FROM THE FIELD

Making Community-Based Research Work: Lessons Learned from a Liberal Arts College

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Abstract

Trinity College launched the Community Learning Research Fellows Program in 2011 to support undergraduate community-based research (CBR). Our goal was to create an environment that supports high-quality undergraduate research consistent with the principles of community learning. Our strategy focused on building the right type of collaborative relationships among the different actors involved in CBR. We learned three important lessons in our efforts to support these relationships: (1) The community perspective must be integrated into the structure of the program to lend it authority; (2) Peer learning should be used to better prepare students to meet the challenges of CBR; and (3) Expanding the collaborative learning model to include a diverse group of participants empowers students to construct knowledge with and for their community partners. The broader implications of these lessons are discussed in the conclusion.

Introduction

In 2011, Trinity College created the *Community Learning Research Fellows Program* to support undergraduate community-based research (CBR) in the Hartford, CT area. In this program, students work in partnership with community organizations and under the supervision of faculty advisors to create knowledge for social action. From the very beginning, the program focused on mentoring young scholars and on creating the conditions for mutually beneficial and respectful partnerships between Trinity and Hartford's many community organizations (Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010).

The key challenge we faced in establishing the program was creating an environment that supported high-quality undergraduate research consistent with the principles of community learning. These principles emphasize collaborative partnerships between college and community that support social change and value multiple sources of and approaches to knowledge production and dissemination (Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo, & Donohue, 2003). The program's goal was not only to guide students through the different

stages of research but also to foster the right type of relationships between students and community partners, among students, and between students and the faculty and staff who participate in the program.

We focus on "relationship-building" precisely because it helps students change how they think about research: Students learn to appreciate research as an inherently social process that embodies extended discussion, revision, and reappraisal. They learn how to both consider a variety of viewpoints and "reframe" their research question(s) and the criteria by which they judge success. This re-envisioning of the "why" and "so what" of research broadens students' understanding of how knowledge is created, communicated, and shared, and it also underscores the importance of community-driven social change (Stoecker, 2013). We found that by focusing on the process of relationship-building, students successfully shifted from learning about the community to working with and for the community. Most importantly, we learned that our goals could not be achieved without modeling the program itself around the principles of CBR.

Origins of the Program

The impetus for the program was threefold. First, we wanted to leverage an already strong (yet uneven) record of CBR initiatives carried out by individual Trinity College faculty members and students over the past 20 years. One of the limitations of this previous work was that it often took place in isolation without the support of a broader, more formal learning community of students, faculty, staff, and community members. Moreover, if individual faculty members stepped away from a research project, there was no mechanism for continuing the community-college partnership. Thus, the new program aimed to strengthen undergraduate CBR by offering a developmental research curriculum with a collaborative learning model and more formal institutional support.

Second, we wanted to offer a clearer "pathway" for students interested in community learning at Trinity. Over the past two decades, the Trinity College has offered community-engaged seminars for first-year students and a wide array of community learning courses across many different disciplines and at all levels of instruction, including as part of senior thesis projects in the social sciences, humanities, and self-designed interdisciplinary majors. Since 2000, students have also had the option to complete a six-course community action minor. With the launch of the Fellows Program in 2011, the goal has been to add a more advanced option, whereby students could further build on their achievements as community learning practitioners and become more independent in their civic engagement.

Third, we wanted to grow the ways in which longer-term partnerships with community organizations could take root. Over time, these sustained partnerships enable participants to explore multidimensional issues. Research projects can be sequenced over multiple semesters to better align with and support our partners' efforts to enhance community development, effect social change, and strengthen organizational capabilities (Strand et al., 2003). Since 2017, we have begun to experiment with new programmatic components to move us toward meeting this final goal.

Methodology and Program Structure

In designing the program, we began with two main elements. We focused on projects that support community actors in implementing the agendas that animate their work and meet their own priorities. Our second priority was to support student-driven collaborative partnerships. These two elements have practical implications. The first strengthens the community partners' commitments to the CBR projects and enhances the possibility for community-driven social change. It also lays the groundwork for incorporating CBR projects that more fully aim to achieve community empowerment and social transformation (Lewis, 2004). The second element requires students to take the lead in building the relationships with their community partners.

