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# “Principles of Good Practice” for Academic and Student Affairs Partnership Programs

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*While academic and student affairs partnership programs have been championed as a means to enhance undergraduate education, research documenting the characteristics of effective partnership programs is sparse. The Boyer Partnership Assessment Project is a qualitative examination of academic and student affairs partnership programs at 18, diverse institutions. This article identifies seven principles of good practice for creating and sustaining effective partnerships, and discusses the implications of these principles for higher education research and practice.*

People collaborate when the job they face is too big, is too urgent, or requires too much knowledge for one person or group to do alone . . . Only when everyone on campus—particularly academic affairs and student affairs staff—shares the responsibility for student learning will we be able to make significant progress in improving it. (American Association for Higher Education [AAHE] et al., 1998)

To a five-year-old with a hammer,  
everything is a nail. (source unknown)

Many challenges face higher education in the United States, including dwindling resources, rapid technological advancements, and demographic changes. Most disconcerting, perhaps,

is the loss of public confidence in higher education's ability and/or willingness to achieve the educational outcomes it claims. Colleges and universities have been called upon to address these accountability concerns by focusing more intentionally and systematically on undergraduate learning and success (ACPA, 1994; Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, 1998; National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges [NASULGC], 1997, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Partnership programs—programs developed and offered via collaboration between academic and student affairs units—have received notable attention for their potential to create seamless learning environments (AAHE et al., 1998; Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999; Kezar, Hirsch, & Burack, 2001; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b, 2004).

Despite this attention, little research has been conducted to identify aspects of effective partnership programs (Kezar et al., 2001; Magolda, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The Boyer Partnership Assessment Project (BPAP) was initiated in 2001 to address these research gaps; the focus of this article is to

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identify and describe characteristics of effective academic affairs-student affairs partnership programs.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Among the critiques aimed at 4-year colleges and universities from voices within and beyond the academy is that these institutions have become too fragmented by disciplinary and functional specializations to educate students effectively (Blimling et al., 1999; Boyer Commission, 1998; NASULGC, 1997, 2000; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b). For example, organizational boundaries have had a negative impact on undergraduate education:

We have created an intellectual landscape made up of mineshafts, where most of the mineworkers are intent on the essential task of deepening the mine without giving much thought to the need to build corridors connecting the shafts (and the miners). We have become so poorly connected that we have greatly fragmented our shared sense of learning for both students and faculty. (NASULGC, 2000, p. 41)

The divide is particularly distressing given the unequivocal evidence that students learn most effectively in seamless learning environments (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Such environments are characterized by coherent educational purposes, comprehensive policies and practices consistent with students' needs and abilities, and a widely shared "ethos of learning" (Kuh, 1996, p. 136). Seamless learning environments blur the boundaries between in-class and out-of-class experiences.

Academic and student affairs partnership programs have been championed as one means to bridge the academic, social, and affective elements of students' experiences by creating seamless learning environments and engaging

students in their own learning (AAHE et al., 1998; Blimling et al., 1999; Kezar et al., 2001; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b). By their very nature, partnerships require educators from both inside and outside the classroom to collaborate to consider students' educational experiences. Thus, partnerships create cross-functional, interdepartmental linkages that combine resources and expertise to address the learning needs of students.

Moreover, recent research on educational effectiveness has fueled the notion that partnerships may be productive strategies. For example, Project DEEP, a comprehensive study of educationally effective colleges and universities (Kuh et al., 2005), identified six conditions common to these institutions, including shared responsibility for educational quality and student success. At the DEEP institutions, "effective partnerships among those who have the most contact with students—faculty and student affairs professionals—fuel the collaborative spirit and positive attitude of these campuses" (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 157). Thus, partnerships may have a positive impact on learning and the educational climate.

