This paper introduces an exploratory case study involving students enrolled in an urban experiential learning program called Los Angeles Term at Azusa Pacific University (APU). Students from LA Term were paired with students from Central High School to survey community residents of Mar Vista Gardens, a housing project in Los Angeles. The surveys were part of a larger effort aimed at advocating for a change in practice concerning community and residential gardens in Mar Vista Gardens. The learning activity resulted from an existing partnership that LA Term had with American Friends Service Committee–Los Angeles (AFSC-LA) through LA Term’s Internship Program. This case demonstrates how community partnerships and engagement that are developed and maintained can provide rich potential for critical service-learning opportunities that are reciprocal and go beyond instrumental learning.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

In 1990, E. Boyer renewed the call for higher education institutions to engage more substantially as partners with local communities in his work, Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professorate (Boyer, 1990). His appeal for a “scholarship of engagement” argued that the university ought to bring its resources into the community and address the “most pressing social, civic, economic, and moral problems” of the day (Boyer, 1996, p. 19). In so doing, higher education institutions can reclaim their relevance and mission in society.
This plea to the university continues today as several advocates echo the arguments of Boyer (Benson & Harkavy, 2000; Bringle, Games, & Malloy, 1999; Enos & Morton, 2003; Maurice, 2001; Sandy & Holland, 2006). Moreover, many have heralded community-campus partnerships to hold key benefits to the university and its ability to be relevant in our society while promoting civic engagement (Boyte & Hollander, 1999; Bringle et al., 1999; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Zlotkowski, 1996).

**EMPHASIS ON SERVICE LEARNING**

In response to Boyer’s appeal to the university to reexamine its role in the local community, many college campuses have focused on service learning as a way to engage the local community. Thomas (1998) identifies 10 different ways that higher education institutions can be involved with the community: (1) service-learning classes, (2) collaborative extension and continuing education programs, (3) clinical and field-based programs, (4) top-down administrative initiatives, (5) centralized administrative-academic units with outreach mission, (6) academic centers and institutes, (7) academic outreach and professional services, (8) student initiatives, (9) economic and political programs, and (10) access to facilities and cultural enrichment. The growth of service-learning classes on campuses since the 1990s is one source of evidence that there has been a renewal of mission and responsibility to the community in higher education (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Service learning can be defined as follows:

A course-based, credit bearing educational experiences in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility.

(Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, p. 111)

Proponents of service learning argue that its major benefit is its ability to develop strong citizenship skills among those involved (Carr, 1999; Gorham, 1992; Nyden, Figert, Shibley, & Burrows, 1997; Rhoades, 1998; Robinson: 2000; Stringer et al., 1997). Moreover, a number of studies have shown that service learning can increase students’ academic and life skill development as well (Astin & Sax, 1998; Densmore, 2000; Elyer & Giles, 1999; Kezar, 2002).

Service-learning opportunities help engage students’ learning and attention toward concrete social problems in the community while in school rather than waiting until they graduate (Bordelon & Phillips, 2006; Myers-Lipton, 2003). Furthermore, Bordelon & Phillips (2006) suggest that service-learning opportunities appeal to students because they often perceive them in a positive light.

Bordelon and Phillips (2006) also argue that service learning is one of the most meaningful ways for community-campus partnerships to flourish, for the following reasons: (a) its compatibility with the central mission of higher education, (b) its ability to create various forms of civic engagement while improving scholarly activities, (c) its ability to involve faculty and students in meaningful service related to community issues, (d) its value for community members as co-educators, and (e) its requirement for partnership among all parties for success (Benson & Harkavy, 2000; Bordelon & Phillips, 2006; Zlotkowski, 1996).

**CHALLENGES IN A SCHOLARSHIP OF ENGAGEMENT: MOVING FROM SERVICE TO RECIPROCITY**

Nevertheless, the journey of the university into the local community has not been immune to its critics. Scholars have argued that too often, universities have related to communities as “pockets of needs, laboratories for experimentation, or passive recipients of expertise” instead of as partners in mission and research (Bringle et al., 1999, p. 9). In her review of the literature surrounding scholarly community engagement, Sandmann (2008) observed that in 1998–2000, several authors maintained that community involvement for the university needed to move beyond service to engagement embracing “bidirectional interactions, reciprocity, and mutual respect” (Sandmann, 2008, G. Bahng
p. 94; see also Byrne & Russon, 1998; Leiveton, 2004; Simpson, 2000). This plea seemed to be a revival of Kendall’s earlier warning that service learning seemed to hold the potential for paternalism as she wrote, “[service] suggests an inequity between the ‘servers’ and ‘those served’...It does not carry the connotation of social justice” (Kendall, 1990, p. 24). Accordingly, many have argued that service learning for the sake of civic engagement among students is not enough. Instead, a social justice agenda that aims to address social transformation and structural inequities is a more appropriate goal for a university’s engagement with the community.