Placing students in the lead, however, required us to confront two obstacles. First, the community-driven model at its core assumes a common ground and a set of shared values between Trinity College students and local community partners, such as a shared understanding about access to quality health care, education, and housing, or the importance of local entrepreneurial initiatives for long-term community development. This commonality supports working together collaboratively to achieve the desired change. And yet, students often have different backgrounds (with different life experiences) than those of our community partners, and they often have little training—or experience—in creating collaborative partnerships with non-traditional academic partners. Similarly, community partners have limited experience in framing their agenda items so that they dovetail with academic projects. To overcome this obstacle, we focused on reconciling these diverse life experiences and intentionally building connections between the two groups of actors.

We sought an innovative approach to "bridging the divide" between college and community. We created the position of community consultant who was responsible for advising all the research projects and participating in each stage of the research process, including weekly seminars and monthly colloquia. In filling this position, we sought someone who possessed both a deep knowledge of Hartford and local non-profit, grassroots, and public organizations, as well as experience in conducting CBR and/or teaching in an academic setting. The community consultant would thus have experience with both academia and local community-based organizations. They would be able to "translate" the community perspective into clear, recognizable objectives for student (and faculty) participants, accommodate the limits of the academic calendar in project designs, and be familiar with navigating the social relations among the different members of the academic community. Equally, they would be able

to communicate some of the "unspoken" conflicts or limitations that community organizations might face and/or the anticipated learning curve a community organization may exhibit in partnering on an undergraduate CBR project (Lash, personal communication, December 5, 2019). The ultimate goal was to help students produce research findings that support community-driven social change.

The second obstacle focuses on resolving the tension between student learning on the one hand and supporting community transformation on the other (Lewis, 2004). We realized that in order to bring the two objectives together we needed to reorient students' thinking about research, empower them to act in their new roles, and work to secure community partner "buy in."

With this goal in mind, we borrowed ideas from Kenneth Bruffee's (1995) "knowledge communities" and Edgar Schein's (2013) concept of "humble inquiry" in order to model research as a collaborative social process that relies on collective inquiry and respect for (and interest in) others' knowledge and experience. This approach requires upending the traditional academic model of research and its accompanying presumptions about who is an expert and how (and with whom) knowledge is created. It also asks students to reimagine the research problem and potential solutions from the perspective of their community partners. In the end, our focus is as much on the research process as on the outcomes themselves, and our belief is that useful findings only evolve from a mutually respectful and beneficial collaborative process (Bowen, 2012).

To accomplish these goals, we developed the following curriculum over the course of several years: a weekly seminar, a monthly colloquium, and a final capstone conference. The weekly seminar focuses on helping students move through the different stages of CBR and hone research tools, techniques, and skills, while the monthly colloquium focuses on the "bigger picture" and allows students to take stock of their progress, present preliminary findings, and receive feedback on their work. The final conference brings together the student researchers, their faculty advisors, and community partners in a public presentation of the final research findings to the greater Trinity College community. Each student earns ½ course credit (the equivalent of two credit hours) after successfully completing the three curricular components.

We opened the program to all undergraduate students who had already completed at least one community learning project as part of a Trinity College course or while studying abroad. To enroll in the program, students propose a credit-bearing research project that meets the needs of a community partner or facilitates the work of that partner in some way. Each student has an individual faculty advisor who provides disciplinary guidance, oversees the research, helps to determine the final "product," and evaluates the project for academic credit at the end of the semester (or academic year). Table 1 summarizes the types of projects that students undertook during the first seven years of the program. The table lists by major the number of students, sample research questions, research themes, types of partners, and research methods employed.

During this period, 70 students participated in the program. Each year, the program includes a combination of team and individual projects. In addition, the types of projects vary. They may count as part of the students' major requirements, as a general elective, or as fulfilling a minor requirement. Although there are no restrictions with regard to how the project fits into a given student's curriculum, typical examples include:

- As part of a one-semester or two-semester senior thesis;
- As the research component of a senior seminar for completion of a student's major;
- As an independent study (both major- and non-major credit-bearing studies are accepted);
- As the synthesizing exercise for the Community Action minor; and
- As the research component of an internship-based course.

