Linking Students with Community in Collaborative Governance: A Report on a Service-Learning Class

Thomas A. Bryer

University of Central Florida

Abstract

Collaborative governance is increasingly becoming a topic for scholarly research and practitioner skill development as well as a component of graduate programs in public administration. This article documents a service-learning project in a graduate-level Masters in Public Administration class on cross-sector governance. The article begins with a brief review of literature on university-community relations and, specifically, the civic mission of institutions of higher education and the role of service learning in public administration programs. The teaching case is then introduced, with the full context and detail explained. Lessons are offered for replicating this kind of class. An analysis of the success of the case is offered based on reflection journals written by students throughout the semester.

Collaborative governance is increasingly becoming a topic for scholarly research and practitioner skill development as well as a component of graduate programs in public administration. One need look no further than the top Masters in Public Administration programs in the United States (Posner, 2009), browse recent book titles published in the public administration field (see for example the recent edited volumes by Bingham & O’Leary, 2008, and O’Leary & Bingham, 2009), and examine article titles in top scholarly journals in public administration (see for example citations in the next paragraph) to verify the emergence of collaborative governance as a hot topic.

Importantly, the apparent fad comes with much substance. Research has demonstrated the benefits of multi- or cross-sector collaborative relationships, both interorganizational and citizen centered (Bingham & O’Leary, 2008; O’Leary & Bingham, 2009). The challenges of developing successful collaborative partnerships in the public interest have been documented utilizing a variety of case studies, including collaborations in emergency management (Kiefer & Montjoy, 2006; Moynihan, 2005), public works (Cooper & Bryer, 2007; Bryer, 2009), health care (Milward & Provan, 2000), and transportation (Lawther, 2002; Bryer, 2009).
So far missing from the literature, however, is an explicit linkage between collaborative governance theory and analysis with literature on the civic mission of universities. In the latter category, there is a rich history of writing on the importance of ensuring institutions of higher education do not isolate themselves from the communities in which they exist. Institutions of higher education, indeed, have commitments to be citizens and promote citizenship among their faculty, staff, and students (Dewey, 1916).

Collaboration between universities and communities is potentially significant to successfully achieve both the educational objectives of the university and the public service objectives of community partners. Promoting service or experiential learning in public administration programs has the potential to enrich the quality of learning outcomes achieved by students while simultaneously providing the most up-to-date theoretical and empirical knowledge on an issue or concern to address a need in the community (Dicke, Dowden, & Torres, 2004; Lambright, 2008).

This article documents a service-learning project in a graduate-level Masters in Public Administration class on cross-sector governance. The course is a requirement for students in the certificate program in Emergency Management and Homeland Security, but it is often populated by students in nonprofit management, public administration, and planning certificate or degree programs. The article begins with a brief review of literature on the civic mission of institutions of higher education and the role of service learning in public administration programs. The teaching case is then introduced, with the full context and detail explained. Lessons are offered for replication of this kind of course. An analysis of the success of the case is offered based on reflection journals written by students throughout the semester.

THE CIVIC OBLIGATIONS OF UNIVERSITIES AND SERVICE LEARNING IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Dewey (1916) advocates for institutions of higher education to adopt an active role in promoting democracy, encouraging citizenship, and serving community. Since his writing in 1916, the work of strengthening linkages between the educational and civic missions of schools has continued. Some recent writings, and the urgency expressed in those writings, suggest that there may be a long way to go for some higher education institutions (Boyte & Kari, 2000; Salamon, 2005).

Two streams of thought seem particularly influential in considering the function of universities as well as of university faculty, staff, and students. The first is the conception of higher education as public work (Boyte & Kari, 2000). This notion is summarized in Boyte and Kari’s (2000, p. 48) quotation from Liberty Bailey:
Real leadership lies in taking hold of the first and commonest problems that present themselves and working them out. I like to say to my students that they should attack the first problem that presents itself when they alight from the train on their return from college. It may be a problem of roads; of a poor school; of tuberculosis; of ugly signs along the highways.