Mitchell (2008) continued the work of a number of scholars (Kendall, 1990; Rhoads, 1997; Wade, 1997) who sought to distinguish between charity and service by defining a traditional charitable services approach and a critical approach to service learning. The traditional charitable services approach typically involves activities such as organizing food drives, painting or building houses, cleaning up city streets, and peer counseling (Robinson, 2000). Conversely, a critical approach to service learning emphasizes working toward redistribution of power, building authentic relationships, and having a social change orientation (Mitchell, 2008; Rice & Pollack, 2000; Rosenberger, 2000). A growing number of scholars have argued that the traditional charitable services approach is ineffective where social justice aims are concerned and propose more emphasis on the critical approach to service learning to address structural inequities and foster mutual partnerships (Brown, 2001; Butin, 2005; Cipolle, 2004; Mitchell, 2008; Robinson, 2000; Rosenberger, 2000; Walker, 2000).

Gorham (1992) argues that traditional approaches are often one-time experiences that provide poor training and learning opportunities for students in terms of critical civic engagement and social transformation. Furthermore, the traditional charitable services approach can reinforce stereotypes and assumptions that view community members as clients and recipients instead of as partners and social change agents (McBride, Brav, Menon, & Sherraden, 2006; Pompa, 2002; Sleeter, 2001).

Hondagneu-Sotelo and Raskoff (1994) discuss the challenges associated with integrating traditional service learning in their sociology curriculum as students served communities in poor, urban neighborhoods in Los Angeles. Accompanied with training and monitoring, the university volunteer program then placed students in neighborhood schools and adult learning centers where they would volunteer two hours of community service each week for eight weeks. One of the “most serious and most frustrating” problems the researchers discovered were students’ “tendency to reach, unwarranted, often racist conclusions based on selective perceptions” (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raskoff, 1994, p. 250). They explained that when student assumptions went unchallenged, many tended to “see socioeconomic inequality as the result of poor attitudes” (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raskoff, 1994, p. 250).

Thus, although many have also argued that the opportunities for service learning are a major benefit of community-campus partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Dorado & Giles, 2004; Gelmon, Holland, Seiffer, Shinnamon, & Connors, 1998; Jacoby, 2003; Sandy & Holland, 2006), others have noted the shortcomings of service-learning efforts in local communities, especially when approaching it through a traditional model of charity and service.

RECIPROCAL SCHOLARLY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH CRITICAL LEARNING

Although advocating for critical approaches to service learning has received much attention, less attention has been given to examining what actually happens when such approaches to service learning are implemented. Similarly, although making appeals for more community-campus partnerships have received much attention, scholars have also suggested the need for more research on them (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Giles & Eyler, 1998).

What happens when students and communities engage in critical service learning aimed at
political organizing and social advocacy? What happens when service learning emerges out of an existing community-campus partnership? What happens when universities seek to foster relationships through the experience? Can there be reciprocal benefit for both parties, and how far can the learning for each go?

This paper presents one such case example: The existing community partnership with AFSC-LA helped create opportunities for LA Term to join with Central High School for a joint learning activity geared toward reciprocal roles and community change. The paper examines the learning that results from a critical service-learning activity that is (a) based in a long-term relationship with community partners, (b) geared toward responding to issues related to social power, and (c) designed to teach students about social change.

CASE STUDY: PARTNERING STUDENTS IN LOCAL ADVOCACY IN LOS ANGELES

This paper introduces a short case study examining the partnership between Los Angeles Term (LA Term), an urban experiential learning program at APU; AFSC-LA, a nonprofit organization in Los Angeles; and Central High School, a continuation school in Mar Vista Gardens and a member school of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Mar Vista Gardens is a housing project located near Culver City and is operated by the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA).