Thus, students come to the program through many different routes, and faculty who serve as research advisors may be outside the students' home departments.

Lessons Learned

We faced a number of logistical and financial obstacles when the program began in 2011. It was difficult to find a common time to meet because program participants came from all four divisions of Trinity College, each with its own schedule of classes and administrative timetables. In addition, the program included not only faculty and students but also Trinity College staff and a community expert, whose own work did not easily fit into the academic calendar. The solution was to split our meetings between evenings and Trinity College's weekly "common hour," when classes were not in session.

Table 1

Majors (# of Students)	Sample Research Questions	Themes	Types of Partners	Methods
Psychology (21 students)	Students' metacognition skills and motivation to learn: Does subject area matter?	Education	local public schools	Experiments; Quantitative
	Maternal health and infant mortality at the city-level: Have specific objectives of the city's strategic plan been met?	Community Health	state-level health agencies and outreach programs	Quantitative
	What conditions in a youth violence prevention program promote the highest levels of youth engagement?	Youth Education	private consultant for social sector organizations	Qualitative
	What Hispanic media sources should the state department of consumer protection and community organizations use in order to reach a targeted audience?	Hispanic & Media Studies	state-level agency	Mixed
Educational Studies (14 students)	How is parental engagement defined by policymakers, professionals, and parents involved in the two-generation planning and decision process for serving low-income families?	Community Engagement	private philanthropy foundation	Mixed
	Does wealth-restrictive zoning correlate with the cost of home ownership? Is wealth-restrictive zoning associated with school district performance?	Housing	housing advocacy organization	Quantitative
	How do teachers in an urban school interpret and act on the Common Core State Standards? What teaching and curriculum design strategies are teachers using to meet these new standards?	Education Policy	local public schools	Mixed
Political Science (11 students)	How can recidivism be reduced among the local ex-offender population?	Human Rights	non-profit advocacy organization	Qualitative
	Can community gardens significantly employ at-risk urban youth?	Youth Education	non-profit organization on urban food systems	Mixed
	In what ways does the English language learners program continue to fall short of meeting the needs of new arrival students?	Education & Hispanic Studies	public middle school	Qualitative
Economics (9 students)	Who chooses? A spatial analysis of school choice activity in the local metropolitan area.	Education	non-profit organization on educational achievement	Econometric Analysis
	Does race play a role in bank mortgage lending in the local metropolitan area?	Community Development	community development financial institution	Mixed
	Does bank lending activity differ in neighborhoods where a majority of the population is non-white?	Housing	community development financial institution	Econometric Analysis
Urban Studies (8 students)	What are the most common concerns and questions about the services available to immigrants in the local urban area?	Immigration	public library's integration, language & citizenship center	Mixed
	What issues do neighborhood small businesses rank as most important, and do they match the priorities set by the neighborhood revitalization association?	Community Development	neighborhood-based community advocacy organization	Mixed
	How can a mid-sized city in the Northeast, increase demand for biking, particularly among low-income groups?	Sustainability	municipal planning department	Mixed