To suggest that higher education is public work is to say that universities—and their faculty, staff, and students—have obligations to the promotion of democracy and the solving of real-world problems. Problem solving and public work is not a function for experts acting as experts and consequently in their self-interest or disciplinary interest. Rather, faculty, staff, and students should apply their craft as a contribution to the democratic process, both informing decision making and educating citizens.

The public work perspective is consistent with another stream of thought advanced by Lester Salamon (2005). Salamon, confronting the challenge of blurring boundaries across sectors and increased reliance on third-party actors to deliver services to people and communities, introduced the notion of a professional citizen. He defined this person as follows (2005, p. 13):

A “professional citizen” is thus a person who works, and is trained to work, whether in a paid or volunteer capacity, on public problems—to identify them, to analyze them, to devise solutions to them, and to implement actions that alleviate them—whether they are employed in governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations, or even for-profit companies in roles that focus on the solution of public problems.

Salamon (2005) saw a role for public administration programs in training professional citizens and providing them with three types of knowledge: (1) tool knowledge or awareness of mechanisms to facilitate collaboration, such as consensus building and conflict management, (2) design knowledge or awareness of what tools can be effective given different conditions, and (3) operating knowledge or competence in applying the tools of governance and collaboration. Professional citizens serve public causes, Salamon (2005) suggests, regardless of sector. Universities and university faculty have obligations not only to serve as professional citizens, but to train professional citizens.

One means of pursuing a mission of higher education as public work and of acting as and training professional citizens is service learning. A small handful of articles have been published on the specific topic of service learning in public administration programs, or masters in public administration programs more specifically. Each of these articles, reviewed here, expresses some degree of optimism and encouragement in pursuing service learning as a means of fulfilling the
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democratic function of higher education institutions. Overall, it seems public administration programs are particularly well placed, given their existing professional development programs, to integrate service learning and pursue democratic objectives (D’Agostino, 2008).

Waldner and Hunter (2008) consider the efficacy of what they call client-based courses, which are “structured to produce a useful report or product for a client” (p. 219). They continue: “The client’s issue becomes a focal tool for delivering course materials and integrating theories and practice” (2008, p. 219). Client-based courses are variants of service-learning courses, but they may not contain a reflection component. The focus, as with service-learning courses, is on gaining experience and generating a useful product for a community partner. Client-based courses can be service learning in character, if they also promote self-reflection and awareness.

To this end, Dicke, Dowden, and Torres (2004) direct us toward four rationales on the use of service-learning pedagogical strategies: (1) community service, (2) moral, (3) political, and (4) instrumental. The community service rationale can be identified with the public work perspective of higher education. Universities and students should contribute to the common good through technical or volunteer assistance given to community nonprofit, governmental, or private organizations. The moral rationale is grounded in the desire to have students become more self-aware regarding their philosophical and ethical perspectives on, for instance, the role of government or the role of professions in the promotion of a common good. Whereas the moral rationale seeks student self-reflection, the political rationale promotes a particular vision of strong community and the pursuit of social equity and justice. Last, the instrumental rationale is applied and is exemplified by the client-based course design described by Waldner and Hunter (2008). Students are expected to exit the class with new skills and competences to apply in real-world settings.

The case described next offers an assessment and findings that align with the community service and instrumental rationales. The course did not pursue a particular social justice agenda, though students may have advanced that perspective on their own, through their own reflection. Through analysis of student reflection journals, the case study offers broad lessons but does not dig deeply in any one rationale, such as Lambright’s (2008) emphasis on the instrumental rationale and differential learning outcomes associated with service-learning versus traditional courses. Keeping in mind this broad parameter, we now present the case.

A CROSS-SECTORAL GOVERNANCE SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE

The course was taught at a large, metropolitan-based public university in the Southeast United States. Its purpose is stated on the syllabus in the following manner:

The solution to many social problems requires the combined strengths of the public, for-profit/private, and nonprofit sectors.
This course highlights this emphasis on cross-sectoral governance by providing a foundation in the purpose and usefulness of cross-sectoral relationships, and by providing the knowledge and tools necessary for the effective management of such relationships.