The case specifically looks at the joint learning activity that uses the critical service-learning approach. The activity took place in the spring of 2012 between the undergraduate college students in the LA Term program and the high school students from Central High School. In this learning activity, students from LA Term partnered with students from Central High School to survey community residents in Mar Vista Gardens concerning their attitudes on and need for healthy food. Specifically, the Central High School students were interested in learning about community attitudes toward gardening because they were also concerned about the future of their own community garden, planted with the help of AFSC-LA.

Students from APU’s LA Term participated in the joint learning activity as part of their course on Community Transformation in the LA Term program.

Los Angeles Term at Azusa Pacific University

LA Term is part of the Global Studies program at APU and is an experiential learning semester program designed for students to learn about urban culture, systems, and transformation. Program activities include (a) living with a host family of a different culture in Central Los Angeles; (b) interning at a local nonprofit organization (NPO) for 12 hours a week; (c) taking four courses over the semester focused on urban studies and community change using a pedagogy focused on experiential learning incorporating site visits, guest speakers, and service learning; and (d) taking public transportation exclusively when traveling to home stays, internship sites, and class meetings. LA Term cohorts typically consist of approximately 17 students who are in their sophomore or junior years of college and are usually majoring in Global Studies, Sociology, Political Science, Psychology, or Education.

Because the internship is a major component of the LA Term program, the program has dedicated significant efforts in recent years to maintain partnerships of approximately 20 nonprofit partners who operate in Central or South Los Angeles. An internship director position was created and appointed to a faculty member (myself) in the Global Studies program; the assistant director and graduate intern of the LA Term program both dedicate significant parts of their workloads to the administrative responsibilities of the Internship Program; and student intern supervisors from the partner NPOs are required to meet twice a semester with the course professor (usually myself) of Community Transformation (the service-learning course where APU students receive academic credit for their internship work).

Nonprofit partner organizations focus on a range of issues, including social service provision for marginalized groups, such as People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) or people...
who are homeless; urban youth leadership development and mentoring; gang prevention; immigrant issues and rights; affordable housing and tenant rights; political organizing around labor and environmental issues; access to healthy food in urban areas; and community-based arts programs.

American Friends Service Committee Los Angeles (AFSC-LA)
AFSC-LA has been an NPO partner of the LA Term program since 2009. The committee has used LA Term interns in its Peace Education program throughout Los Angeles. AFSC-LA is the Los Angeles operations of the larger international organization, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). AFSC, which is a Quaker organization committed to pursuing social justice, peace, and humanitarian service, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1947 as a co-recipient on behalf of all Quakers. The Los Angeles office focuses primarily on its Peace Education Program, which works to reduce “violence among youth and local communities throughout Greater Los Angeles and beyond.”

Among the primary tools that AFSC-LA uses in its Peace Education program is the activity involving leadership development around community gardening.

Central High School in Mar Vista Gardens
AFSC-LA runs its Peace Education program throughout Los Angeles in several high schools, one of them being Central High School in Mar Vista Gardens. Central High School is a continuation school in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). It describes itself as “a self-contained, single teacher, 9–12 grade classroom” and has partnerships with organizations and individuals from UCLA, Santa Monica College, The Wildwood School, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Street Poets, The Story Project, The HeArt Project, and the Labor/Community Strategy Center. Central High School is located in the Mar Vista Gardens, a housing project in southwestern Los Angeles. Mar Vista Gardens is operated and managed by the HACLA and is the fourth-largest low-income housing development in Los Angeles. It has approximately 62 buildings and 601 apartments.

Development of Learning Activity
Central High School was originally introduced to LA Term through the AFSC-LA Peace Education program. The joint learning activity originated out of conversations between the course professor for Community Transformation and the director of AFSC-LA’s Peace Education program during the standard supervisor meetings throughout the semester. The course professor had solicited input from NPO partners for possible joint learning activities that would meet NPO operation needs while providing LA Term students the opportunity to practice community surveying skills. This invitation was extended with the intent of allowing community leaders to define the needs and terms of engagement in the context of the existing partnership.