Major (students)	Research Question(s)	Field/Topic	Organization	Methodology
Public Policy & Law (4 students)	Has the utilization rate of oral health care services for Medicaid enrollees changed? What factors help to explain the change?	Health	non-profit advocacy organization	Mixed
	What steps need to be taken before creating a neighborhood multicultural center for immigrants and refugees?	Community Development; Immigration	neighborhood-based community advocacy organization	Mixed
Culture and Language Studies (5 students)	How do different members of the local Peruvian community view food as "cultural capital"?	Community Development	Peruvian consulate	Qualitative
	What stance do public hearing participants take on the Common Core State Standards, and how do their responses reflect the community they represent?	Education	parent-led organization & coalition	Mixed
International Studies (4 students)	To what extent are there economic disparities between refugees and non-refugees in the Hartford area?	Immigration & Human Rights	commission on immigrants & refugees	Quantitative
	Is the local community garden program utilizing its gardens in the most effective way to increase the social capital of urban gardeners and neighborhoods?	Community Development	non-profit horticulture organization	Qualitative
Anthropology (4 students)	Is it beneficial for teaching artists to collaborate with mental health professionals when engaging in art with incarcerated populations?	Arts & Human Rights	arts non-profit organization	Qualitative
	Can a community-run food access group help fight the urban food desert?	Community Development	non-profit social enterprise	Qualitative
Human Rights Studies (2 students)	How do faith-based organizations fill in the gaps between state-provided services and the norms of human rights? What are the implications of immigrant accommodation via faith-based social justice for the human rights discourse on citizenship?	Human Rights Studies	catholic faith-based organizations	Qualitative
Environmental Science, Chemistry & Computer Science (3 students)	Can App Inventor change student views on computer science? And, if so, how can it be incorporated into high school curricula?	Education	public math & science high school	Mixed
	How can the advanced Instrumental Methods of Chemical Analysis course incorporate lessons for students at the public magnet school?	Education	public magnet school	Experiments; Qualitative
	Is there a difference in the toxic trace metal distribution between two upstream sources? Does the difference help to explain sources of downstream contamination?	Sustainability	Non-profit watershed stewardship organization	Quantitative
Interdisciplinary Health Studies (1 Student)	How do nurses in the labor & delivery unit of a hospital overcome the language barrier between Spanish-speaking patients and themselves?	Health; Hispanic Studies	teaching hospital	Qualitative
American Studies (1 Student)	How can the ELCA use media literacy with high-school aged youth to address formation of morality?	Youth Culture & Religion	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	Mixed

One of our most important constraints was budgetary. Our limited funding, which depended at times on "soft" monies, inhibited our ability to attract new faculty to the program and to gain visibility for the program itself. Other Trinity College initiatives either offered more generous faculty funding and/or were more closely aligned with traditional measures that departments used to reappoint and promote faculty. During the first three years, we focused on providing modest research expense grants for each student project and covering minimal material costs. We finally secured a permanent budget—with funding available for competitive faculty and community consultant stipends and a one-course release for the program coordinator—when the college administration increased its recognition of the program's achievements.

As the program structure evolved, we arrived at a set of practices that advanced our goal of producing high-quality undergraduate CBR. These practices collectively underscore the importance of building the right type of collaborative partnerships among the different CBR actors to ensure the centrality of the community voice. The next section describes the three important lessons the program learned in the process of developing these relationships.

Make the "Community Voice" an Integral Part of the Research Process

One of the key challenges for students is placing the community viewpoint at the center of their research partnerships. This can be especially difficult for undergraduate students, who often are undertaking their first, full-length research project. Part of the challenge stems from being able to recognize and appreciate the different forms that knowledge and expertise can take and the different ways in which knowledge can be produced. The other part stems from being able to create a product that is both academically rigorous and valuable to the community partner. Our response to this challenge has evolved over time, as we have learned how better to incorporate a more comprehensive role for the community.

When launching the program in Fall 2011, we first combined the traditional model of faculty supervision of student research with a monthly interdisciplinary colloquium during which student researchers discussed their progress with faculty and staff members from different disciplines and with different expertise in CBR. Early in the program's history, we also invited a community

consultant to join each of the monthly colloquiums (co-leading the opening meeting each year) and to act as an outside reviewer of the students' presentations at the final capstone event. This individual brought to the program years of experience in directing CBR between local community organizations and Trinity faculty members, a deep knowledge of Hartford-area organizations, and a long record of teaching a community-based internship course at Trinity.

More recently, we have focused on strengthening the connection between the individual partner organizations and the program itself. Early in the semester, the program coordinator (often with the student researcher) now meets with each partner organization to answer questions, address concerns, and identify how the student's research might be made more useful to the community organization. These meetings help to solidify the relationship (ensuring partner "buy in") and increase the probability that the outcomes achieved will align with the organizations' own goals (Lewis, 2004).

Over the past year, we have transformed and expanded the role of the community consultant—essentially creating a "community expert in residence" position—to integrate more fully the community perspective into each step of the research process. In addition to participating in the monthly colloquium meetings and the final capstone event, the community expert now joins the weekly seminar meetings of the student researchers and program coordinator. The community consultant acts as a full member of the seminar: They comment on the weekly readings and the students' written responses to those readings; offer guidance when problems arise; respond to the students' "action steps" (which are posted after each meeting); and join the team of reviewers as students prepare their final presentations. The critical point is that the community expert is an *equal partner in the discussion throughout the semester*. They can thus bring to the forefront the community perspective at each step of the research process and help find solutions to the many practical obstacles that arise in CBR in a way that faculty members may not be able to, either for lack of time or training (Bartel & Nigro, 2016). As our community consultant explains:

> My role is to inform the students and faculty of the hurdles and shortcomings that may reside in a community organization (outside the pitch the

organization itself gives). This way the student, along with their faculty advisor, can create workable metrics for the project that will work for the organization.

