fostering a mutual benefit (Kruss, 2006) that moves beyond traditional forms of consultancy toward a more strategic approach of planning and operations with an eye toward long-term sustainability. Partnerships built on trust, communication, and common purposes are more successful, whereas inequality among the partners and fewer resources undermine joint ventures (Connolly, Jones, and Jones, 2007).

An international example is Queensland University of Technology's partnering with the city of Brisbane and the state of Queensland to stimulate what they call "creative industry" that melded together brick-and-mortar initiatives and programming (Silka, 2008). Economic development initiatives often entail regional efforts to address issues or challenges facing multiple organizations (Fluharty, 2007). As the global economy reels from economic recession, partnerships are increasingly looked upon as a viable lever for economic recovery and development (Dominguez, 2006).

Dual Enrollment or Student Transfer

Two key transition points involving different educational partnerships occur at the nexus of high school and college (dual enrollment) and between community colleges and four-year universities (transfer). Dual enrollment and transfer require partnering among K–12 schools, community colleges, and universities that is often legislatively mandated. Dual enrollment occurs when high-ability high school students enroll concurrently in an institution of higher education, typically a community college, to help meet their educational needs for more advanced coursework (Kreuger, 2006; Morrison, 2008). Currently, forty-seven states have dual enrollment programs in place (Farrell and Seifert, 2007). States vary in oversight of these programs, from state statutes to board policies to institutional policies. States differ as well on who is responsible for payment of dual-enrollment coursework and how high school and college credits are awarded (Hale, 2001).

College transfer occurs when students move between a community college and four-year college or between two four-year institutions. Kisker (2005) determined key elements in community college transfer included previous relationships between institutions, the support of the college presidents, adequate and sustained funding, and the importance of the university in maintaining a presence on the community college campus. Typically, articulation agreements between community colleges and universities outline the requirements of the transfer process, potentially eliminating common barriers and challenges faced in partnerships development (see, for example Anderson and Sundre, 2005). Ease of movement between educational institutions helps in retaining students, eliminates redundancy in course taking, and may result in cost savings for students and their families.

Student Learning

Institutions are often motivated to partner because they share interest in students' success. One focus of student learning initiatives involves preparing students for college. These collaborations often target underserved groups through programs such as TRIO, Upward Bound, and locally created access programs (Hebel, 2007; Lindstrom and others, 2009). These programs involve colleges' and universities' partnering with public schools and community groups to open paths to college for students not typically attending. Another focus of partnership centered on student learning involves service learning. Despite challenges in building and sustaining service-learning collaborations, Sandy and Holland (2006) discovered a high sense of understanding and commitment to student learning among partners, with the common goal of student learning helping to bolster the partnerships. Another focus on student learning occurs in vocational training programs in community colleges that work to support apprenticeships for students in area businesses (Chin, Bell, Munby, and Hutchinson, 2004; Cohen and Brawer, 2008) and in technology preparation programs that provide high school students with work experiences (Bragg, 2000).

As noted earlier, a common area of partnership activity occurs among educational institutions along the P-16 continuum (Kisker and Hauser, 2007; Tafel and Eberhart, 1999). P-16 initiatives not only address educational reform but also offer opportunities to partner to heighten student learning. Though the overarching goal of all educational institutions is to educate students, differences in culture, teaching approaches, policy oversight, and philosophies emerge (Krueger, 2006; Zimpher, 2002). For example, Bartholomew and Sandholtz (2009) reviewed a partnership between a school and a university, noting that different views on the teacher's role in school reform created fissures in the partnership. Different perspectives ultimately shifted the goals and outcomes of the collaboration.

Resource Savings

The decline in public funding for higher education pushes faculty and institutions to seek supplementary revenue sources and to look at partnerships as a money-saving enterprise (Daniel, 2002). For example, educational institutions

involved in P-16 endeavors can help states save resources but require a reduction in the competitive nature of higher education (Baker, 2002). Resource savings are often a motivator for institutions in rural areas that strive to create better opportunities for students, businesses, and the community (Warren and Peel, 2005). Although one source of revenue comes from partnering with business, an issue often raised in business and educational partnerships is the loss of academic freedom for faculty members and the push of a business agenda (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). Concerns also occur regarding the impact on the academic culture, but Mendoza and Berger (2008) found that the faculty in the case investigated felt that the academic culture of their department was unaffected by their partnership with industry collaborators. Kisker and Carducci (2003) provided a different perspective on education-business partnerships, underscoring the symbiotic relationships between regional employers and community college programs. In this case, businesses receive a well-trained workforce, colleges create cutting-edge curricula to support student learning, and students gain valued experience in the workforce.