Partnership programs offer an avenue to foster student engagement; several decades of research on college impact point to engagement as the primary means by which students learn, develop, and persist in college (Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students learn by being engaged, that is, by placing the time and effort into their studies and other activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success. Engagement also requires considering how an institution allocates its resources and organizes services and learning opportunities to encourage students to participate in and benefit from such activities (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

Colleges and universities influence student learning by organizing curricula, programs, and institutional structures in a manner that fosters student engagement. High levels of student engagement are associated with a wide range of educational practices and conditions, including purposeful student–faculty contact; active and collaborative learning strategies; and collaboration among faculty, academic affairs units, student affairs units and staff to produce programs and services for students (Astin; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Limited attention has been paid to partnerships by higher education scholars (Bourassa & Kruger, 2001; Kezar et al., 2001). Moreover, the attention directed to partnerships has been focused largely on their prevalence, type, and/or form of support. For example, Kolins (2000) surveyed the perceptions of senior academic affairs officers and senior student affairs officers [SSAOs] at 2-year colleges; he identified 20 forms of academic affairs and student affairs collaboration at the respondents' institutions, ranging from consultation to program development and delivery, and found evidence of positive perceptions of and support for academic and student affairs partnerships. Kezar (2001) surveyed SSAOs in order to identify national trends in academic and student affairs partnerships. Her study indicated that some form of academic and student affairs collaboration was occurring at all of their institutions; most respondents described those collaborations as moderately to highly successful.

Despite the promise and prevalence of partnership programs, no empirically grounded, comprehensive assessment of partnership programs has been conducted. Moreover, no one has sought to identify characteristics of effective partnership programs. In the for-profit sector, an accepted approach to improving organizational effectiveness is adapting the practices of effective organizations (Kuh et al.,

2005); we adopted this approach to address the research gaps regarding academic and student affairs partnership programs.

## METHODS FOR IDENTIFYING GOOD PRACTICES

This research was conducted as part of BPAP, a FIPSE-funded study coordinated by The Ernest L. Boyer Center at Messiah College. Because there is little research specific to academic and student affairs partnerships, our research team sought methods that would enable us not only to provide rich descriptions of the elements and impacts of programs within individual institutions but also to make comparisons across types of programs and types of institutions. Therefore, we chose a qualitative case study design to achieve the detail, complexity, and “multiple perspectives” to accomplish our research purposes (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 105).

### Site Selection

The study began in the summer of 2001 with a call for proposals from institutions that had expressed interest in being involved in several partnership program initiatives of The Ernest L. Boyer Center. Forty-seven proposals were submitted. To capture the diversity of partnership programs in postsecondary education, we sought variety in institutional type, size, form of control, and type of partnership program. Our selection criteria also included partnership program history of at least 3 years and commitment of institutional leadership to the program. We selected sites in two phases to enable us to develop our ideas about what constituted effectiveness. Twelve institutions were selected for 2002-03 participation. Two institutions withdrew from participation during that year. We returned to the original proposals to select institutions for 2003-04 participation, paying particular attention to

TABLE 1.  
BPAP Institutional Participants

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Barnard College (NY): In-Residence Seminar
Brevard Community College (FL): Center for Service Learning
Carson-Newman College (TN): Boyer Laboratory for Learning
DePaul University (IL): Chicago Quarter
DePauw University (IN): DePauw Year One
William Rainey Harper College (IL): Learning Communities
George Mason University (VA): New Century College
Messiah College (PA): External Programs
North Carolina State University: First-Year College Living-Learning Community
Portland Community College, Cascade Campus (OR): Multicultural Awareness Council
Prince George's Community College (MD): Developmental Math Program
Saint Mary's College (CA): Catholic Institute for Lasallian Social Action
Siena College (NY): Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy
University of Arizona: Faculty Fellows and Student-Faculty Interaction Grants
University of Maryland: College Park Scholars
University of Missouri: Freshman Interest Groups
Villanova University (PA): Villanova Experience
Virginia Tech University: Residential Leadership Community

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assertions that program assessment had occurred. Eight additional institutions were selected for participation.

Our final sample of 18 institutions (see Table 1) was composed of 4 community colleges and 14 four-year institutions, including 6 public universities, 3 private universities, and 5 private colleges. Types of partnership programs represented were first-year transitions, service learning and community service, living-learning communities, academic support, interdisciplinary courses, cultural programming, and leadership development.

### Data Collection and Analysis

We collected data from April 2002 through March 2004 via a 3- or 4-day site visit to each

institution by two to five researchers. The primary data collection method was individual and group interviews with institutional and partnership program leaders as well as student, faculty, and staff program participants (Merriam, 1998). All interviews were taped and most transcribed for within- and across-site data analysis. Before and during the site visits, we reviewed documents relevant to the partnership programs, including web pages, planning documents, annual reports, assessment data, and marketing material (Merriam, 1998). We also attended program events and observed relevant class sessions. Each visit concluded with a debriefing session with the campus visit coordinator to address remaining questions and seek reactions to emerging themes.

