

Community-Based Research in Practice: Faculty Reflections on a Collaborative Approach to Teaching CBR With a Variety of Community Partners

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Abstract

This essay highlights a collaborative approach to teaching a university course on community-based research while working with a variety of community partners. As part of a broader research project, the course involved faculty from a range of disciplines as well as community sponsors from public and private sectors. Working with a complex array of stakeholders proved challenging at times, yet yielded rewards for the students and the professors teaching the course.

Keywords: community-based research, team teaching, collaboration



Community-based research (CBR) is a collaboration between researchers and community members to address local community needs. Professors interested in community outreach and engagement have increasingly utilized CBR as a teaching strategy (Fisher et al., 2004). Incorporating students into CBR projects provides opportunities for learners to engage with the local community and to gain valuable experience applying knowledge to real-world problems (Strand, 2000).

Despite the proliferation of CBR projects, many academics work on them with colleagues and students from within their own discipline. This choice is understandable given the constraints of university structure. However, finding innovative solutions to community needs often requires knowledge from multiple disciplines as well as from community partners and stakeholders. Professors have shown the strengths and drawbacks of using CBR as a teaching tool, but far less information is available on how partnering with other faculty can add to the value of CBR while posing unique challenges to professors and students. In addition, many CBR projects work with one outside community partner at a time. As the

number and type of organizations involved in a CBR project increase, the project has both the potential to provide greater benefits to all members and the chance for conflicts of overlapping interests.

In this essay, we draw upon our experiences teaching a class on a community needs assessment. The class was part of a broader research project that involved faculty from a range of disciplines as well as community stakeholders from the public and private sectors. The experience allowed us to reflect on the challenges and rewards of using a team-teaching approach and of working with a variety of community partners. Though working with a complex array of stakeholders proved difficult at times, many benefits resulted from teaching the class.

Community-Based Research

Before examining the importance of collaboration, it is critical to review the value of CBR as a pedagogical strategy. CBR has been used in a variety of courses. For example, students in a social work course partnered with their professors to evaluate the implementation of a community benefits district within Baltimore city. This evaluation was a direct response to community members who

were concerned about the district (Hyde & Meyer, 2004). In another CBR course, medical sociology students worked with a grassroots community organization to design a project educating Omaha residents about lead poisoning prevention (Rajaram, 2007).

By using CBR in their courses, professors can guide students through a process of applying academic knowledge to real problems (Bach & Weinzimmer, 2011; Dale, 2005; Strand, 2000). Students can benefit greatly from classrooms that utilize CBR (Ingman, 2016). Research indicates that students who took a CBR course became aware of their community partners' missions, built confidence in their own research skills (Bach & Weinzimmer, 2011), and gained a sense of accountability and purpose in the process of carrying out the project (Strand, 2000). Students saw firsthand "that social research is seldom as linear, systematic, and subject to the researcher's control as textbook discussions would have us to believe" (Strand, 2000, p. 89).

Though these benefits can occur in many research courses, forming a partnership with community stakeholders makes CBR both unique and challenging (Apostolidis, 2013). University and community members should be engaged in every step of the process, and both parties should gain a clear benefit from the relationship (Marullo et al., 2009; Rajaram, 2007). Maintaining this symbiosis and keeping lines of communication open can be further complicated when the student body demographics differ drastically from those of the community organizations (Bach & Weinzimmer, 2011) and when the limitations of the academic calendar prevent students and faculty from getting to know the community before the project starts (Lewis, 2004).

Though bringing CBR into the classroom comes with many rewards, scholars note the challenge in simultaneously meeting community needs and university requirements. For professors, course planning and implementation are more demanding than in a traditional course. These demands also impact students, who must manage their schedules around the project (Rajaram, 2007). Even with a dedicated group of students and professors, academic calendars pose restraints on the type of research conducted and the timeline of project completion (Downey, 2018). Additionally, CBR projects are not always supported financially and have historically been undervalued in

the tenure process (Dale, 2005; Merenstein, 2015).