The university's catalogue contains the following description of the course: “This course examines the structures, dynamics, and processes associated with developing and delivering public services through networks and partnerships involving public, nonprofit, voluntary, and private sectors.” Figure 1 summarizes the course objectives, as they appear in the syllabus.

Figure 1.
Course Objectives

**Academic and Scholarly Objectives:**
- Analyze the size, trends, nature, structure, and constraints of the public, for-profit, and nonprofit sectors.
- Evaluate the structure, dynamics, and processes of cross-sectoral governance.
- Analyze the rationales for cross-sectoral governance arrangements.
- Integrate an understanding of historical and theoretical perspectives of intergovernmental relations and cross-sectoral governance.
- Evaluate the future of cross-sectoral governance and the system as a whole.

**Professional Development Objectives:**
- Develop governance, consensus building, and conflict resolution tools in inter- and intra- organizational interactions.

**Service-Learning Objectives:**
- Develop a normative orientation toward self and community.
- Learn about community—strong community requires active involvement with and of diverse stakeholders.
- Learn about citizenship—as professional citizens, we individually and collectively have responsibilities toward the betterment of communities, not only for our own selves and neighborhoods. “Public service is rent for our time here on earth.”
- Learn about service and knowledge—with knowledge comes responsibility.
In designing the course as a service-learning course, the dual objective was to instruct on the practice and theories of collaborative governance while demonstrating through service to a set of community partners how collaboration can be successfully achieved. Appropriately, the focus of the service project was the development of a set of recommendations to enhance collaborative capacity across sectors and agencies.

The class provided students with the theoretical and practical tools needed to engage successfully in networking and collaboration across government, nonprofit, and private sectors. Among the topics covered during the course were network development and evaluation, conflict management, consensus building, and public participation. The class of 25 students worked for 13 weeks with the Orange County Children’s Cabinet and the larger child-serving community in Orange County, Florida.

According to the Children’s Cabinet bylaws, their mission is “To provide the framework, advocacy platform and organizational model to foster integration, collaboration and development of all entities focused on creating positive outcomes for the children of Orange County.” Though the Cabinet has formally drafted bylaws, it is not a legal entity. Instead, the Cabinet is an informal network of approximately 60 individuals from public, private, and nonprofit child-serving agencies. Service areas represented include but are not limited to foster care, education, mental health, juvenile justice, and basic needs (e.g., shelter, food). Members meet once a month to reflect on current data and trends in their service areas, plan joint activities, and generally share information regarding the participating organizations.

The Cabinet was in search of a plan to enhance coordination across child-serving agencies in the county, a means to refocus their attention collectively on prevention rather than treatment, and a desire to reduce service duplication as well as service gaps in meeting the needs of children in the county. Students in the class sought to apply their skills and knowledge to address these objectives. They did so by conducting interviews, analyzing a survey, completing a literature review, and assessing best practices.

Structure of the Class

Key components of the course included the instructor-prompted reflection journals, facilitated group work and management, and facilitated consensus process that led to the writing of the final recommendations report. These processes allowed for the timely completion of a credible report to the community, while simultaneously permitting advanced student learning. Underlying these processes were standard classroom activities, including lectures, casework, and role-play simulations.

Instructor-Prompted Reflection Journals

Throughout the semester, students kept a reflection journal in which they...
responded to discussion prompts provided by the instructor. Questions were intended to provide students an opportunity to specifically draw connections between class discussions and readings with experiences outside the classroom. These questions are outlined later in the article when discussing student learning outcomes.

**Facilitated Group Work and Management**

Students were divided into groups according to tasks that needed to be completed. Teams of three to four students formed to (1) interview nonprofit officials, (2) interview public/governmental officials, (3) interview for-profit officials, (4) interview faith-based organization officials, (5) conduct statistical and network analysis of survey data, (6) conduct a literature review of collaboration in child services issues, and (7) conduct “best” practices research of how officials in other counties in Florida were interacting to pursue positive outcomes for children. As discussed later in this article, the learning outcomes for students may be different based on the group they were assigned to or chose. Specifically, the passive activity of literature review limited student interaction with community members. Consideration is given to this issue in the next section.