The difference in having a community expert in residence is that they are often still active in the community, and they carry with them the awareness of the projects. This allows them to make connections for the project with other people and spaces outside of the organization the students have partnered with, that can assist in providing insight, data-mining, or network possibilities. The benefit for the student is contact with different agencies, people, organizers, schools, all of which help to shape the students' understanding of Hartford, and the importance of community partnerships. A successful project gives the community partner more than they bargained for even if it's not what they initially expected to receive. As the community consultant, the purpose of being there weekly is to help keep things to scale, and to present enough different community connections that the students can hand over a project (and information) on what the possible next steps and allies can be. (J. Jeter, personal communication, November 30, 2019)

The consultant's presence thus helps to align the project with the community organizations' own capacities, offers possibilities that could not be envisioned at the start of the project, and reinforces the *authority* of the community voice. In the end, students come to see their own partnerships in a new light and can better envision an issue from a different perspective.

Originally, we considered asking the different community partners each to join the weekly seminar for one or two sessions rather than creating a "community consultant" position. However, this alternative model would be difficult to implement: Some partners do not have the time, or resources, to participate in the seminar; others prefer a more distant collaborative relationship (closer to a consulting model) that entails stepping away after the objectives and goals of the research project are set and allowing the student to carry out the project with only periodic updates and opportunities for feedback. Even if these hurdles

did not exist, the rotating "chair" at the seminar table would undermine the authority of the position, and it would represent a lot of work for each community participant, as they would need to be briefed on each project as they prepared to join the conversation at a particular point in the semester. Lastly, changing the discussants every couple of weeks would weaken the idea that as a group the seminar participants were committing to an uninterrupted process of collective discovery.

Use Peer Learning to Encourage Collective Responsibility and Respect for Different Perspectives

While we saw the weekly seminar as being a space to provide additional guidance and support to students, we also realized it serves a separate and equally important function. Its emphasis on peer learning invites the students to see themselves as members of a community with a sense of responsibility to one another and to the success of each project. Honing this "craft of interdependence" ultimately produces more mature researchers who appreciate the value of collaborative engagement and thereby can better meet the challenges of CBR (Bruffee, 1995).

Over time, we found that students faced certain common challenges each year. First, we over-estimated students' level of comfort and expertise in working with community partners, including their capacity to remain flexible in order to make community-based collaborations successful. Although the students selected for the program are experienced in community learning, their experience can vary in important ways: some have worked closely with community organizations, learning how to build relationships and communicate with a non-traditional academic partner, whose resources, work patterns, and time frames differ significantly from those of an academic institution. Others, however, have participated in community learning projects for which the faculty member is the main negotiator and point of contact with the community partner. In these latter cases, although the students may have learned a good deal about the partner organization, they remained at a distance from the organization itself or had only limited experience in building the relationship.

Second, each year many students have found it challenging to receive (and digest) the advice that is offered at each of the monthly colloquium meetings. These meetings involve an interactive process of presentation, conversation, and

feedback that requires students to learn how to evaluate and discriminate among the different types of advice they receive from a diverse group of participants. Students must not only be open to feedback but also be able to critique it. This is particularly difficult for first-time researchers. At the same time, however, many students report that they enjoy sharing their work with one another at the monthly meetings.

> I often felt that what my peers had to say was just as important and I benefitted from the small "sideline" conversations that we had. (Research Fellow, Fall 2011)

> The other fantastic part of the colloquium was getting to see other students' work…. I enjoyed learning what other students are doing in the community and following their project over the course of the semester. (Research Fellow, Fall 2012)

The problem was that the program—as originally structured—did not offer many *regular* opportunities for peer exchange.