Overall, scholars argue that teaching with CBR works best when there is a mutual partnership between the university and the community, and when the university values and supports the projects (Marullo et al., 2009; Mott, 2005). Although adequate scholarship addresses bringing CBR into the classroom, there are fewer examples of how to enhance CBR through collaboration. Since some social problems are "too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline" (Klein & Newell, 1997, p. 393), CBR courses can be improved by incorporating professors from different disciplines who can encourage students to see problems from multiple angles. Working together, the students and faculty have greater potential to improve nearby communities (Jones, 2010; Pestello et al., 1996).

Given the academic potential, team teaching must move beyond existing barriers. For example, programs that seek community change are often spread out among various departments at large universities even when they tackle similar issues and students only earn degrees by completing courses within their chosen majors (Mott, 2005). Universities that support creating new courses, cross-listing classes among various disciplines, and splitting course load credits among professors can often mitigate these problems (Hyde & Meyer, 2004; Klein & Newell, 1997); however, many universities do not support these endeavors. When the lack of university incentives for team teaching is combined with the above-mentioned restrictions for teaching CBR courses, it can be difficult to get faculty members on board.

Collaboration can also refer to working across organizational types. Both the local knowledge of the community and the specialized knowledge of students and faculty should be valued throughout the process (Beckman et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2004; Rajaram, 2007). In addition to these stakeholders, it is also important to utilize the wisdom of additional public and private partners who frequently work in the community. Academics are not often encouraged to work with these practitioners, and CBR can serve as a valuable way to tap into their expertise (Mott, 2005).

Though outside collaborations can be valuable, problems such as miscommunications can arise. In addition, the university con-

stituents, the community, and the stakeholders may disagree on how to collect data (Silka et al., 2013). Issues and problems have been noted when working directly with a single partner (Rosing & Hofman, 2010), and such difficulties can be amplified when collaborating with multiple outside partners, especially if those partners have very different goals. Therefore, it is important to consider how multiple outside partnerships can influence teaching and learning in a CBR course.

In our recent experiences with a university–community partnership, we worked on a team that included faculty members from different departments as well as members of several outside groups. Collaborating with all of these groups was instrumental in teaching a CBR course that was connected to a larger research project. Team teaching and outside partnerships greatly enhanced the course; however, these aspects also created a unique set of challenges. Below, we describe the project before elaborating on the course experiences from both faculty teaching and student learning perspectives. Ultimately, we intend to show the rewards and challenges of teaching a CBR course in conjunction with projects that utilize multiple organizations in the planning and execution of community-based research.

The Research Project

Background

This CBR course was rooted in a larger community project with multiple stakeholders. Before describing the course, we give some background on the research and the stakeholders. In doing so, we name our university but give pseudonyms to other partners in order to protect the identities of the people and organizations involved.

This research project took place in Gardenville, a small city located within an hour of our campus. As in many communities in the United States, the history of racial segregation is reflected in the town's demographics. Just over half of the city's population identifies as Black or African American, but the majority of those residents are concentrated in one section of the city, Town Center. About one quarter of Gardenville residents identify as Hispanic or Latino; however, they are spread out more evenly among different portions of the city. At the time of the project launch, Town

Center residents had significantly lower median incomes and median home values than residents in other parts of Gardenville (United States Census Bureau, 2017).

Given these demographics, the Gardenville Housing Authority (GHA) recognized the need for urban redevelopment. The GHA applied for and received a federal grant to fund a community needs assessment. The goal was to collect data that would guide community planning and that could be used to apply for additional aid related to documented community needs. GHA initially hired Urban Planners Plus (UPP), a planning and development company, to oversee the needs assessment. The Federal Government Organization (FGO) that issued the grant advised the GHA/UPP leaders to partner with a university in order to ensure integrity of the data collection process. Given this recommendation, GHA/UPP invited Monmouth University (MU) to participate in the project. The university assembled a team to assist with survey development and to oversee the data collection process. Professors from social work, sociology, and criminal justice joined the MU team based on their knowledge of issues related to the community and their proficiency with research methods. Finally, leaders of various community groups were invited to participate in the process by joining focus groups, offering ideas, and recruiting survey participants. Table 1 summarizes the key project stakeholders.

