

Abstract

This paper explores the evolution and maintenance of a unique University/Community partnership among three mission driven agencies. This partnership brings together: a U.S. based University; a Peruvian based Catholic mission and a U.S. based international non-governmental organization. We argue that sustainable partnerships emerge when the collaborators are mission driven, when those missions are compatible and when the constituent organizations maintain their openness to one another. Sustainability occurs as a consequence of these characteristics and in the presence of a shared commitment on the part of all collaborators that is kept at the forefront of planning processes.

Keywords: Sustainability, Mission-driven organizations, University Collaborative partnerships, International collaboration, Faith Based Organizations, Nursing

Sustainable partnerships: Mission driven collaboration for learning, serving and creating health care access.

Introduction

This paper explores the evolution and maintenance of a unique University/Community partnership among three mission driven agencies. This partnership brings together: a U.S. based University; a Peruvian based Catholic mission and a U.S. based international non-governmental organization. We argue that sustainable partnerships emerge under three conditions: mission driven organizations, mission compatibility and open- minded leadership.

Part I: Mission driven organizations

UNCW –committed to creating powerful learning opportunities and new knowledge

The University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) is a regional comprehensive Masters one University, and is one of the 16 constituent campuses of the University of North Carolina system. Its primary mission is to create the most powerful learning experience possible for its students. UNCW also seeks to create global citizens and a commitment to community engagement. Furthermore, the University seeks to create new knowledge through engaged scholarship by faculty and students. The UNCW School of Nursing is constantly working to expand the opportunities for student learning and research in both traditional and non-traditional forms. Since 2004, the School of Nursing at the University of North Carolina Wilmington has embarked in an effort to create global learning

and research experiences for students in the nursing pre-licensure program through a three week experience to Arequipa, Peru.

For three weeks in the spring semester, undergraduate students visit the Alto Cayma community, north of Arequipa, to work in concert with parish mission service programs. Ways in which the parish serves the community include an ambulatory care clinic, which sees approximately 17,000 patients per year. Health care services at the clinic include general medicine, gynecology, pediatrics, ophthalmology and dentistry; laboratory and pharmacy services.

The use of cultural immersion experiences to increase cultural awareness and promote development of students' understanding of different cultures have been well-documented (Currier, et.al, 2000; Leh, Robb, Albin, 2004; Ruddock, deSales Turner, 2007). Beyond cultural learning, international experiences have been shown to also support student development, both personally and professionally (Lee, 2004). Other identified outcomes from international learning experiences include a greater appreciation for the profession of nursing (Currier, et. al, 2000), enhanced personal decision-making, and global understanding (Zorn, 1996). The experience incorporates lessons learned relating to the need for cultural immersion experiences to be at least two weeks in duration (Hern, et.al, 2005).

The program is designed to provide students with both clinical and cultural immersion experiences in the global health environment. The experience also challenges them to explore personal ethical perspectives related to people living in poverty, issues of basic human rights and dignity and social justice. The program provides students with a cultural immersion experience as it relates to: 1) the role of the professional nurse; 2) trends in global health care delivery within a diverse community; 3) implications for future nursing practice. The program fosters the development of cultural competence in our students and exposes them to the

challenges of the health care environment in the developing world. More recently, students have had opportunities during the experience to be directly engaged in community based health needs assessment research projects, conducted in partnership with faculty from the University and other partners in the Peru program experience. This program is mission driven, meeting both the powerful learning experience and new knowledge development benchmarks, but also contributes to other University strategic goals of enhancing our students' understanding of diversity and fostering their global citizenship.

Clinical experiences of students who are enrolled in pediatric and community health clinical courses are overseen by the faculty traveling to Peru. The faculty traveling with students also coordinates learning experiences with course faculty back in the states before, during, and after the trip. Reflective journals are submitted to course faculty for review. Students participate in development of care plans for clients seen in the community and clinic during the trip, and have regular post conference debriefing sessions throughout the experience.

The Alto Cayma Mission –committed to love and serve the poor.

The Missionary Society of Saint Paul is a Catholic religious community whose primary mission is to serve the poor. Its origins lie in the aftermath of the First World War to help settle and provide pastoral care to Maltese citizens forced abroad by the destruction of their country. After the resettlement of the Maltese, the missionary society began additional work in Peru, Pakistan and Philippines.

Although the initial focus of the Alto Cayma mission was to provide pastoral care to the residents, the 1995 founding of the mission coincided with the onset of a national migration out of the altiplano of Peru to urban areas. Arequipa was a

destination city for thousands of such refugees. It quickly became apparent that the basic human needs of the community were also pressing and the mission has ever since worked to meet both the pastoral and the human needs of the community.