**Facilitated Consensus Process to Write Final Report**

In the end, all group output needed to be consolidated into a single, credible document with a set of recommendations agreed to by all students. To achieve this, the instructor asked each team to appoint one member to a writing committee. This committee met with the instructor outside of class hours to review the findings from each team and, based on the model of network development described in a section to follow, write the final report. Members of the writing team were assigned to draft individual sections; much of the writing committee’s meeting time was spent exploring possible recommendations for the Children’s Cabinet. The consensus recommendations of the committee were presented to the full class, at which time the instructor facilitated a consensus decision process to make changes and finalize the recommendations.

**Instructor Preparation for Teaching and Facilitating**

Any instructor seeking to replicate a service-learning course design like the one described herein can benefit from a few lessons learned. Lessons are based on the teaching of the course to graduate students, but the course may be appropriate for advanced undergraduates with perhaps more hands-on guidance from the instructor.

As already observed, in the sections that follow, the learning outcomes were not consistent across all students; those who had direct contact with community members demonstrated through their journaling a stronger ability to link theory and practice. Students whose task was focused on literature review demonstrated
less ability to link theory to practice. The implication of this finding concerns the division of tasks for successful completion of a project, while allowing approximately equal opportunity for all students to achieve the same learning outcomes. To counter the division of experiences in this case, literature review, to the extent it is required, might be divided across groups rather than assigned to a single group of students. As such, all students would have opportunity for deeper reading in a subject area, plus the benefits of field research and data analysis.

An important consideration for any instructor contemplating a service-learning class on the scale of the one described here is the immense time commitment required. Simply stated, much is being asked of students in a service-learning class; much should be expected of the instructor. With that in mind, it is advised that instructors observe the service-learning design principles outlined by Imperial, Perry, and Katula (2007). Among those are explicit connections between the service activity and learning objectives, reflection, faculty commitment, and perceptible impacts. Faculty commitment, in particular, cannot be emphasized enough. In this case, the instructor worked for the year before the class being offered to establish trust with Children’s Cabinet members. He attended most monthly meetings, volunteered time on preliminary visioning exercises, and developed personal relationships with many of the Cabinet members. These relationships ensured that once the students entered the field and sought interviews, community members were ready and waiting. Once the students started their engagement, the instructor was needed to troubleshoot, particularly with individuals who were not responsive to requests for interviews. Ultimately, the success of the project required the hard work of the students, to be matched with persistence from the instructor. Without both, the project would not be successful and might very well damage relationships between the university and community based on the inability to complete a desired and promised project.

Conducting any community-engaged research may require the approval of a university institutional review board (IRB). However, IRB processes require submission of any change to protocol or data collection instruments, which are requirements that may be problematic given the emergent nature of the service-learning project. For this class, the instructor completed the IRB process to secure use of student reflection journals for analysis of the class. Survey data were collected by the Children’s Cabinet and provided to the instructor for analysis by students; interview data were collected by students acting as consultants to the Children’s Cabinet. The community partners, following completion of the project, agreed to have the student report publicly released, along with all accompanying data. This method worked in this case; however, if an instructor or any student wished to publish directly from the data, it is advisable that the IRB be consulted at the very least for the possibility of expedited review.

Lastly, it is important for there to be a clear theoretical framework that guides the overall project. Absent such a framework, it can be potentially difficult
to ensure all students are accomplishing tasks that are aligned with the needs of the project. The model used in this class is presented in the next section.

**Applying a Model of Network Development**

Literature on network and stakeholder management and evaluation suggests a set of steps that can be followed in designing a network in social service delivery systems; these steps informed the interview questions students asked of community partners (see the appendix for questions). Students learned and followed these eight steps:

1. Identify problem or information needs./Identify the type of network.
2. Identify possible network members.
3. Specify the skills, resources, relationships, or information each potential network member possesses.
4. Map existing relations among potential members.
5. Map the relations that you might want to exist, given member skills, resources, relationships, or information.
6. Identify unique environmental conditions.
7. Determine strategic orientation of network members.
8. Select management structure of network.