Representatives from each of the four local stakeholders (GHA, UPP, MU, and the community partners) established a core research team who could work together to plan and conduct the needs assessment and to set deadlines for the project execution. The project began with focus group meetings conducted by UPP. Based on the issues raised in these conversations, the core research team worked together to develop a questionnaire that community residents would respond to through interviews. The GHA advertised this survey to the community and scheduled times and locations where the interviews would take place. MU took charge of securing Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and conducting the interviews. UPP then analyzed the results and shared them with the community. GHA and UPP requested that the required number of questionnaires be completed by late spring 2017. Because the survey would be administered in a face-to-face setting, there was a

Table 1. List of Stakeholders in Urban Redevelopment Planning

Stakeholder	Role
1. Gardenville Housing Authority (GHA)	Local government agency, original applicant for federal needs assessment/redevelopment grant
2. Urban Planners Plus (UPP)	Private urban planning company, hired by GHA to conduct a needs assessment and to create a redevelopment plan based on assessment data
3. Monmouth University (MU) • School dean • Assistant dean • Social work, sociology, and criminal justice professors	To ensure integrity of the data collection process, FGO recommended that GHA and UPP partner with a university. The university assisted in developing a needs assessment survey and oversaw the survey data collection process
4. Community partners • Town Center Community Health Organization • Youth After School Club of Town Center • Gardenville Middle School • Old President Elementary School • A Plus Charter School • Town Center Faith Association • Gardenville Senior Citizen Club • Seeds Urban Farm • Garden Village Housing Project residents • Peer Mentorship United Program • Stateside Adult Health Center • Gardenville Police Department	Community partners participated in UPP brainstorming sessions. The conversations from those sessions were instrumental to developing the questionnaire. Partners also provided space to conduct the survey and assisted with recruitment of survey participants
5. Federal Government Organization (FGO)	National government agency, issued and oversaw administration of grant

need for trained interviewers to conduct the surveys and to record the results. This need was the impetus to create a CBR course for students majoring in related fields.

Course Development

During the early stages of planning, the university representatives initiated discussions to create a multidisciplinary elective course that would be open to both undergraduate and graduate students. The purpose of the course was to involve students firsthand in the data collection while teaching them about the research process. Each of us from our respective disciplines of social work, criminal justice, and sociology came together to create the course. It

was pertinent to meet and discuss course curriculum, assignments, and grading that would be carried out parallel to the needs assessment in the community. The curriculum was divided into three sections, with each professor teaching a section that best suited their strengths. The course used a hybrid model, as it was reflective of in-classroom learning followed by application in the field. Assessment of the students' work was performed both independently and in consultation between the three professors. In addition to administering the survey in the community and entering the data, students were asked to conduct their own research projects using the data they collected. Additionally, students wrote three reflections on their course experiences.

The first section of the course, taught by the social work professor, consisted of a community mapping project, reflecting the foundation of conducting a needs assessment. In this portion of the course, students learned the history of Gardenville, read related research, and visited the community. At the end of the first unit, students were required to create an asset map, write a literature review on a topic that interested them, and reflect on their initial experiences. The criminal justice professor took the teaching lead in the second section of the course, engaging students in the methodology of carrying out a needs assessment. Students were certified to conduct research with human participants, attended a workshop on survey administration, and provided feedback on the official questionnaire. In this section of the course, students proposed research questions that they could answer based on the questionnaire and wrote a detailed methods section describing how they would use the data to answer their question. They also administered the questionnaire in the field and composed a

written reflection on these experiences. The final section of the course, taught by the sociologist, focused on data entry, analysis, and discussion around the limitations of the data. Students entered completed questionnaires into a database and followed through with answering their own research questions using the data they had entered. At the end of the course, students submitted a full research paper and a final course reflection. The three sections are summarized in Table 2.

Reflection and Evaluation

Collaborating With Community Partners for a CBR Course

Collaborating with other professors and with outside organizations was beneficial for this course; however, it also posed some unique challenges (see Table 3). Though our teaching was strongly supported by the university, the constraints of the academic schedule as well as the needs of the outside organizations greatly affected the planning

Table 2. Course Objectives and Assignments for Community-based Research Class

Professor	Course Objectives	Assignments
Professor 1 (social work)	Conduct a historical analysis of the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a broad literature review on a specific social problem • Create a community asset map • Submit a preliminary report examining research on the social problem in this community and relating the literature and community asset map
Professor 2 (criminal justice)	Deepen understanding of survey methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete training program on human subjects research • Formally critique the survey instrument
Professor 3 (sociology)	Data analysis and interpretation Presenting the findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submit weekly homework assignments analyzing small portions of survey data • Write a full research paper analyzing a specific social problem in the community • Deliver a formal research presentation to the class
All professors	Develop an understanding of the processes of community-based research involving multiple stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete three reflection papers, one for each stage of the course