Federal grant funding agencies encourage partnerships between public schools and colleges as a means to pool resources and address problems of poor student performance (Clifford and Millar, 2008). A common perception is that alliances result in economies of scale and ultimately the expenditure of fewer resources. One form of resource savings occurs when partners share facilities (McCord, 2002). Watson (2007) studied a partnership among a high school, community college, and four-year university in which the construction of a new high school afforded the opportunity to create space to include programs on site provided by the two-year college and the four-year university. Each educational representative held different motivations and desires for sharing space, but all were accommodated in the high school space.

Shared Goals and Visions

Another motivation for partnering is based on partners' having common desires for particular outcomes. Having a shared goal or vision for a partnership may be based on a number of factors, including those motivations outlined above. An example of shared goals occurring on a policy level involved the Association of Research Libraries and the Association of American

Universities. ARL Executive Director Duane Webster was a champion of the partnership that benefited both associations but more so of those that were part of a larger set of partnerships and collaborations (Vaughn, 2009). Another example of an informal partnership between associations involves the sharing of student data in New Hampshire for policymakers regarding postsecondary aspirations of students across the state (Lemaire, Knapp, and Lowe, 2008). Here the goal of pooling information using a collaborative helped address the lack of consistent data on higher education in the state, ultimately providing a benefit for all institutions and students.

As partnerships become more frequent, state offices create policies to outline how agreements should be operationalized and to help support new partners in defining roles and responsibilities (Illinois State Department of Human Resources, 2001). Likewise, colleges partner with community agencies to obtain shared goals and desirable outcomes such as improved health and safety, community betterment, or common desires to enhance learning opportunities. The closer the alignment of the shared vision, the more likely the partnership will become sustainable and reach its goals (Kruss, 2006).

International Joint Ventures

Colleges and universities increasingly look across national borders to establish international partnerships. Efficiencies in communications and travel and the opening of previously closed countries like China have created possibilities for cross-border projects. The need for creating new educational markets to supplement college resources and provide educational opportunities to support students in acquiring global competencies and reliance on the knowledge industry (McMurtrie and Wheeler, 2008) all provide motivation for working with foreign countries. Traditionally, study abroad or individual faculty collaborations with scholars around the world formed the backbone of international efforts (Eggins, 2003). U.S. faculty, however, have lagged in their involvement in international research or teaching relative to faculty in other countries (Finkelstein, Walker, and Chen, 2009; O'Hara, 2009).

International partnerships are more complex because of the additional considerations resulting from use of different languages and working in different cultures (Scarino, Crichton, and Woods, 2007). The policies of each country's

government and the colleges and universities involved “play a crucial role in determining the nature of foreign study opportunities and in shaping the realities of the experience” (Altbach, 1998, p. 151). How these national policies translate to operations for faculty and colleges contributes to a successful partnership. For instance, the Bologna process was developed across countries in Europe but has real implications for those managing course credit transfers for students and for faculty coordination regarding curriculum. According to de Wit (2002), “Strategic partnerships in research, teaching, and transfer of knowledge, between universities and of universities with business and beyond national borders, will be the future for higher education in order to manage the challenges that globalization will place on it” (p. 205). Knowing more about the partnership process will aid faculty, leaders, and policymakers in creating sustainable joint ventures.

Looking Forward

A broad definition of partnership is used in this volume to accommodate the range of partnering options, motivations, and outcomes. Partnerships are considered a collaborative between two or more institutions of higher education, businesses, or social agencies, with the goal of obtaining a shared objective. As noted, the ultimate objective may range from resource saving to economic development to increased student learning outcomes. Regardless of the desired end product, it is critical for those entering into a partnership to have a clearly defined notion of the partnership. For the purposes of this monograph, a partnership involves two or more organizations working together to obtain an agreed-upon objective, whereas collaboration describes instances of individual faculty working together.