Following each site visit, we prepared a detailed report of the partnership program. To ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we sent the initial site report to the institution for wide distribution and review. Persons at each site were asked to share with the campus visit coordinator their reactions to the accuracy of the information provided in the report and to communicate what we had missed and/or needed to expand. After reaching agreement with the campus visit coordinator that the report offered an accurate portrayal of the program, we used the reports to analyze data across the sites.

The research team began cross-site analysis after completing about half the site visits, using our data to create categories inductively. Each member of the research team reviewed site reports for the purpose of identifying “good practices for partnership programs.” We discussed our individual analyses of the reports and our individual insights regarding good practices at a team meeting in June 2003. These discussions led to a tentative list of good practices, which we tested and refined as we examined site reports from the remaining institutions. We met as a team in January 2004, June 2004, January 2005, and June 2006 to continue cross-site analysis and refinement of the good practices. At the end of this process, we had identified seven “good practices,” and operational definitions of each that were consistent with and reflected the weight of the data from the 18 sites.

Using these seven good practices, three team members conducted a detailed analysis of every site report, coding each for elements and evidence of the good practices we had identified. The qualitative data analysis software, *Atlas-ti*, facilitated our analyses. The software was used to code reports for good practices and to manage coded data. Key study participants were also invited to review the good practices as part of our ongoing effort to

establish the rigor and credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002). Following completion of analysis and solicitation of participant feedback, the good practice categories were further refined. The seven “principles of good practice” for partnership programs generated by these intensive and extensive analyses are addressed in this study.

## PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

### 1. Good practice for partnership programs reflects and advances the institution’s mission.

Effective partnership programs are grounded in, and extend the influence of, the institution’s mission in their purpose, design, implementation, and assessment. In the process, they demonstrate and enhance institutional commitments to students and their learning. The importance of clear connections between institutional mission and institutional policies, practices, and programs for creating educationally effective opportunities for students has been well established in other research about college impact (c.f., Kuh et al., 2005; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). What is noteworthy here, however, is evidence of these connections in a wide range of partnership programs in a wide range of institutions. Two examples of this principle are described here.

DePaul University’s mission—focusing on service to the community, access to education, respect for the individual, and academic excellence—represents its Catholic, Vincentian, and urban character. The work of Saint Vincent DePaul emphasized community transformation through community involvement. Founded by the Vincentian religious order, DePaul strives “to foster in higher education a deep respect for the God-given

dignity of all persons, especially the materially, culturally, and spiritually deprived; to instill in educated persons a dedication to the service of others” (DePaul University, p.537).

The Chicago Quarter (CQ), offered in the first quarter of each academic year, is required of all first-year DePaul students. According to the creators of the CQ, to understand the program, one must also “understand DePaul’s Catholic, Vincentian, and urban identity. [DePaul has] an urban mission. We feel ourselves connected with the people of Chicago. [The CQ] communicates the urban mission to our students.” In addition, “We’re Vincentian. We should have programs in the community.” Thus, the CQ was designed to introduce students to the intellectual resources of the city of Chicago, to socialize them to the values and expectations—particularly for social justice and service—of the DePaul community, and to introduce them to life as DePaul students. The first week of the quarter comprises “Immersion Week” in which CQ students and faculty engage in service in Chicago consistent with the focus of their particular CQ class. As one early program leader stated, the CQ “really does mesh with the mission of the university and reflects DePaul’s values. [The CQ] is an academic illustration of the mission of the institution.”

George Mason University (GMU), a public research university in Fairfax, Virginia, exhibits a distinct focus on institutional mission similar to that of DePaul. The University’s mission statement asserts that GMU

will be an institution of international academic reputation providing superior education for students to develop critical, analytical, and imaginative thinking. It will respond to the call for interdisciplinary research and teaching, not simply by adding programs but by rethinking the traditional structure of the academy. (George Mason University, p. 10)

One example of GMU’s commitment to interdisciplinary teaching and “rethinking” traditional structures is New Century College (NCC). Initiated in 1995, NCC is an interdisciplinary curricular unit that integrates academics with experiential learning. The program offers majors in integrative studies, including a comprehensive first-year curriculum, and learning communities. The First-Year Experience, Learning Communities, the Center for Service and Leadership, and the Center for Field Studies are administered by NCC and provide opportunities for students both within NCC and throughout the university. A GMU administrator described another significant connection between New Century College and the GMU mission:

One of the most obvious things that’s been happening [at George Mason] over the past several years is we’ve been becoming a successful research university. Our funded research grows by about 15 to 20 percent per year . . . but the challenge is to make sure that we continue to develop emphases on and rewards for high quality and innovative teaching. . . . New Century fits solidly in here. They contribute greatly to our educational climate and are one of the programs we point to with great pride with regard to teaching.