Table 3. Rewards and Challenges

	Rewards	Challenges
University support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paid course overload • Shared course designation • Encouragement from administration and deans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constraints on completing project within typical semester • Other professor commitments limited availability of course offering
Partnerships with outside organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professors established working relationships that were vital in course delivery and fieldwork • Partnering with stakeholders was useful in course delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with stakeholders in the community meant little control over timelines and demanded flexibility • Course schedule shifted ahead from summer to spring, which impacted student registration • Course delivery was constantly challenged as we were implementing the survey while maintaining course rigor and expectations
Team-teaching environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professors had a shared commitment and supported each other throughout the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foundational information around topic was based on different professors' respective fields
CBR in the field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time invested with stakeholders prior to survey intervention established our presence in the project. • Our presence during data collection with students allowed us to teach them the process firsthand • Working with students in the field during survey implementation aided in course delivery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time and effort beyond that typical for course delivery was expended in this project and in developing and carrying out the course
Student learning and experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students had the valuable opportunity to learn firsthand how a needs assessment should be performed • Students expressed pride in their involvement in the project • Direct engagement allowed students to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the data collection process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior research experiences varied greatly • Students spent time driving to multiple locations • Project miscommunications and delay led to student frustrations • The quality of data collected affected student research papers

and implementation of the course. Based on the original project timeline, faculty members suggested running a summer course to parallel the research project. When the community partners accelerated the data collection schedule, the course was moved to the spring semester. This schedule change ensured that students would have hands-on experiences with conducting the needs assessment but also hastened the planning

process. Previous research recommended that the faculty get to know the community partners before engaging students; our time to do this was limited. Due to the academic calendar, we had to balance our desire for course development with the outside partner's schedule for data collection.

This change also meant the faculty had to balance their personal commitment to

the project with their existing obligations. Fortunately, the university was committed to the project and was able to support the course in a number of key ways. First, the administration approved team-teaching for the course, ensuring that the workload would be split among three professors. Second, each of the three professors was compensated with a one-credit overload. Next, the university agreed to run the course in a hybrid format so that students could earn credit hours for their work in the field, which also freed faculty to spend fewer hours in the classroom and more hours in the community. Finally, the university agreed to cross-list the course among four different disciplines (sociology, social work, criminal justice, and political science) to attract students from different majors. Without this vital support, the course might have stalled in the planning phase. These measures emphasize how critical university support is for facilitating courses that rely on collaborations across disciplines.

Though the course was strongly supported, the scheduling had an impact on student enrollment. By the time the course was announced, most students had their spring schedules finalized and were not willing or able to add a new course. Additionally, the course had to be planned around the three faculty members' existing schedules. The only available time was during the day, which limited the possibility of enrollment for many graduate and part-time students. Due to these constraints, only five graduate students and one undergraduate enrolled in the course. Though the students hailed from three different majors (criminal justice, public policy, and social work), we initially anticipated a bigger group with more undergraduates. The students' mutual interest in the project was a helpful common ground, especially because they did not share the same theoretical or methodological training.

The accelerated planning process may have held one unexpected reward: The faculty members quickly reached consensus about how to organize the course and evaluate student performance. Previous research shows that team teaching can lead to conflicts about which topics and theories to spend time on; however, the limited time frame and our shared commitment to working with the core research team left little time for disagreement.

The first part of the course, the community mapping project, presented the greatest

challenge to the team-teaching concept because the social work professor was responsible for setting the context of the project. She was very conscious that we would have students from multiple disciplines and faculty members who had different ways of viewing the issues connected to the Town Center. Thus, she reached out to the other faculty members for suggestions on which literature to cover. She was able to collect readings on the history of the Town Center as well as peer-reviewed research that spanned the fields of sociology, psychology, social work, community practice, and community organizing. Although these readings set a good context for understanding the neighborhood in a broad sense and gave students multiple angles from which to view the research, the professor was able to incorporate only one reading that was specific to the field of criminal justice. She also noted that she felt much more confident instructing students on the issues and readings that were closer to her discipline.