This volume comprises three chapters. The next chapter reviews organizational partnerships. The rationale for organizations and individuals to participate in institutional collaborations sets the foundation for the development of the partnership, builds on preconceived ideas regarding roles in the group and the level of resources each contributes to the project, and begins to define the type and level of connections each participant brings to the group. The preliminary phases of a partnership rely on the various levels of social capital

that individual actors bring to the endeavor as well as the type of organizational capital committed to the project. Amey, Eddy, Campbell, and Watson (2008) found that a new form of capital develops in collaborations, namely *partnership capital*. Partnership capital evolves over time as group members develop trust of one another; build shared meaning and understanding about ideas, goals, and outcomes associated with the partnership; and solidify the network of those involved in such a manner that the partnership can outlive those immediately involved.

The second chapter addresses individual faculty collaborations and roles. Two levels of practice are evident in the individual sphere. First is the role of the individual champion in an organizational collaboration. As noted in the previous chapter, individuals bring different levels of social capital to the exchange, and often a person takes on the role of champion of the project. The chapter discusses the role of the champion, paying attention to issues of sustainability and succession of leaders. According to Zakocs, Tiwari, Vehige, and DeJong (2008), the role of the champion is critical to success of the partnership. These authors investigated a series of five community-university partnerships and determined three key factors supported success: (1) designation of a college staff member to act as a community facilitator; (2) support from higher-level college administrators; and (3) community initiation of the partnership. In this research, the presence of a dedicated individual supported the partnership. The second level of practice reviews collaborations based on various forms of group work in which faculty members participate. Here, the faculty collaboration may be focused on research, teaching, or practice.

Faculty members often serve as the initial instigators for partnerships that grow among organizations (Amey, 2010; Cooper and Mitsunaga, 2010). The focus on the roles of faculty, however, does not include faculty collaborations in a single institution such as those involved in interdisciplinary work (Holley, 2009; Lattuca, 2001) or faculty work on joint research projects for publication (Austin and Baldwin, 1991). This chapter reviews the roles the faculty play in these early stages of collaborative ventures. It also includes an overview of the role of the champion in the collaboration. In this case, the champion may or may not be the initial faculty member involved in the partnership.

The final chapter posits the role of collaborative work in future endeavors where institutions of higher education are involved. In contemplating the future and potential partnerships, it is important for leaders to consider expectations of their institutional roles, barriers to successful partnering outcomes, and best practices to support successful collaboration. This chapter reviews the role of goals on partnership outcomes, the demands of international partnerships, and tips on planning for partnerships.

The recent explosion of international partnering opportunities is reviewed from the vantage point of the U.S. partner (Fischer, 2009). Internationally, more countries are increasing their investment in higher education (Labi, 2009a, 2009b), just at the time when U.S. institutions of higher education are receiving less support through state appropriations. Coupled with increased international investment in postsecondary universities is the desire to create *world-class* institutions (Hazelkorn, 2009). To that end, U.S. institutions are under pressure to keep up with a larger array of competitors for prestige and to stave off the slip in international rankings of top universities (Huckabee, 2008).

Foreign countries seek to partner with U.S. colleges but are selective regarding these partnerships. For instance, China is becoming more discriminating regarding its institutional partners, demanding more commitment from U.S. partners and focusing on longer-term partnerships (Willis, 2006). Likewise, U.S. colleges are challenged in their partnering with overseas institutions (Mooney, 2008) as a result of differences in expectations, culture, and measures of quality.

The goal of this volume is to provide faculty and college leaders with an overview regarding formation of partnerships and to highlight elements of consideration for those contemplating a collaborative venture. Faculty members will be able to take into account how their involvement in a partnership is valued in the tenure and promotion cycle and to determine how to anticipate potential problems arising from collaborative efforts. A thorough review of interdisciplinary work (Holley, 2009) addresses faculty roles and institutional actions regarding this particular form of internal institutional collaboration but is not included in this volume. Rather, the faculty roles included cover involvement in partnerships across institutions that go beyond mere collaboration on a research project, though these types of pairings may ultimately

provide the foundation for larger institutional collaborations. College leaders will learn what factors are central to establishing sustainable partnerships, what barriers exist to partnership formation and success, and how to think of partnerships more strategically. Leaders will also discover ways to support the faculty work that is often the backbone of joint ventures.