Protecting Central High School’s Community Garden
In the course of this discussion, the AFSC-LA director shared the circumstances surrounding Central High School’s community garden and suggested joining in a participatory action research project. The students at Central High School were concerned about the status of their community garden, because the HACLA seemed to have an unclear policy surrounding gardens in the housing development. In the past, residents and students had recounted to the staff at AFSC-LA incidents of how the housing authority had destroyed residents’ gardens and seemingly had a policy against gardening in the complex. Nevertheless, the policy was unstated and unclear, because the gardens of some residents had remained untouched. As such, the housing authority seemed to be exploiting tenants’ rights by seemingly destroying residents’ gardens arbitrarily and without explanation.

Thus, concerned about the status of its own community garden, AFSC-LA worked with the Central High School students on a participatory action research project aimed at learning about the attitudes and needs of the community residents concerning healthy food and gardening. The hope was that if the students could gather enough evidence from community residents...
expressing a need for healthier food and a desire to garden in the housing development, the data could be presented to the HACLA with the goal of clarifying the policy in support of gardening in the complex. The exercise would be the beginning stages of political action aimed at community change, for its intent was to gather more information from community members to confront the agency that held power over the residents to prevent future instances of unfairly destroying residents’ gardens.

Based on conversations during the meetings with the LA Term professor and the AFSC-LA director, there seemed to be an opportunity to meet the needs of both organizations. On the one hand, Central High School students could receive help and support with their community surveys from the LA Term undergraduate students while building confidence in their own ability to bring about community change. On the other hand, LA Term students would have a real hands-on opportunity to practice community surveying in a context where the data could be used to advocate for a local policy that was important to community members’ lives. Thus the opportunity appeared to have real potential to provide reciprocal benefits in the beginning stages of political organizing and advocacy.

Therefore, the LA Term professor and AFSC-LA director formulated the idea for a joint learning activity whereby data would be collected in the housing development by both groups of students surveying the community. The students would be paired—one student from Central High School and one student from LA Term—to go door-to-door throughout the 61 buildings in the development and ask members to participate in the survey. The Central High School student could provide insider information on the housing development and already had the trust of many residents since they themselves were residents, too. In addition, Central High School students had the language skills to conduct the survey in both English and Spanish; this would be important since many in the complex spoke only Spanish. LA Term students in turn would participate in the survey by accompanying the Central High School students during data collection and providing any support that was needed, such as taking notes, answering any questions residents may have, or simply providing a reassuring presence from an older student to boast their confidence in the effort. Consequently, in many ways the LA Term students were not the primary actors in the joint learning exercise and were not positioned as “saviors,” as is often common in traditional service learning (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Raskoff, 1994).

The idea was then presented to the Central High School students’ teacher who, after several conversations with the LA Term course professor, agreed to allow the students to participate in the learning activity. This decision was reached primarily because the idea itself was presented to the students, who reached a consensus to participate. Being involved in the decision possibly cultivated more ownership among the students. This decision was also likely aided because the Central High School students had spent time with the LA Term Intern who was working with AFSC-LA that semester. This intern was able to explain and describe the LA Term program to the Central High School students, thus helping them to become more familiar with the program as well.

**Planning the Service-Learning Activity**

AFSC-LA prepared for the joint learning activity with LA Term by working with the students at Central High School to plan their research through the participatory action research model. Facilitators from AFSC-LA helped Central High School students to process through their situation with the community garden and the housing authority, and they worked with students on project goals and research questions for the community survey. Together, they worked to create a survey that would ask residents in the community about their attitudes toward gardening and their access to healthy food. After working through four versions of the survey, the students working with the AFSC-LA director finalized and duplicated it in preparation for the joint
learning activity with the LA Term students (see Table 1 for community survey questions). The LA Term professor and the AFSC-LA director then collaborated to plan the schedule and logistics of the joint learning activity for the actual day of data collection.

**Critical Service Learning and Community Change**

Thus the described joint learning activity resembled a critical approach to service learning. It fulfilled each of the three characteristics that Mitchell (2008) describes as distinguishing critical approaches from traditional charity approaches. The joint learning activity was (a) based in a long-term relationship with community partners, (b) geared toward responding to issues related to social power, and (c) designed to teach students about social change. The service-learning activity itself was part of a larger effort to promote social justice in the housing

**BOX 1.**

**Community Action Research Project: Survey Questions**

1. Do you know if there any schools in the Mar Vista Housing Projects?
   - Yes
   - No

2. Do you know if there any gardens in the housing projects?
   - Yes
   - No

3. In your neighborhood, which do you see more of: fast food restaurants, liquor stores, or grocery stores?
   - fast food restaurants
   - liquor stores
   - grocery stores