## 2. Good practice for partnership programs embodies and fosters a learning-oriented ethos.

Effective partnership programs foster learning, in and out of classrooms, in formal and informal settings, and for students as well as educators. Partnership programs also create seamless learning opportunities, environments, and experiences for students, and encourage pedagogical innovation and experimentation. Two service learning partnership programs illustrate this principle.

The “vision” of Brevard Community

College (BCC) in Florida is to become the “community center” for quality teaching and lifelong learning by engaging a “diverse population in quality, accessible, learning opportunities which successfully meet individual and community needs” (Brevard Community College, p. 5). Brevard developed the Center for Service Learning (CSL) in 1988 to involve students systematically in educational and public service experiences. The mission of CSL is to make service an integral part of students’ educational experiences and to prepare students to be lifelong learners, responsible community members, and productive citizens. Service activities are both credit- and noncredit-bearing and aim to link community service and academic study.

A BCC faculty member commented that CSL helps “produce a well-rounded human being who can not only function as a professional . . . but can also have a more humane approach to living and develop positive values of service.” Students also indicated their CSL activities influenced their learning in other courses and guided their selection of majors. One student, for example, spoke of being motivated by CSL experiences to pursue a career in politics after graduation. Others cited CSL activities as the reason they planned to seek positions in social services or other helping professions. In these examples, students described how they could easily generalize from their CSL experiences to serving people in a variety of settings.

A learning-oriented culture was also central to The Catholic Institute for Lasallian Social Action (CILSA) at Saint Mary’s College of California. Saint Mary’s has been under the direction of the De La Salle Christian Brothers, a lay Catholic religious teaching order, since 1868. The Lasallian tradition supports education that is transformative for both the individual and society at large; the phrase “Enter to Learn and Leave to Serve” is a motto

of Lasallian organizations around the world. The CILSA was established in 1999 to fulfill Saint Mary’s commitment to education for civic responsibility. Through the development and implementation of service-learning courses and community-based research, CILSA helps students and faculty build connections between service and study across the curriculum. Students, faculty, and administrators acknowledged CILSA’s success in bridging curricular and co-curricular learning and in helping the institution understand the benefits of such bridges. An administrator commented, “I think that, from my own perspective, CILSA has been a great way to expand everybody’s notion of where and how education does take place.”

Saint Mary’s faculty also perceived that students involved in CILSA were more engaged in the classroom than they had been prior to CILSA participation and more than students who were not part of CILSA’s programs. A chemistry professor whose students’ project involved conducting tests for lead in elementary schools noted the community experience

led into a connection with the curriculum that was a discussion of risk assessment. And it showed . . . they knew nothing about risk assessment. And they stopped and realized all the rest of their education really hadn’t ever crossed over into this. So they were more engaged to say, “I think I really do want to know about this because I may be a technical scientist in the field collecting data.”

### **3. Good practice for partnership programs builds on and nurtures relationships.**

Effective partnerships grow out of existing relationships between and among academic and student affairs professionals. Such relationships—often based on mutual interests or shared experiences—cross organizational and

cultural boundaries to blur distinctions between academic and student affairs. In every case, the partnership programs we studied evolved from informal and formal relationships based on common interests.

The Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy at Siena College (NY) illustrates this principle. Founded in 1999, the Center coordinates service opportunities and educational programs focused on social justice for students, faculty, staff and alumni. One-quarter of Siena's foundations courses incorporate a service-learning component, and the Center offers a minor in Franciscan Service and Advocacy. The Vice Presidents for Academic Affairs and Student Affairs at the time of the Center's inception were perceived as key factors in its successful development. Moreover, the program coordinators—Father Dennis and Brother Michael—were described by educators as friends who “interacted respectfully” and trusted each other. An educator affirmed the importance of relationships for the partnership program,

I can't say enough about the value of relationships. . . . In our roles [we] have a good working relationship and foster our groups not to get too focused on turf issues but to look at the common good for students. I think us modeling that and really working at that is key.