In order to address this gap and the challenges faced by students each year, we added a weekly research seminar oriented to achieving three important goals. The first takes the students carefully through the entire arc of the research process and simultaneously asks them to rethink how each stage of research is executed in order to incorporate the principles of mutual learning, collaboration, and creating knowledge for social action (Strand et al., 2003). Part of this process includes troubleshooting problems common to CBR, such as communicating and managing expectations with community partners, negotiating changes when obstacles present themselves, and addressing IRB concerns.

The second goal is to emphasize peer learning and coaching. Prior to each session, students complete a set of readings and a written assignment. Students are then regularly assigned the role of discussant for another student's project. Some of the sessions also include specific training to help students carry out their research and effectively communicate their findings. These workshops act to support the individual faculty-student relationship. For example, while a student will work closely with their individual faculty advisor on interview guidelines and data collection and analysis, the seminar focuses on how to conduct interviews, visualize qualitative and quantitative data, and create a research poster that communicates well with one's target audience. Staff members in IT and Community Learning often co-lead these workshops.

The third goal is to model partnerships for students based on the principles of "humble inquiry" (Schein, 2013). Building a collaborative process with individuals who are different from them requires students to "ask questions and build relationships that are based on mutual respect and the recognition that others know things that… [they] may need to know in order to get a job done" (Schein, 2013, p. 2). The goal of the seminar is to "operationalize" what we mean by mutual respect. The format of each session therefore emphasizes dialogue *among peers*, with a shared sense of *responsibility to one another*, guided by the idea of *learning with and from others*.

At its core, then, the seminar works because it is a place where students are able to experiment with their ideas, voice concerns, and work through the feedback they receive (from both partners and colloquium participants) in a comfortable, informal environment. Each student is encouraged to share ideas and interpretations as they take shape and provide feedback to their colleagues. A researcher from Fall 2017 summarized the typical response of students to the seminar:

> I really enjoyed the seminar because it kept me on track with how my own project should be progressing while giving me really good feedback and a safe space for open discussions. Because I have never done a project of this magnitude it was really nice to have feedback and be able to come to the seminar with questions about various challenges I faced. That feedback came from my fellow students and our community expert so it was good to get a lot of different perspectives on my project. (Research Fellow, Fall 2017)

By creating and carefully structuring the opportunity for mutual learning, the seminar serves as a model for building cooperative, mutually respectful, and beneficial partnerships.

Employ "Communities of Practice" to Emphasize How Knowledge is Constructed Through Conversation

The weekly seminars are embedded in a larger monthly conversation with all the members of the program—faculty, staff, and community

consultant—during which the students share their ideas and respond to feedback from individuals who possess a wide range of expertise, local knowledge, and disciplinary training. This nesting, or multiple levels, of dialogue both challenges students to address a variety of perspectives and offers them additional practice in relationship-building. It helps them to construct their research narrative in a way that acknowledges the role of collaborative conversation in creating knowledge (Bruffee, 1995; Grabill, 2012).

While students meet each week to move carefully through the research process, the larger monthly meetings focus on research updates and specific challenges that the students are facing at that point in their research. These meetings provide opportunities for students to step back and see where they are and assess what type of help they need and what remains unclear or troublesome for them. It is critical for students to take the lead in this meta-reflection: each researcher prepares a set of materials and questions for discussion in advance of the meeting. Students are then assigned to a discussion group with faculty and staff members other than their own faculty advisor in order to encourage conversation across disciplinary boundaries and ensure that the students drive the conversation. After each meeting, students report on any adjustments or changes they expect to incorporate into their research design and/or execution.

The colloquium structure is effective because it empowers students to meet the challenges of CBR. First, it reinforces the idea of research as a social process, and it underpins the work of the weekly seminars. Students are repeatedly encouraged to think about how to produce research that can be useful to and meet the needs of their community partner. For example, colloquium participants help students think about how best to present their data, or what form(s) it should take to have the community group's interests in mind. Similarly, students receive helpful advice on how to put together their final report in order to increase accessibility to and functionality for the community partner.