**Identify Problem or Information Needs/Identify the Type of Network**

This is a first step in any purposeful project, whether it involves the creation of a public participation process, a strategic planning process, or, as in this case, a network. The first step is to clearly identify the problems to which the network might respond. Doing so will allow students to identify the best functional type of network to recommend.

Milward and Provan (2006) identify four types of networks: (1) service implementation, (2) information diffusion, (3) problem solving, and (4) community capacity building. Service implementation networks are defined by four primary characteristics. They typically involve government funding for services; services are jointly produced by at least two organizations; coordination occurs through horizontal rather than hierarchical management; challenges include the need for successful cooperation and negotiated contracts between service producers. Information diffusion networks maintain hierarchical lines of authority as well as horizontal relations between network members. The primary focus of the network is on sharing information across agencies and other boundaries. Problem-solving networks aim to establish an active policy or political agenda. Their focus is on solving immediate problems, such as lost funding or burdensome regulation. Community-capacity-building networks seek to develop social capital among diverse actors in communities, with the intent that emergent and developed social capital can enable agencies to address current and future issues and needs.
Identify Potential Network Members

It is important for students to experience a process of stakeholder identification and selection. In defining a stakeholder as anyone who can affect or be affected by the actions of an organization, or in this case a network (Freeman, 1984), Bryson (2004) suggests assessing stakeholders who have the most potential either to help or hurt the organization (or network) and its ability to accomplish its goals. This step can be more advanced or less advanced, depending on the amount of time devoted to the question of stakeholder identification. If more advanced, a stakeholder power-interest grid (Bryson, 2004) can be constructed in which all possible stakeholders are categorized as having high or low degrees of power (or ability to influence the network’s success and direction) and interest (or concern for the topic or problem being addressed by the network). Those stakeholders who have high amounts of power and high interest are potentially most needed for inclusion in the network; those with high power and low interest might be necessary but perhaps in a different role. Those with low power and high interest need not be included from a strictly power perspective but may be instrumental in goal achievement.

Specify the Skills, Resources, Relationships, or Information Each Potential Network Member Possesses

This step identifies the existing capacities of potential network members, including how they currently relate to each other. This activity allows one to identify not only existing strengths but also the weaknesses of the potential membership (i.e., where are the skill or relational gaps?). For insight on this step, students or others can refer to Moynihan’s (2005) examination of the Exotic Newcastle Disease network as well as Kiefer and Montjoy’s (2006) study of the Hurricane Katrina response network. In both cases, it is evident where there are benefits of well-documented and planned relations across parties and the harm that can result from the lack of such systemic planning.

Map the Relations That Exist Among Possible Members

As in the previous step, it is important to understand existing capacity before considering how to move forward. The mapping exercise is simple, with a unidirectional or bidirectional arrow drawn between two or more prospective network members indicating whether there is an existing relationship between potential members (aka—a sociogram). There may be multiple types of relations to explore. Perhaps prospective members have a communication relationship, serve on multiple boards together, or live in close proximity to each other. The more relations are found to exist, or the more multiplex the network, the potentially stronger the overall network might be (Provan & Milward, 2001).
Map the Relations That You Might Want to Exist

On a blank slate, who needs to be connected with whom in order for the network to succeed? What should the density of the network be? Should there be bridges between cliques or groups in the network? Or should everybody be connected to everybody? Are there key members of the network? These are some questions that can be answered through analysis of responses to the other steps in this process.

Identify Unique Environmental Conditions

Moynihan’s (2005) Exotic Newcastle Disease study, as well as Kiefer and Montjoy’s (2006) Hurricane Katrina study, shine a light on the importance of aligning network structure and design with environmental conditions. The question to ask here is: What factors in the environment might influence the ability of the network to operate or achieve its goals? Possible answers to this question include general uncertainty, unanticipated events, member/institutional representative turnover or rotation, resource constraints or availability, and political/policy priority shifts. The importance of asking this question is to revisit the previous step in mapping desired network relations, given the possibility of an environmental dynamic, and to prepare to consider the ideal network structure (step 8) to manage environmental conditions successfully.