4. Does your family eat from fast food restaurants?
   - Yes
   - No

5. How often does your family and children eat from fast food restaurants?
   - Once per week
   - Several times per week
   - More than 4 times per week

6. Why?
   - Convenience
   - Price
   - Taste

7. Is it difficult for you to find fresh, healthy foods and vegetables in your neighborhood?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Somewhat

8. What is your greatest challenge to buying healthy foods and fresh vegetables?
   - Cost
   - Transportation
   - Time to Cook
   - Other
   - If other, what is the reason? _______________________________________________________

9. Where do you currently buy your produce and vegetables?
   - Name of store(s)________________________________________________________

10. How often do you shop from the grocery store?
    - Once per week
    - Several times per week
    - More than 4 times per week

11. Are there any instances of diabetes, high blood pressure, or high cholesterol in your family household?
    - Yes
    - No

12. Do you or someone in your family know how to garden?
    - Yes
    - No

13. If you could, would you be interested in learning about gardening and having your own garden to grow your own food?
    - Yes
    - No
development. The unspoken policy of the housing authority was interpreted by the students as unjust, and their effort to survey the residents was an attempt to advocate for more appropriate policies concerning gardening and healthy food.

Furthermore, the joint activity was structured to emphasize reciprocity between the students. Rather than being viewed as a paternalistic presence, the LA Term students who were older and more educated were joining the Central High School students’ project and taking a lesser role in the community surveying. The emphasis was on partnering rather than doing the surveying for the high school students (Dicke, Dowden, & Torres, 2004; Karasik, 1993). In addition, although learning instrumental skills in community surveying methods was part of the intended outcomes for both students, this intent was given less priority and thus was less influential in the design of the activity itself.

Surveying the Community Residents
On the day of the joint learning activity, LA Term students arrived at the housing project and joined the Central High School students in their classroom. After students were introduced and the programs and project were reviewed, several activities and games were planned to help the students become acquainted. Soon after, the survey and data collection procedure was explained to the students, and they were sent in pre-planned pairs to assigned buildings throughout the housing project. The students were given a little over one hour to survey residents in their assigned pairs and buildings. LA Term students had the role of recording data, and Central High School students had the role of asking questions.

After the students finished their surveying, the group met again in the classroom to debrief the exercise in large group discussion. In addition, LA Term students were asked to complete a brief short-answer survey before and after the learning activity. Table 2 includes the questions that LA Term students were asked to respond to before and after the service-learning activity.

Unfortunately, due to the short period of time between planning and the actual learning activity, permission from LAUSD to survey the Central High School students for this study was not obtained, since it is a lengthy process. Therefore, students’ responses to the learning activity are not included in the study. Nevertheless, the reader can get a sense of their participation through the LA Term responses and reflections on the activity itself. Still, being unable to incorporate the high school students’ responses directly is a major limitation of this study.

Following the group time together, seven groups of students were sent out to the housing project to survey community residents on their attitudes toward gardening and on their access to healthy foods. Each group of students was assigned to nine buildings in the housing development and was given a goal of completing from eight to 10 surveys. The debriefing time with the two groups of students included discussing some of the challenges that students had encountered while surveying. These included the following issues: Many residents were not home, since it was the middle of the day; students encountered some language barriers if the residents did not speak English or Spanish; and some residents simply did not want to respond to the survey.

However, by conducting the survey, students were able to learn more about the community’s attitudes toward healthy foods and gardening. Results of the survey revealed that many in the housing development project already had gardens or were interested in gardening. Students also learned that many residents had experiences with the housing authority’s actions of removing gardens and did not understand what the policy was. Lastly, the survey also revealed to the students that many residents went to a local supermarket for their healthy food but also had complaints about the quality of food in that particular supermarket.

Furthermore, in subsequent months, the Central High School students were able to present these findings from the survey to the
housing authority and were able to engage in a process to clarify the policy on gardens in the complex.

**LA Term Student Feedback**

In addition to completing surveys on the exercise, LA Term students wrote journal entries in the week following describing their participation in the surveying. One student wrote:

>[We] let [the Central High School student] conduct all of the surveys. While he surveyed community members, [we] would take turns recording the information on the survey paper. We thought it was important that [the Central High School student] was the one making a connection with residents because he lives there. Being an insider is always more valuable to creating relationships and trust. No one refused to take a survey. All of the residents seemed to trust [him] with their opinions. He did a great job, and when he became nervous, [we] reminded him of what a great job he was doing.