Relationships were also key to the development and success of the Developmental Math Program at Prince George's Community College (MD). Counselors from the college's Student Development and Counseling Office are paired with faculty who teach developmental mathematics. An advisor described her partnership with a faculty member:

We were cooperating right from the very beginning. He comes down and gives me a list of students who miss his class. He talks to students and tells them to come see me. I visit class and we've done several

workshops with students in class on goal setting, learning styles, study skills, that kind of thing. . . . I see our work as a partnership. I see the students from my faculty [member's] class. . . . I think it is a great entrée—students feel more comfortable coming in to speak with someone whose face they know.

Thus, the relationship between the counselor and the instructor creates opportunities for at-risk students to obtain the assistance they need and feel comfortable doing so.

#### **4. Good practice for partnership programs recognizes, understands and attends to institutional culture.**

Recognition of the institutional culture in which the partnership program exists is paramount to success. Partnerships comprehended and heeded institutional subcultures, organizational structures, and the unique characteristics of students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

Both organizational structures and culture played a role in the development of the Residential Leadership Community (RLC) at Virginia Tech. In 1996, the then-interim Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA) pulled together several strands of campus interest and activity—student leadership programs, innovations in undergraduate teaching and learning, first-year student programs, learning communities, and opportunities for Honors students—to create a task force to develop “a vision” for student leadership at Virginia Tech. Educators asserted that collaboration regarding the RLC operated within a larger context of “conscious collaboration through cross-cutting initiatives” sponsored by the Provost and the VPSA and that the RLC “fit the way the university was beginning to think.” In addition, educators affirmed that “budget circumstances created a need to cooperate [and] do undergraduate education in a different way.” In this context,

the VPSA and the Director of Interdisciplinary Studies combined resources to create a “joint program both could support”.

At the time of this study, the VPSA at Virginia Tech reported to the provost, a structure we were told was important for the success of the RLC and other academic and student affairs partnerships at the university. According to an administrator, “It has helped us and worked for us. I dare say if you want to develop [academic and student affairs] partnerships, move Student Affairs to report to the provost.” Doing so “facilitates relationships, acceptance, [and] understanding” and fosters a view of Student Affairs “as an essential aspect of the academic mission.”

The Multicultural Awareness Council (MAC) at the Cascade Campus of Portland Community College (PCC) in Oregon also reflects and reinforces the culture of the college. Initiated in 2000, MAC is a committee of academic and student affairs staff members and students that develops creative programs for student populations typically underserved by campus activities. The Council’s goals include

to create a multicultural event calendar that will honor the diverse cultures, perspectives, and ethnicities of the PCC student body and community, . . . to learn about the immigrant experience, . . . to emphasize the urban experience, . . . to provide PCC student leaders, faculty, and staff with a forum to discuss multicultural issues. (Portland Community College, 2001)

An administrator asserted, “Living in our silos is easy. But it works a lot better for students if we’re integrated. We’re thoughtful about [partnership].” Therefore, as another staff member said, “We have discussions about what’s important and who our students are. We take a team approach and really stretch each other.” A number of faculty, staff, and

students described the culture of PCC as “a family.” One educator affirmed,

We are very tight-knit. We’re all part of the Cascade family—it’s a culture that’s been there since the beginning, conversations about values and our relationships. When it’s nurturing, people want to be together no matter what it takes. People can put up with a lot of stress if they’re in a supportive environment.

And a student noted that MAC is “a partnership—that’s what it is. It brings together the key components of the college, like a marriage.”

### **5. Good practice for partnership programs values and implements assessment.**

Whether responding to an external funding application or institutional concern, effective partnership programs have a clear understanding of what they intend to accomplish and identify means to evaluate their accomplishments. Multiple assessment strategies and data (e.g., participation rates, retention rates, satisfaction, and learning outcomes) are used to guide, alter, and improve the program. Although evidence of assessment in the proposals to participate in the study was a criterion for selection to the sample, we found meaningful assessment to be associated with effectiveness in the partnership programs.