The objectives of this volume include an outline of the features of partnerships to enhance understanding of the component parts of these ventures. The information presented provides individuals and institutions tools to analyze joint ventures before committing to a partnership and outlines tactics used in successful collaborations as well as challenges to their sustainability. Finally, it provides suggestions that focus on a number of different levels of involvement to help leverage successful partnering.

The audience for this volume includes individuals active in partnerships or interested in starting a joint collaboration. College, business, and community leaders will find this volume useful as they pursue joint ventures. In particular, it is important to ask a set of questions up front as partnerships are created. The impetus for partnerships often begins with a champion of the project; thus, knowing more about this critical role can help leverage the processes involved in collaborating. Institutional leaders are barraged with opportunities to partner with others. The information presented here helps leaders understand better which partnerships are more advantageous, what stages are most critical for long-term success, and how best to use institutional resources in the partnerships. Finally, policymakers and funding agencies increasingly emphasize partnerships as a means to advance state, national, and disciplinary goals (Chamberlin and Plucker, 2008; Frierson-Campbell, 2003). Tracking data along the educational pipeline requires collaboration among institutions (Olson, 2006). Thus, knowing more about what contributes to a successful partnership can help shape how mandates are crafted and grant language formed to best support successful partnerships.

Current trends in higher education point to an increased demand for partnerships, often with the expressed desire to save resources. Perceived duplication of services in an institution and among colleges and universities in a state push policymakers to create mandates requiring cooperation. A common form of these mandates is P-16 initiatives to create a seamless educational path

among educational sectors, with transition points between public schools and colleges and between two-year colleges and four-year colleges. Leskes (2006) researched an initiative focused on college access and noted that long-term success required becoming more intentional in aligning actions with desired outcomes. Work on seamless educational systems builds on the ideas of ways to best support student learning and potential, thus underscoring the need for alignment. Further, a report by the task force on urban and metropolitan schools for the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (2004) determined that personnel need to be able to move easily back and forth across the boundary of P–12 and higher education and act as boundary spanners. These individuals can act as champions in the collaborative process and highlight how alliances benefit from these porous configurations.

As state coffers become depleted, policymakers must choose how to spend scarce resources and look at tactics to save them. Increasingly, institutional mergers are also advocated as a means to save state resources (Blumenstyk, 2009; Harmon and Harmon, 2008). Likewise, grant-funding agencies are also interested in economies of scale, desiring to have the most impact for their funds. Collaborations are increasingly a part of calls for proposals.

More and more case study research in the field is beginning to be reported about partnerships (see, for example, Amey, 2007; Holland, 2010). This work helps to fill in the gaps of our knowledge about partnerships and provides others with templates and models based on successful ventures. Examples of partnerships that did not work are equally important, as they identify potential barriers and pitfalls to avoid.

Implications for Higher Education

Institutions of higher education are being challenged to shift out of historical patterns of operation and to explore partnerships as efficient means of avoiding duplicate services, providing creative solutions for the problems facing colleges, and becoming more accountable. Past practice shows, however, that mandating collaboration is no guarantee of success (Farrell and Seifert, 2007). Partnerships affect college operations at different levels and in different ways throughout the institution. Policymakers can structure mandates for collaboration more

effectively when they understand more fully what best supports the formation of partnerships and their development and what helps maintain longer-term sustainability. Institutional leaders must weigh options as they consider what partnerships are most beneficial for their colleges, the best way to expend scarce college resources, and how to support faculty members' engaging in partnerships. Likewise, faculty members act in leadership roles when they serve as early champions of partnerships.

Given the fact that partnerships are initiated by different individuals throughout the college, leadership's responses likewise occur throughout the institution—starting with the department chair and moving up the organizational hierarchy to the president. Leadership decisions are different and represent various levels of college commitment, depending on the stage where these decisions are made. Individual faculty and staff can leverage their interactions on the front line more effectively when they understand better the systematic impact of the interactions involved in partnerships. Individuals often serve as the initial champions for partnerships, working at the grass-roots level with their personal connections and involvement in particular areas of interest. Thus, faculty members need to determine how their involvement in partnerships is recognized in the current reward structure, in particular if they serve as the initial champion for the partnership because that role typically requires more time and energy than just participation in an established partnership. A heightened awareness of their own power and capital allows champions the ability to leverage change to best support the development of a partnership. Knowing more about partnership operations, in particular the effective levers for change, can help college leaders and champions prepare more effectively for the future.