Another student wrote:

The survey went well in that we covered all but two of the buildings we were assigned. We only got five surveys completed though, as most people were not at home. We had two people answer
their doors who spoke Korean and one resident [the Central High School student] knew who was Arab and spoke no English. She knew a lot of people in the complex due to having grown up there most of her life. I really enjoyed walking and talking to her. We all three got along well and I believe, found the exercise to be rewarding. I enjoyed watching [the Central High School student] be stretched to have to cold turkey address people at their doors. [We] took turns as well, and I think that helped [the Central High School student] move forward on her delivery when the rotation made it back to her turn.

Expectations for Student Learning Through Community Partnerships

LA Term students were asked beforehand what potential benefits and challenges they expected in the joint learning activity. Regarding potential benefits, one of the most frequent responses from LA Term students was that the exercise would give them an opportunity to interact with students from different contexts, cultures, and classes—in other words, they would be able to work with an actual community instead of merely reading about it. The other most common response was that the activity would provide practical hands-on training in community survey methods and learning how to use data to address community change. More specifically, the students would gain insight in using data strategically and gain a better understanding of some of the issues that this community was facing.

Afterward, when students were asked about the benefit of the activity to them, they indicated that these learning expectations had been met. LA Term students indicated the importance of the relational time with the Central High School students during the activity and found it to be one of the most enjoyable aspects of the day. They appreciated gaining exposure and insight into the different life circumstances that the high school students faced. In addition, students also valued the hands-on experience in the community while being able to experience how collecting data and research could be used to make a practical difference in the community.

Student journals revealed such sentiments from LA Term students. Here a student writes about appreciating the opportunity to interact with the Central High School students:

Our class’s participation in the site visit last Friday was perhaps the most interactive and relationally building any of our site visits have been. I had the pleasure of going around this housing project with [another classmate] and one of the male Mar Vista students, seeing the community through his eyes and witnessing how that community responded to us.

Another student commented on some of the insights the high school students shared about living in the housing project:

[The Central High School student] shared with [us] his thoughts on living in Mar Vista. He despised being treated like a criminal. They were not allowed to have gardens because of undeserved suspicion. [He] pointed to the cameras that surrounded the buildings, explaining that they pointed inward at the doorsteps rather than towards the parking lot. He told us a story about being handcuffed for two hours because of a truancy law. He was running late to class one day, and he was handcuffed by a police officer for truancy. Though his school was visible from the point on which they were standing, the police officer did not believe [him and] that there was a school there.

A similar feeling was shared by another student, who wrote:

This high school student truly amazed me with his insight to the area, his anger and sadness at how gang-bangers “tear up their own turf,” how professional
he was and relational at interviewing, and how street smarts/high schooler he would turn once the door closed. I really enjoyed the participation I had in this project in supporting him as he knocked on doors, translated questions and gathered information.

**Challenging Assumptions Through Community Partnerships**

When asked about the challenges they had expected to face in the joint learning activity, one of the most common responses from the LA Term students concerned the actual success of Central High School’s advocacy efforts for a change in policy about gardening in Mar Vista Gardens. Some students doubted that the data they would collect would make any difference to the housing authority and the decision regarding the presence of residents’ and community gardens.

The other most common response from LA Term students surrounded the possibility that the high school students and community residents would not be receptive to their presence or the exercise. In their journals, many LA Term students revealed their assumptions and stereotypes about the high school students’ attitudes before the learning activity and noted how those assumptions changed because of the joint learning activity. One student wrote:

> I so loved our opportunity to work with the Central High School students. I went into the site visit not really feeling it, not wanting to participate much, but it ended up being I think way better than any of us thought it would, both for APU students and Central High students. I went into it thinking that since it is a continuation school the students would all be apathetic and not really care to engage at all or talk with us, and therefore the site visit would be just a do-what-we-need-to-do-and-leave type of day, but it turned out being one of the best site visits we had for Community Transformation class.