Participating partnership programs employed a wide variety of methods to assess program outcomes and to guide changes. The University of Maryland incorporated assessment strategies in the development of the College Park Scholars Program (CPS) to quell skeptics of the program. The CPS assessment plan had seven components: classroom evaluations; comparisons of rates of recruitment, retention, and graduation of CPS and non-CPS students; residence hall surveys; focus group interviews; FIPSE-mandated assessment of CPS projects in undergraduate research; periodic program

reviews by the CPS Faculty Advisory Council; and exit surveys with CPS students.

In a similar fashion, Villanova's Division of Student Life and Office of Planning, Training, and Institutional Research have collaborated on several efforts to assess the success and impact of the Villanova Experience. Villanova has, for example, used the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International (ACUHO-I) Resident Satisfaction Survey, the College Student Expectations Questionnaire, and the College Student Experiences Questionnaire. As data have been collected from program participants, data also have been obtained from students not enrolled in the program. In this way, inferences can be drawn about the impact of the program.

One of the benefits of assessment for Virginia Tech's RLC is its very existence. During recent budget cuts, the Vice President for Student Affairs made

an early decision [to] preserve the programs that were most effective. . . . How did we know [what was effective]? We had assessment processes in place. We knew what we were doing well and we could continue the things we knew we were doing well.

The RLC "survived the budget cuts [because] we had evidence of its effectiveness. We have gathered a lot of data about the RLC."

## **6. Good practice for partnership programs uses resources creatively and effectively.**

Effective partnership programs thrive in both resource-rich and resource-limited contexts. They capitalize on existing financial, human, and environmental resources and generate additional resources as necessary. Programs we studied differed in size and resources, but they shared a willingness to think creatively about using resources to support student learning.

One example of this principle in a limited-resource context is the Freshman Interest Groups (FIG) partnership program at the University of Missouri. The FIGs are living-learning communities initiated at Missouri in the mid-1990s to address low student retention rates by facilitating students' transitions to college, making the large institution feel small, and providing integrated learning experiences for students. At the time of our site visit in Fall 2002, the University of Missouri was facing substantial financial difficulties that resulted in salary freezes and reductions in operating budgets. These strictures were felt by the FIG programs. An administrator noted, "We are right now operating kind of on a budget that we proposed last year for which none of the funds have been allocated. We're kind of running full speed ahead but on empty." It is to the FIG's advantage, then, that it has been a relatively inexpensive program to run and has had a fairly tight budget from the beginning. One way the program has managed to be "successful on a shoestring" and "both inexpensive and effective" is by establishing partnerships with campus units beyond academic and student affairs. For example, "Campus Dining is another partner that has been supportive. They have provided dining cards for [FIGs faculty] and feed all the FIGs students a day early"—that is, a day before the regular dining contract begins for residence hall students.

DePauw University's DePauw Year One (DY1) illustrates this same principle in a resource-rich context. In 1998, after concluding a \$200 million capital campaign, the university's Board of Trustees sought to use some of the new funds to build on DePauw's strengths. A task force of students, faculty, and staff examined issues of student attrition and retention, as well as concerns about the impact of the social fraternities and sororities on student life. The task force's research and

deliberations led in 1999 to DY1. Based on the “four pillars of a DePauw Education” (intellectual engagement, building community, valuing difference, and goals assessment), DY1 is a comprehensive first year program, including a first-year seminar linked with academic advising, peer mentoring, and residential programs. The additional monies funded the hiring and educator development activities of new faculty and student affairs staff to implement and support the program.

### **7. Good practice for partnership programs demands and cultivates multiple manifestations of leadership.**

Effective partnership programs not only require strong organizational leadership, but also draw upon and foster principles of shared leadership. In addition, the programs facilitated leadership development for students and educators.

From its inception, the CQ at DePaul University had “the full support of university leaders”, including key people in academic and students affairs. Educators reflected that early CQ leaders were, “visionary people who saw that the people involved were really committed” to the program. As a consequence, CQ “was very much top-down in its inception.” Program founders affirmed, “We were in the right place at the right time. We had all the right people and it was the right thing to do. You can do amazing things with the right combination of people.” They also believed it was “unlikely that a program of this scope could come from a grassroots effort.” The early leaders “had a collective vision—and authority—that made it practical to go ahead with sweeping change.”