Determine Strategic Orientation of Network Members

In discussing the multisectoral trilemma of network management, Herranz (2007) identifies three potential strategic orientations of network members: bureaucratic, entrepreneurial, and community. A bureaucratic orientation is characterized by a desire for legislated order, reliance on rules and procedure, and hierarchical authority. An entrepreneurial orientation is characterized by a focus on market mechanisms, pursuit of value maximization, and an opportunistic decision process. A community orientation is characterized by an emphasis on civil society forces, pursuit of social equity, and a participatory decision process.

Each orientation suggests a different preferred mode of behavior for network members, which is particularly the case, and thus a challenge, in networks involving individuals from different sectors. The task in this step is to assign each prospective network member with an assumed orientation, which would then inform the next step of how to structure and manage the network given a potential diversity of behavioral orientations.

Select Management Structure of the Network

Milward and Provan (2006) identify three network governance structures. The final step in the network design process is to identify the optimal structure to guide the network and allow it to best achieve its goals, based on assessment from the previous steps. The three structures identified by Milward and Provan

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are self-governed, lead organization, and network administrative organization. A self-governed structure maintains no administrative core and is characterized by a decentralized, participatory decision process. A lead organization structure is directed by a member of the network, both administratively and politically. Decision making is centralized through the lead agency. A network administrative organization structure utilizes the services of an independent third party to facilitate decision making, communication, and administration. There is no best alignment between the strategic orientations identified by Herranz (2007) and the governance structures described by Milward and Provan (2006), particularly when there are multiple strategic orientations within a prospective network. The proper structure is dependent on dominant orientations in a multisectoral network as well as on the size of the network, preexisting power or authority relationships, and variant environmental dynamics. Careful analysis as suggested in this article is required for any emergent network to customize a network structure unique to the particular context.

**Student Output for the Community**

Through analysis of the project’s findings and based on the eight steps just summarized, students developed several consensus suggestions for network development in the child-serving community. They issued a final report divided into eight primary sections. First, a review of literature on collaboration and networking in child-serving agencies was presented. This review grounded the work of the class in a selection of academic literature. Overall, the review identified some positive examples from around the country in developing effective networks across child-serving agencies; it also identified drawbacks and challenges that need to be overcome. Second, a review of current practices in Florida was offered. In this section, students described the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges associated with other existing models of child-serving agency coordination and collaboration. Third, data were presented from a survey of child-serving agencies in Orange County. These data offered a glimpse into the diversity of agencies and complexity of needs and barriers faced by the agencies as well as into the relationships that existed across agencies. The survey was designed and administered by the Survey Mapping Committee of the Orange County Children’s Cabinet; a total of 89 responses were collected from approximately 100 organizations either affiliated with the cabinet or concerned with the welfare of children in the county.

In the next several sections, students analyzed interview data to report on several facets of network development (see interview questions in the appendix). Sixty-two interviews were conducted with officials in the nonprofit sector, private sector, public/governmental sector, and faith community. In the final section, the report proposed a set of short-, intermediate-, and long-term recommendations, along with a set of considerations, challenges, and action steps.
Assessment of Course

Student reflection journals were analyzed using qualitative analysis software, NVivo 8.0. For each reflection question, key themes were identified through a reading of student submissions twice through and the pairing of statements deemed to be similar in meaning. Statement is here defined as “a sentence or set of sentences that form a complete thought.” Once theme categories were created, student submissions were read a third time, and their content was sorted into the identified categories. The first steps in analysis were performed by the course instructor (and article author); an independent third party sorted the statements into identified theme categories at the same time but apart from the instructor. The rate of agreement between the two coders was 92%. Most of the difference occurred in the placement of statements into more than one theme category. Reflection questions are shown in Figure 2. As reported later in this article, much of the student reflection aligned with the community service and instrumental rationales of service learning identified by Dicke, Dowden, and Torres (2004).