Another student admitted:

> Upon arriving at Mar Vista I was not entirely sure what to expect, but I think in the back of my mind I foresaw encountering a group of rebellious teens who obviously had done something wrong to deserve a spot at a continuation school. Though it was not a conscious thought I saw myself as better than them in some way, as if I was the classic White heroine that they needed for guidance. I am not proud of such thoughts, but they were slightly present. When we met up with the students I was intrigued by their style of learning and fascinated that such a concept actually works. I was partnered with [a Central High School student] who is not very talkative, but ended up being super friendly when we went door to door to interview his neighbors. We went together to survey the members of the community, but he almost always asked the questions because he was the only one who spoke Spanish.

Still another wrote:

> I went into it dreading it. I seriously thought about ditching, but I’m really glad that I went. I had some misconceptions about the kids that we were going to be working with. I thought that they weren’t going to care and would just make the APU students do everything. I was very pleasantly surprised when we were able to meet them and talk to them and I realized how great they all were. While we were walking door to door to do the surveys, very few people wanted to talk to us.

**DISCUSSION**

Bringle and Hatcher (2002) suggest that community-campus partnerships experience phases in their interactions much in the same way that relationships do in general. These phases include (a) relationship initiation, (b) relationship development and maintenance,
and (c) relationship dissolution. In discussing the partnership between LA Term and AFSC-LA, it is helpful to examine it in terms of these phases and how it influenced the development of the joint learning activity. In particular, the initiation and development and maintenance phases will be discussed. Relationship dissolution is excluded because the partnership is still active.

Relationship Initiation Phase
The relationship between the two organizations originated in 2009 when AFSC-LA was seeking student interns for their operations. At around the same time, the LA Term program was undergoing transitions in staff and faculty that would help develop new procedures and infrastructures for the LA Term Internship Program. Some new procedures that were instituted in the LA Term program at this time included drafting a new memorandum of understanding that delineated the program's expectation for supervisors of LA Term Students, preparing a revision of the Learning Contract that formed goals and activities of the student's internship, revising the student's Final Performance Evaluation, and restructuring the meeting schedule between student supervisors and LA Term faculty. Developments such as these formed a new infrastructure for the program that would allow the LA Term Internship Program to take advantage of this unanticipated opportunity with AFSC-LA (Walshok, 1999).

Relationship Development and Maintenance Phase
Bringle and Hatcher (2002) discuss several components that help to describe the level of closeness in community-campus partnerships. These components include (a) frequency of interaction, (b) diversity of interaction, and (c) strength of influence on the other.

The partnership between LA Term and AFSC-LA was able to develop through the frequent interactions between the LA Term course professor and the AFSC-LA staff who were supervising LA Term student interns. Because AFSC-LA had received a student intern from LA Term every semester since the fall of 2009, there was opportunity for timely meetings in the form of supervisor meetings with the professor, which occurred twice a semester. These meetings helped remind both parties of each other's program mission and goals, provided opportunities for feedback and influence in both expectations and operations of each other's programs, and facilitated discussion with more detail about how each party was going about pursuing their goals that semester. In addition, AFSC-LA also regularly participated in orientation meetings for LA Term students that occur at the beginning of every semester, invited several LA Term student interns to come back in different capacities after their formal internship through LA Term was over, and maintained contact with many of the students after they completed the LA Term program.

CONCLUSION
This section discusses lessons learned about the benefits and challenges of this service-learning project.

The Importance of Infrastructure to Reciprocal Service Learning in Community Partners
In the relationship initiation phase, LA Term was able to create an infrastructure and allocate resources in a way that allowed it to take advantage of potential opportunities to partner with other community organizations. In this case, the potential opportunity became a joint learning activity with Central High School, facilitated by AFSC-LA. In the relationship development and maintenance phase, frequent and diverse meetings created the space for the two partners to discuss common goals and possible ways to influence one another through new ideas, such as this joint learning activity. Furthermore, in this case, the well-developed and maintained community partnership offered students the chance for a form of learning that was hands-on, practical, reciprocal, and aimed at community activism.

Because LA Term and AFSC-LA were able to build their relationship and maintain it through
frequent and diverse interactions over several years, the opportunity for the joint learning activity was much easier to facilitate and much more compatible to the needs of each party involved than if a weaker had relationship existed. The joint learning activity flowed organically out of conversations about goals and operations. The learning goals for each participant were compatible to each other because the two had grown together as partners in the previous years.