Two of the professors (sociology and criminal justice) had more experience teaching research methods and agreed to cover the later classes focused on data collection and analysis. Working in teams can create tensions regarding which research methods are best, but these potential disagreements never arose because the research goals, methods, and plans were established by the various community partners. We simply had to teach the students how to carry out the planned research and engage them with critical questions on the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen methods. The biggest challenge to team teaching arose during the data analysis portion of the class, because the classroom instruction time was designed to refresh knowledge gained from previous courses. However, students from different majors had vastly different experience with the necessary ideas and techniques, which resulted in some students being able to perform statistical tests with little guidance while others needed outside tutoring and multiple office hour visits to run the same tests. Devoting extra time to data analysis was particularly burdensome for these students because it overlapped with the most demanding weeks in the field.

Once the planning for the course was finished, the execution went very smoothly. We were all present during the first course meeting, and we occasionally stopped by

other meetings, even if we were not the faculty of record. In addition, we partnered with the students frequently in the field. This field presence allowed us to establish relationships with the students so that if they had questions that fell outside one faculty member's disciplinary purview, we were able to direct them to one of the other professors. We were all open to working with the students even when it was not our week to lecture. Our offices are not located in the same space on campus, but regular meetings with the university representatives from the core research team ensured that we were always on the same page with respect to the needs assessment and gave us time to discuss the course progress or problems with individual students. The biggest challenge for all three of us was the strain on our time. We were able to provide a valuable opportunity for students, but doing so required more effort and time than a typical semester. We think we became stronger teachers from this experience, but we all put our personal research agendas on hold to participate in the project.

Working with other faculty on a CBR project had rewards and challenges, but so did working with partners outside the university. As noted earlier, we had to give up control over the timeline of the project and the research methods. As trained researchers, we had many suggestions on how to improve the needs assessment. The outside organizations were very receptive to the suggestions; however, their own constraints with time, money, and personnel limited their ability to incorporate every recommendation. For example, changing the data collection timeline enabled both UPP and GHA to use the findings in subsequent grant applications. Though beneficial, the new schedule strained students and faculty trying to fulfill obligations to this project alongside other commitments. There were several miscommunications with the core research team about when and where the students needed to collect data. Some students showed up at locations where there were no local residents. Other times and locations were changed with minimal notice. These issues were due to myriad factors like availability of public spaces and willingness of local residents to participate in the survey. Although the core research team was well-intentioned, such changes in essence made the faculty middle managers and left us frequently adjusting our requirements and expectations for the students.

Though these issues were not ideal for conducting research, working with outside organizations enhanced our CBR experience in numerous ways. First, the core research team collected vast amounts of data on the Town Center and made these documents available to us. We put many of their publications in the syllabus and did not have to spend time searching and compiling data to present in class. We were also able to connect directly with many local community employees and residents who gave us inside information about the Town Center that we used to develop the needs assessment and shared with the students. One community partner, a nonprofit organization, offered to host the students in their meeting space, which allowed the students to visit the Town Center and get a firsthand experience of what some of the residents and community organizers encountered on a daily basis. The core research team's role in the data collection process was also a major reward. With the goal of conducting face-to-face interviews with over 200 local residents, the team organized the times and places for the interviews and advertised to residents. They also produced the materials needed for data collection and often provided food and drink for the respondents and the interviewers. We acknowledge that we would have never been able to put that much effort into recruiting and organizing a community needs assessment while teaching a course overload. The biggest effort on our part was making sure we had ample student support to collect the data. The core research team took care of all the other details.

Student Learning in an Interdisciplinary Course

Students in the class learned how to conduct a needs assessment and learned more specifically about the Town Center. All students conducted survey interviews, recorded the data, and used the data to write a final course paper. The final course papers covered the following topics: education in Gardenville, a Town Center public safety needs assessment, Gardenville youth activities, Town Center residents' perceptions of police, and affordability and quality of housing in Gardenville.

Following the final projects, we reviewed the reflection papers that our students wrote as part of the course requirements. Each student wrote three reflections. The

first reflection was about their initial impression of the project and the community. The second reflection focused on student experiences in the field while conducting the survey. The final reflection assessed students' overall view of the project after completing the course.