Today the parish serves the community multiple ways but one of the most important is the ambulatory care clinic, which sees approximately 17,000 patients per year. Health care services at the clinic include general medicine, gynecology, pediatrics, ophthalmology and dentistry; laboratory and pharmacy services. A physical therapy clinic is offered two days a week, based on volunteer availability. Other programs are run in coordination with the Peruvian Ministry of Health.

The partnership between the Alto Cayma Mission and UNCW has been as a direct consequence of the creation of the Volunteer Center at the Alto Cayma Mission. As a method of bringing additional resources to the mission, groups and individuals are recruited to volunteer in the community. This has increased the mission's service capacity and also placed it in a nexus position for collaborative relationships. It attracted the attention of a UNCW School of Nursing Advisory board member and they brought the mission to the attention of the School of Nursing. The relationship has now existed for six years. Each year, students travel to Peru for a three week clinical and cultural immersion experience as part of their required community health clinical experiences within the undergraduate nursing program.

Health Bridges International – committed to development of sustainable improvements in health

Health Bridges International (HBI) is an international tax exempt organization based in Portland, Oregon in the United States. HBI has been working with the Mission of Alto Cayma for more than ten years. HBI is dedicated to facilitate health of underserved populations through collaborative efforts. Other organizations that HBI has collaborated with in Peru include Medical Ministry International, based out of the U.S., and the Quechua Benefit, based in Peru. HBI also has partnerships with Union Biblica del Peru, based out of Lima, Peru and Sirviendo Logrando Paz, a Peruvian registered Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) based out of the Mission of Alto Cayma as well as other U.S. based non-profit organizations. Through these partnerships, HBI coordinates a number of medical delegations to Peru and other areas in Latin America, and participates in various community alliances to create awareness of health needs of the people of Arequipa and other areas of Peru.

Besides efforts to create community alliances, HBI also supports professional development of in-country healthcare and social service providers. Finally, HBI's mission includes a goal of meeting the basic needs of communities and individuals living in poverty. Thus, collaborative research efforts with UNCW School of Nursing have been developed and include community health needs assessments through which HBI hopes to create baseline data on underserved populations in Arequipa and other areas of Peru, which can in turn, be used to highlight community needs, gaps in services, and obtain support for health related projects in these areas. To date, two specific community needs assessment projects have been conducted along with UNCW School of Nursing in Alto Cayma and Kusi, a community located approximately nine hours northeast of Lima. Data collection for a third study being conducted with the Quecha Benefit in the Colca Valley is occurring in fall, 2010.

Part II- Benefits of Partnership –Meeting Agency Missions

UNCW

The mission compatibility of the agencies involved in this partnership has enhanced the collaboration and the ability of each discrete entity to serve its primary audience. Together we have both enhanced our own missions and contributed to the achievement of each collaborating institution's mission. The direct consequences of this, we hope, are both positive and sustainable in the long term. For the University of North Carolina Wilmington, meeting the University goal of *creating the most powerful learning experience* has informed the development and leadership of the program.

Currently, the program has expanded beyond the School of Nursing to make space for an interdisciplinary collaboration between faculty from the School of Nursing and faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences. This collaboration has added a small formal teaching component focused on government and public policy to further prepare students who are participating in the experience and also contributed a formal health policy research component that is related to but different from the ongoing needs assessment work.

Alto Cayma Mission

The leadership of the Alto Cayma Mission (the Mission) believes that *Our experience with the past is our promise for the future. All the work + faith = no limits.* For this faith-based organization, the achievement of the mission combines service to the community and service to the volunteers. This service is centered in the existence of the mission and a dedication to creating opportunities for others, such as the UNCW student groups and HBI- led delegations to see and

work with a community such as Alto Cayma. Exposing students and other health professionals to the reality of the rest of the world, allowing them to see first-hand the challenges of a third world, impoverished existence, and giving them the opportunity to directly observe the true limitations of government service provision is providing a transformative experience that crosses religious and/or denominational boundaries.

Individuals and groups come from around the world to visit the mission and one of the clear benefits is the fostering of cross-denominational, and cross-professional cooperation resulting in the bringing of multiple skill sets, including medical, nursing and construction service providers as well as individuals who come to the Parish mission for longer term service commitments. The mission is especially interested in making a difference in the lives of youth and to challenge youth to ask how they can be of service to others and the partnership with the University is especially suited to support these interests.

Finally, the commitment of the Alto Cayma mission leadership to the partnership, helps them to meet their goal in bringing awareness to the plight of the people of the community, and can provide access to needed resources for the community. For example, recently a UNCW donor has provided significant funds for supplies to assist the Alto Cayma Health Clinic.