**Role of Intermediary Actors for Openness and Honesty Between Parties**

The activity itself was likely more successful because a bridge already existed between the student groups, in the form of the LA Term student intern who was working with AFSC-LA that semester. The LA Term student intern was present while the Central High School students reached their consensus to go ahead and participate in the learning activity proposed to them by LA Term and AFSC-LA. She was there to answer questions from students and familiarize them with the LA Term program. Based on student feedback, one of the most valuable parts of the experience involved the relational aspects between the two groups of students. Getting to hear about the other’s experiences, background, and story was cited by students as a significant part of the learning that occurred for them. In addition, feeling comfortable with each other was important in being able to conduct the survey together in the housing development. This comfort level was facilitated by the pairings of the students and the getting-acquainted activities and games that the group participated in before conducting the survey. The LA Term student intern was assigned to organize both activities, since she had an understanding of both groups. For example, knowing which students could speak Spanish beforehand ensured that each student pairing had bilingual skills. Knowing which students were quieter and which students were more outgoing helped ensure that someone would initiate conversation among the pairings. Such elements were important to facilitating the learning that would occur beyond the community survey, so that learning could extend beyond the instrumental goals and become a more holistic educational experience.

**Change Typical Roles to Change Assumptions and Stereotypes**

Although there is evidence of instrumental learning that occurred through the joint learning activity, LA Term students just as often described the cultural learning that was occurring as their own assumptions were changed. As the Central High School students opened up about their lives, the LA Term students became more aware of the challenges people faced when living in a housing development managed by a housing authority. Furthermore, the Central High school students likely would have been less engaged in the activity if they had not themselves designed the project and survey for the service-learning project. In this way, the process of approaching the community and allowing its members to define the project for themselves allowed them to fully participate, while challenging many of the LA Term students’ assumptions about the high school students.

In addition, designing the participatory action research project for themselves also allowed the high school students to place themselves as the primary actors in the exercise. This activity likely worked to challenge two assumptions. First, it could have worked to challenge the assumption that the high school students themselves were not capable of being social change agents, but needed a “white knight” to save them (Hondageu-Soleto & Raskoff, 1994). Second, it may have worked to challenge the assumption that the only valuable role of LA Term students in the process would be to play the white knight. Instead, LA Term students were able to play a supporting role in a process aimed at community change and still have a meaningful experience.

**Challenges and Limitations**

This case, however, has its shortcomings. The most obvious is that the Central High School
students were not surveyed or included in the study. The high school students may have had a completely different experience and understanding of the joint learning activity, though we were not able to include it in the study. The main reason for this was the short period of time between the planning of the event to the actual event. Because many of the Central High School students were under age 18 and the school is under LAUSD jurisdiction, it was impossible to pursue permission from the district to survey the students given the short timeline.

The other challenge in planning the event was scheduling with other parties. In the original discussion and plan for the day, a HACLA representative was going to be invited so that the students could present their findings to the housing authority. However, the HACLA representative was unavailable on the given day and was thus not able to join us.

This leads us to our final lesson. Perhaps with a partnership and opportunity such as this, a simple joint activity was not enough to seize the full opportunity for learning that existed. Several students as well as the Central High teacher himself commented that they hoped this sort of activity would be repeated or that were would be more opportunities for the two groups of students to work together again. Thus, if the activity were extended to two days or multiple sessions, then HACLA would have more opportunity to be present and even greater learning would occur.

Public Affairs Education

Thus, as public affairs education programs consider how to guide students in designing, implementing, and evaluating effective public policies and programs, it is equally important to consider how such programs can help students identify some of the harmful misconceptions and stereotypes they hold. In identifying these things, we prepare students to develop and nurture open, honest, and reciprocal relationships with the public and the community members they will be working with, speaking for, and serving in their futures. Creating more opportunities for critical service learning rather than service learning that only reinforces the charity model can be an important method that mutually benefits the parties involved. It can help break down barriers while creating new expectations and openness between groups by providing both experiences and learning that will be invaluable for the future public servant.

NOTES

1 Retrieved from https://afsc.org/office/los-angeles-ca


REFERENCES


**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Grace Bahng, PhD, is an associate professor of Global Studies at Azusa Pacific University and the Internship Program director for LA Term. Her research focuses on collaboration in community development and social protection for vulnerable children. She teaches classes in community development and international development and aid and is a consultant in program evaluation for social justice programs both in Los Angeles and in the Two Thirds World.