At the start of the semester, students expressed their excitement about taking the course. The first reflection papers included comments such as "I was excited for what the class had to offer" and "I'm very interested to start our research within the community." One student wrote, "The opportunity to observe not from a distance, but as a major player in the project was encouraging and rewarding." In their initial reflections, students also highlighted the importance of making a difference in the community. Comments such as "I hope this project can really change the lives of the people" expressed a collective desire that the data collected would be used "to better aid the community."

This sense of hope was accompanied by an interest in listening to and learning from community residents as the project progressed. Several students reflected on the importance of hearing from residents about the challenges they faced and learning how the history of the city has influenced the community. Quite a few students expressed enjoyment in "getting to know the city" by visiting city landmarks and spending time with residents, in particular a long-term resident who came to the class to speak about the city's history. One student reflected on the "eye-opening experience" of interacting with residents, as it changed the student's perceptions of the city and the people who live there.

Another theme in students' reflections was anxiety and apprehension about the course itself. Several students expressed their concern about "balancing time between class and work," as they were unsure how they would manage the needs of the project with the demands of other courses, work, and family commitments. Student reflections included comments such as "This class provided me with a lot of stress and anxiety" and "It was stressful, but overall I enjoyed the class." In particular, several students felt that their own research projects suffered because of the course timeline. These students expressed frustration with the short amount of time they had to formulate their research question, administer the surveys,

and analyze the data. Student reflections included comments such as "There was not enough data to answer research questions" and "More training was needed to prepare students to conduct surveys." One student added, "The course would have been more productive if it was split up between two semesters."

Finally, the students described their experiences while administering the surveys in the community. Their reflections included comments such as "There were some questions that as I asked, I felt couldn't apply to the person I was talking to" and "Some questions were difficult to answer due to the large number of response categories that respondents were asked to rank." Students also expressed concern over questions that prompted long answers that had to fit into preexisting response categories. As one student commented, "After each time the participant would tell me a story, he would state 'Did that answer your question' to which I would just re-read the question to him. It was difficult to get through because of this." Respondents often asked for clarification, but the students were not permitted to explain the questions. Students also commented on inconsistencies in data collection ("Too many people were collecting data and recording answers differently") and concerns about survey length and respondent fatigue ("During the end of respondents' time, they may answer however just to finish the survey").

Despite the limitations of the survey, it gave residents "a voice," a way for them to express their ideas on how to make their community better. One student wrote, "I know participants appreciated being heard." Another student added, "The survey was a morale booster to the people who have little to no voice about the direction their community should go." In the final reflection of the course, students expressed confidence that the project would help community residents who want to better themselves and their community. Although the project had its challenges, students expressed a sense of pride in their ability to "stay on track" and "adjust scheduling to assure every task was complete." As one student wrote, "Overall, it proved to be a great learning experience."

The high degree of student learning was rewarding; however, we also encountered multiple challenges unique to the team-teaching format and collaborative nature of this particular course. Concerning team

teaching, the professors felt that the transition between our course sections went smoothly, although one student wrote, “The organization of the class was at times confusing,” and another mentioned, “The disorganization of the project and changing of professors was hard to adjust to, but information provided by professors during class gave me confidence.” Another student expressed the feeling that “the goal posts were being moved” as the course shifted from one section to the next and expectations changed. It is possible that more students felt frustrated by the change in professors but were hesitant to express this directly to the professors through their reflections.

The majority of students’ concerns over the demands of the project highlighted the unpredictability of the course. One student noted that the “fluid and unpredictable” project affected the class organization. The students collectively saw this as a major limitation of the course. They reflected on the lack of people available to administer surveys on short notice and the insufficiency of data to answer research questions (the data were not fully collected before their final papers were due). One student expressed the concern that the data “does not reflect the thought process of the entire community,” since the surveys were often scheduled on short notice. Another student expressed frustration that “emails were sent out on the day of a survey, asking for students to participate.”