In addition, the multiple levels of discussion *over time* help students become more comfortable with feedback and realize that the process itself is as important as the final output. Lastly, the colloquium format asks students to assume greater responsibility. They move from a more informal, "lower stakes" environment of the weekly seminar, with emphasis on peer exchange, to a broader conversation for which they help to set the agenda. In the end, students learn the importance of telling a story: a story that gives meaning to their research and communicates why their research matters to a wider public. Each cohort of students has noted this benefit:

> I came out of the [colloquium] meeting with a renewed and invigorated sense of exploratory drive which definitely helped in making sense of the project we were doing for the semester. (Research Fellow, Fall 2012)

> The most important thing I learned from the colloquium was the importance of multiple, diverse opinions. Just as you would when forming a board or a committee, you should invite and seek out the most diverse group of people as possible when having a project analyzed. Different people come with different opinions and perspectives, which is invaluable to making a project as good or as complete as it can be. (Research Fellow, Fall 2016)

> In doing this type of research… what is even more important than figuring out the results is actually knowing how to make them accessible and meaningful to the public. The statistical results are meaningless without a story behind them, so it has been a great challenge for me to find and tell such a story.

> [I was encouraged] to constantly rethink my research question and make it clearer in connecting with the real need of my target community population. (Research Fellow, Fall 2014)

Moving Forward

These three lessons provide strategies for tackling some of the most important challenges that undergraduate students face in doing CBR:

- incorporating different (and sometimes conflicting) perspectives into the research design;
- communicating with and managing expectations of community organizations;
- valuing both community and academic expertise; and
- integrating academic knowledge with applied practice.

These lessons, learned over the course of time and through practice, suggest an approach to program organization that equips students with the skills and mindset to engage in a research process that embodies the principles of mutual learning and respectful collaboration.

Finally, our lessons underscore the importance of building ongoing, long-term relationships with community partners. Yet this is also where we need to strengthen our efforts as we move forward. Over the past year, we have begun conducting formal review sessions with community organizations with whom we have recently collaborated. The goal of these sessions is to create a better mechanism for building longer-term relationships—a mechanism that offers opportunities for the community organizations to identify researchable projects and that makes possible the development of multiple projects over time to support the work of a given partner in its long-term social action project(s) (Stoecker, 2013; Strand et al., 2003).

In the review sessions, each organization provides feedback on a past collaborative project to help us to identify where the program succeeded in meeting the goals of CBR and where it fell short (e.g., how the research results were utilized and in what ways—if any—the research contributed to the outcomes achieved by the organization). The organizations also propose new CBR projects for future student researchers. These ideas have formed the nucleus of a "partners' page" on our website, and this page has been integrated into our recruitment process for new cohorts of student research fellows. However, we need to better coordinate these efforts with our outreach to students and faculty members in order to sustain ongoing partnerships. Only then can we hope to increase the positive outcomes and possible impact that student-led CBR can have for community organizations (Beckman and Wood, 2016; Lewis, 2004).

Final Observations
In the end, building multilayered relationships among the different actors involved in CBR works because it brings students into conversation with diverse perspectives and sets of knowledge. This exposure to ambiguity and open-endedness encourages students to reconsider how and by whom knowledge is created and, through the process, can challenge their familiar ways of thinking and framing problems. Careful, structured reflection in addition to the support of formal learning communities can foster personal and intellectual growth and enable students to

re-frame their research problems to increase their understanding of CBR and meet its core principles (Baxter-Magolda, 1998; Erickson, 2007; Fetherston and Kelly, 2007; Grossman, 2009). As the students themselves have emphasized:

> My general idea became a clear question as I saw the relevance of my project through the eyes of my community partners. (Research Fellow, Fall 2012)

> It is very easy to fall into the place where we believe we are reaching out to the community as sources of help and knowledge. This common mistake doesn't allow of us to see that it is truly them–our community partners–who are the experts in the field.... [The program] taught me that in order to apply theory when working with the community it is necessary to adapt it to the community's needs, a process that is only possible through the collaborating with our community partners. (Research Fellow, Fall 2013)

Finally, the collaborative nature of CBR helps students develop a sense of agency in their own education and acts as a catalyst for looking within and seeing previously unnoticed or invisible aspects of their own culture and communities. In this way, Trinity College's Community Learning Research Fellows Program encourages empathy and opens the way for creating more sustainable programs and partnerships that serve the community well.

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