Health Bridges International

For HBI, the work of building partnerships is driven by a desire to create additional healthcare access for underserved groups and thus, is also dependent on their ability to attract funders who will provide financial support. Few studies have documented health care access and utilization patterns in semi-urban areas of Peru such as Alto Cayma. The first needs assessment conducted in concert with UNCW School of Nursing faculty and student participation, has provided

valuable data on the health care needs of families living in the Alto Cayma community. Over the course of two weeks during the 2009 UNCW student experience, survey data on health care utilization patterns and barriers to healthcare access were collected from 455 households in the community. Not only does the partnership support University mission foci of teaching and scholarship, individual faculty scholarship efforts also benefit from the partnership.

Part III: Sustaining the Partnership- meeting challenges

We believe the success of this partnership is directly related to the intersection of missions of these three organizations. This nexus cannot be sustained without regular attention to the value of the cooperative relationship for each participating institution, and a commitment to ongoing creative thinking about that relationship. No collaboration can be created and sent off to be self-sustaining. Institutions will face challenges in the form of leadership or personnel change and economic hardship to name just two possibilities.

Although cultural and clinical immersion programs abroad provide valuable learning experiences for both faculty and students, these experiences are at times difficult to support financially. The cost of an international experience often is an additional expense that was not planned for in a student's higher education budget (Leh, Robb, & Albin, 2004). Since the international experience is actually the clinical component of required nursing courses already paid for by the students, there are no further tuition charges for elective courses. Student interest in participation in the Peru experience remains high, despite difficult economic conditions in the US. We attribute this to the highly favorable outcomes of the program and student word of mouth from year to year to their peers about how this program has changed their lives. In fact, students from prior experiences have gone on to return to Peru for additional service in Arequipa, and pursued

international health work, as a result of the impact of this program on their personal learning and development.

For the Alto Cayma mission collaboration with University students is an important component of serving their population but it is also a costly endeavor in many ways. Local level success has also led to an unintended consequence that has manifested as community pressure to both expand the parish and to expand the mission services. Migration out of the altiplano and other rural areas of Peru has not stopped. New arrivals continue to appear and continue to struggle. As the community continues to develop north of Alto Cayma new residents in need are pressuring for services and the mission must balance its desire to serve with the reality of constrained resources.

In addition to working to meet overwhelming needs, Parish staff commits much time and energy to support delegation visits, including assistance with travel arrangements, cultural excursions, and debriefing sessions. This high level of activity is not easy to maintain. It requires constant funding. Groups paying in advance, or as they go, is more or less manageable for the mission. Other entities, such as the University of North Carolina Wilmington may have different constraints or rules that make pre-payment to the mission difficult or impossible. This requires the Mission to extend itself financially in advance. Fortunately, the Mission is able to accommodate these constraints. Payment arrangements are made once student pay for their program costs (typically a month ahead of the actual trip). Payment to the mission is orchestrated through the University Office of International (and study abroad) Programs.

As a small tax-exempt organization based in the United States, HBI has to navigate non-profit requirements for accreditation, which are particularly difficult in Peru. Limited staff resources, funding constraints and dependence on

volunteers to execute efforts are limiting factors for the organization. For HBI, the partnership helps the organization overcome a number of these challenges. For example the partnership between UNCW and HBI provided expanded capacity to be able to engage in a large scale study along with analytical support for evaluation of the data, as well as dissemination of findings.

Part IV: Future Directions-Reflections on Sustainability

Future plans for the experience include the possibility of development of a specific cultural immersion elective course, to expand the pool of students who can participate in the experience. This would include expansion to other disciplines, such as social work, to further enhance the experience by promoting interdisciplinary clinical experiences. Further work is needed in the assessment of specific student learning outcomes related to the international experience. Comparisons of knowledge level, attitudes, and skills before and after the experience need to be done to document and validate that there is a “value added” feature of this international experience.

Additional community assessment activities in communities in Peru are ongoing as part of the partnership between the University and HBI. As the Alto Cayma mission expands services to meet community needs, the University and Alto Cayma mission are also continuing to explore how to expand the partnership, including other educational units within the University. For example, the Alto Cayman mission is now undertaking management of a community based school which provides an opportunity for students in education, some of whom are required to complete an international experience as part of graduate studies, to become engaged in activities of the mission.

Fundamentally, the success of this partnership is based in institutionally similar missions such as the mutual commitment to service and engagement. At the same time collaborators must be committed to remaining conscientious about boundaries between the various organizational missions. For example, public Universities in partnership with faith based organizations must be intentional about not directing students in their beliefs or values but rather provide the opportunities for students to work and learn within their own value frameworks. This must remain a shared commitment on the part of all collaborators that is kept at the forefront of planning processes in order for this collaboration to continue to benefit the Cayma community, to teach students, and to create greater access to health care service

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