These student concerns highlighted some challenges of working in a team with outside partners, but students also had many rewarding learning experiences. For example, several students commented on how comprehensive the survey instrument was in the topics it covered. One student wrote, “This is a way to really understand the community and get a feel for what they are doing.” Despite this praise, the students would have liked to provide input on the format and content of the survey, which was largely completed before students reviewed the final draft. For example, they reflected on the wording of questions that confused them and the respondents. This confusion came from the use of acronyms that neither the respondent nor the student was familiar with, and the use of vague terms like “culture” and “housing quality.” In their reflections, students expressed concern that respondents would feel “embarrassed” or

“foolish” for not understanding certain terms, which could result in respondents having “little comfort in taking the survey.” In addition, students also expressed that their personal research projects would have been stronger if they had input during the survey design phase. Student reflections included comments such as “It would have been nice to have been able to design our personal studies” and “We had ideas on different questions that could have been added to get a better idea of our specific topics.”

Though working with multiple professors and multiple outside agencies created a number of challenges for our students, we believe that the overall experience was a valuable one (see Table 3). As one student wrote in the final course reflection, “I have learned that difficulty will occur in projects, not everything will go as expected, but it will all be worth it knowing you can possibly be changing the lives of others.”

Conclusion

In summary, our experiences show that teaching a CBR course with multiple professors and multiple outside agencies can be extremely rewarding for students; however, many challenges need to be addressed before undertaking such a project. Based on our experiences, we feel strongly that faculty who wish to teach such courses in the future should secure sufficient university support and strategic investments from collaborators before moving ahead.

Because this essay is focused on the experiences of teaching and learning within the context of a university course, our conclusion focuses on the rewards and challenges for professors and students. We would have liked to also examine the community stakeholders’ experiences, but the sheer number of stakeholders and their varied positions within this project placed such an analysis beyond the scope of this article. We hope that this essay will inspire future CBR researchers to produce reflections that likewise extend to community collaborators, even as we believe that the lessons learned here can still be helpful for all people involved in CBR.

Within our course, faculty members were strongly supported by the university’s willingness to offer a cross-listed hybrid course, to split the credits among three faculty members, and to offer overload compensa-

tion. We were also buttressed by the outside agencies' knowledge, research, and planning of the community needs assessment, which allowed us to spend more time engaging students in the project. Furthermore, students discovered a great deal about the research process through participating in CBR as it unfolded, and they learned about the community through interacting directly with residents. Being able to shift their perspectives and see life through the residents' eyes ultimately helped students comment on how the survey instrument could have been improved to better highlight the residents' voices. This result is especially important given that the demographics of the university students differ from those of the Town Center residents. We believe taking the time to visit the community and meet residents was extremely valuable and minimized students' apprehensions about working in the community. We strongly recommend that faculty working with similar university-community differences devote course time to touring the community, visiting research sites, and engaging with residents prior to the research in order to maximize student learning experiences during the project.

Though our overall experience highlighted the rewards of this format, we also faced a number of challenges, many of which were by-products of a restrictive academic calendar. We had to accelerate our course preparation to meet the needs of outside agencies while also staying within the university schedule. Therefore, the course had to be flexible and evolve as the semester unfolded, which created stress and anxiety for students and reduced the quality of the final papers. The student suggestion for a two-semester course was laudable, but this would not have been feasible given

the overall project timeline. In hindsight, we might have focused the course on data collection and input and offered one-credit independent studies over the summer term to students who wanted to produce better research papers with a more complete data set. This format might work well for professors who want to push their students to excel in courses where university restrictions create barriers to success.

Other rewards and challenges came from being part of a large team of various outside constituents. Students expressed their desire to mold the survey to their own research agendas; however, we had to compromise in order to meet the overall project goals. In addition, we needed to be very flexible to a constant set of changing demands. This was frustrating; however, the contributions of our partners alleviated demands on both faculty and students to design the questionnaire from scratch, to organize meetings, and to recruit participants. The amount of data we collected would not have been feasible if our faculty and student team also had to manage that workload in addition to regular course schedules. Though the issue of survey construction and project organization caused tensions, this mode of participation allowed students to see how research is carried out in real time. Published research rarely reflects the messiness of actual time spent in the field. Not only did the students experience this messiness firsthand, but they developed a critical understanding of how various issues affected the overall data collection and how such factors could influence their findings. In this process, the students observed how complex solving community problems can be; however, they also saw how they could be part of the solution.



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