Program leadership was also a critical factor in the success of the FIG program at Missouri. The names of the three program founders—two student affairs administrators and one faculty member—were invoked throughout our interviews as the impetus

behind the creation and success of the program. They were described as energetic and well-respected throughout the university, people with the “capacity to get things done.” At the same time, these individuals took an inclusive approach to designing and implementing the program. Efforts were made to include many voices, including core committees and stakeholder groups, in planning, thus facilitating a sense of shared leadership and ownership in the FIG program.

Students played a leadership role in many of the programs in the study. First-year transition programs and learning communities (e.g., FIG, DY1, First-Year College at North Carolina State, DePaul’s CQ, and Carson-Newman’s Boyer Laboratory for Learning) employed peer educators as advisors, teachers, and mentors. At Missouri, Peer Advisors (PAs) are undergraduate students who live in the residence halls with FIG students, teach FIG pro-seminars, and provide guidance to FIG students about a wide range of academic and nonacademic issues. A staff member involved in the FIG program commented on the impact of PAs:

They have a voice and a credibility that we don’t have or other faculty don’t have. [Students think], “Yeah, that’s your job, you’re telling us it’s important, but I don’t buy it. If a junior tells me that, I buy it.”

In other programs, such as Portland Community College’s MAC and CILSA at Saint Mary’s, students performed key leadership tasks, including developing and offering an array of community programs and service-learning opportunities.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Interpretation and application of study results are limited in several ways by the methods we used to conduct our research. Because we selected our sample purposefully, not randomly,

we cannot—and do not—assert that what we learned in our study can be generalized to other institutions or other partnership programs. In addition, the purpose of our study—to identify what works and why—focused our attention on some elements of the institutions and partnerships and not on others. Although we did, for example, obtain data about how some of the institutions addressed barriers to collaboration, the day-to-day problems of the programs and the ways in which they fell short of their goals were not of primary interest to us. The timing of our visits also affected our data. Because all of the programs had been in progress for at least 3 years, the data we collected about the programs' development were in the form of retrospection on the part of early program leaders and in program documents. In addition, because our data collection and analysis spanned 4 years, it is possible one or more programs have been altered between our site visit and the end of the study. The data reported here, however, offer accurate, detailed, and comprehensive portrayals of partnership programs consistent with the qualitative case study design.

## DISCUSSION

This paper began with two quotations, one asserting the importance of academic and student affairs collaboration for fostering student learning, the other an assertion about the worldview of a 5-year-old with a hammer (i.e., everything is a nail). Both are relevant to the discussion of academic and student affairs partnerships. Research on college impact is unequivocal: Student success (learning, development, persistence) is associated with seamless learning environments, environments characterized by coherent educational purposes and comprehensive policies and practices designed to achieve those purposes (Kuh, 1996; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini,

2005). Academic and student affairs partnerships have the potential to create such environments (AAHE et al., 1998; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b, 2004).

At the same time, however, academic and student affairs partnerships also have the potential to be like that hammer in the hand of the kindergartner: an all-purpose response to myriad campus issues and student concerns, an end—"Let's create a partnership"—rather than a means—"Let's address our students' needs for meaningful community involvement by a sustained programmatic collaboration between academic and student affairs." In a 2005 article about academic and student affairs partnerships, Peter Magolda queried, "Is collaboration inherently a good deed?" (p. 17). He answered his question, in part, by noting, "I remain unconvinced that all such efforts to reorganize the way individuals and offices work together are worthwhile. 'Just because' does not meet the prima facie test" (p. 17). In Magolda's view, the "all-important question [is] 'Is collaboration a good idea?'" (p. 17).

With both assertions—the value of partnerships and the danger of assuming they are valuable in all situations—in mind, we offer the following implications for practice and further research.

### Implications for Practice

The results of this study, taken together, offer some "lessons" for persons or institutions considering the creation or modification of academic and student affairs partnership programs. First, and perhaps most important, *know your context*. Institutional mission and culture matter. Attempts to create partnership programs must attend to the educational purposes and values of the institution; goals and purposes of the program should be consistent with, and promote, those of the institution.

The programs, and the processes used to

create and implement them, must also be consistent with the norms, values, and assumptions of relevant institutional cultures and subcultures (e.g., of faculty, of student affairs staff, of students). Differences in assumptions between the cultures of faculty and student affairs can create barriers to effective collaboration (Magolda, 2005; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b, 2004). What, for example, are the implications for effective partnerships if faculty and student affairs staff have very different answers to the question, “What does it mean to educate students?” (Schroeder, 2004). Understanding these differences and the conflicts they could pose for working in partnership is essential.

However, before prospective partners can understand and communicate effectively across cultural differences, each must understand the values and assumptions of their own cultures (Magolda, 2005). How, for example, might a residence director define student success? What elements might an academic chemist’s definition of student success include?

One of the most disappointing aspects of partnerships between [student affairs and faculty] subcultures is members’ lack of awareness of the norms and values that guide their own everyday practices. This lack of self-awareness is a setup for confusion in the collaboration process. (Magolda, 2005, p. 20)

A second lesson from our research for creating and sustaining partnership programs is *focus on student learning*. Previous research and writing about student and academic affairs partnerships advocates that, to be effective, these partnerships must focus on something that matters to the partners and to the institution: “issues that people really care about—issues that often respond to the self-interest of institutional stakeholders” (Schroeder, 2004, p. 13). For the 18 institutions in the BPAP study, the issues they cared about that

led to the programs included student attrition, empty or aging residence halls, budget crises, negative data about student development or behavior, and so on. Regardless of the issue or question, however, the answer—the “good idea”—focused on engaging students in educationally purposeful activities that encouraged integration and application of new ideas and skills and bridged in-class and out-of-class venues.

Third, *take advantage of opportunities*. In many cases, the BPAP partnership programs evolved from existing relationships or existing conditions, including some that appeared at first glance to be problems (e.g., low levels of student retention). Corollaries of this lesson are (a) *create partnerships with your friends, not your enemies*, and (b) *do not try to create partnership programs from scratch*. Trying to create and sustain an effective partnership program in the absence of a history of collaboration or even in the absence of one or two good relationships from which to build is probably fruitless. In that situation, relationship-building should be tackled first (Magolda, 2005).

Lesson four is *engage in assessment*. Start somewhere—with satisfaction surveys if necessary—but begin to build a body of evidence from which you can demonstrate effectiveness, meet demands for accountability, obtain and allocate scarce resources, and facilitate change. Several programs in the BPAP study attributed their survival as well as their accolades to “good data,” outcomes data that showed they were doing what they claimed and that what they were doing mattered to student success.

The fifth, and final, lesson is to *expect partnerships to be a lot of work*. Largely a consequence of the previous four, this lesson emphasizes that, to realize their potential, partnership programs require significant attention to relationships, including persistent,

clear, and meaningful communication and celebration of accomplishments. Partnerships require an understanding of contexts, cultures and subcultures, and the political landscapes of the institution (and beyond). They require developing and maintaining a shared vision for the purposes of the partnership program and a shared understanding of what is important—and what is not—about student learning and about working together. Effective partnership programs require administrative support. Effort is required to get started and, in many cases, even more effort is needed to keep going and to keep going in the right directions, particularly if those directions change over time. Assessment, again, is a critical component of these efforts, but ongoing assessment, too, can be a lot of work. We were struck, however, by the extent to which educators involved in the partnership programs focused on their enjoyment of their experiences rather than on the work the programs entailed; over and over, and across the institutions, we heard, “It’s so much fun!”

### Implications for Further Research

Research about the effectiveness of academic and student affairs partnerships is in its infancy. Whereas literature advocating their use is easy to find, research about the extent to which they are “a good idea,” and in what forms, under what circumstances, in what ways, and for what students, is scarce. That is good news and bad news. The bad news is little

empirical guidance exists for persons or institutions interested in deciding if a partnership program is a good idea in their particular context. The good news is partnership program effectiveness is a topic open for study, whether with quantitative measures or qualitative methods, and via single-institution case studies or multiple-site approaches. Studies that attempt to identify, then test, measures of effectiveness would be particularly useful. But any well-designed research seeking to answer the questions, “Is collaboration a good idea? And what evidence do we have to say one way or the other?” will make a useful contribution.

### CONCLUSION

We have focused here on “good” practices for partnership programs, rather than “best” practices, because—as we noted in the previous section—one of the key messages we want to send is the primary importance of institutional context for determining what, if any, partnership programs should occur at a particular college or university and what those programs should include. Partnership programs should, above all, begin with the educational purposes of the institution and respect and serve the needs and characteristics of specific institutions and students.

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