Figure 2.
Student Reflection Questions

Journal 1
What are your expectations for this semester’s service-learning project?
What do you personally hope to contribute to the project?
How do you anticipate being able to apply lessons and theories learned in class to the service-learning project?

Journal 2
Have your expectations regarding the project changed as you have read more about networks and network management?
Based on your readings and class lecture notes regarding network structure and management, what barriers do you foresee in creating a cross-sector network of child-serving agencies in Orange County?

Journal 3
What do you feel you have learned in bridging course content with field research?
What theories and or tools do you envision as being applicable to the recommendations we will be making to the Children’s Cabinet?
What do you feel you or the class will be contributing to the child serving community in Orange County?
Expectations and Hopes

The pre-project reflection questions focused on student expectations and hopes for the project. Table 1 summarizes the themes identified in these three questions.

Table 1.
Expressed Expectations and Hopes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Categories</th>
<th>Number of References in Student Journals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are your expectations for this semester’s service-learning project?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask New Questions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging Group Work Process</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a Plan</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain a Better Understanding of Community</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help the Children’s Cabinet</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help the Community</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve my Skills</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Opportunity for Incremental Progress</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize Course Learning</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you personally hope to contribute to the project?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advance Career Path</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply Theory</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft Questions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Ideas</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enthusiasm</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learn and Understand</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide Information</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Expectations

Nine categories of expectations were identified, and eight of those categories contained two or more statements from the journals. The most often expressed expectations had a focus on community: Gain a better understanding of the
community, and help the community. This finding is consistent with the community service rationale for service learning (Dicke et al., 2004). Following these categories were statements that were categorized as an expectation to develop skills, an idea that aligns with the instrumental rationale.

A community focus is exemplified by the following statement from a student who attempts to bridge his work experience with the realities of what he expects to find in the community:

> From my years in the fire service, I have seen that children often bear the brunt of society’s failures. Although I have encountered hundreds of children who are victims of abuse, poverty, neglect, injury, or circumstance, I suspect that I have only seen the surface of what truly exists in Orange County. While the facts are unfortunate, I believe that the members of this class will learn that the demand for child services in Orange County far exceeds the capacity available. Even so, we will probably see that there is a dizzying array of services available, and a critical need to coordinate those services so that the greatest good reaches those most in need.

With regard to instrumental skills development, students considered how they expect to enhance skills ranging from writing to conflict management. One student summarized these perspectives through observation of the group-work format of the class:

> One of the potential benefits I expect to receive from the process of service learning is to build up my own social capital and network, for the completion of the class assignment requires interaction and cooperation among classmates, and the project itself brings us to the dynamics of relationship with a host of public, private and nonprofit organizations. I trust my participation and constant exposures to the people in different organizations and networks [will] help add to my own capacity in the future career development.

Hopes

Eight categories of statements were identified with respect to the question of hoped-for personal contributions to the project. Four of these categories consisted of two or more statements. At this point in the class and project, students were still grappling with the boundaries of the study they would be conducting. Thus their expressions of hoped-for personal contributions were ambiguous to some degree. Broadly, most students expressed some variation of the desire to provide information to the community or to develop new ideas that the class and community
might be able to use. They offered their professional background or passion as statements of credibility for their intended contributions, such as strong research or interpersonal skills.

**Changed Expectations and Perceived Barriers**

The second set of journal reflection questions were assigned a few weeks after the first set, after students learned through reading and lecture the core theories of networks and collaboration. Some of this literature is summarized earlier in describing the eight-step network development process. At this second stage, students were asked to consider how their expectations have changed, given their new theoretical knowledge, and what they perceived as barriers that might confront the community. The second question specifically asked students to apply course content and thus to begin thinking through possible recommendations to the child-serving community in the county. Student perceptions are summarized in Table 2.

**Changed Expectations**

Seven themes emerged in student journals regarding their changed expectations, given their new knowledge of theory and network design tools. As seen in Table 2, the two most populated categories suggest either student recognition that the task before them is more complex than initially thought, or that they have experienced no change in expectation. These may be seen as two opposing responses. On the one hand, students recognized that building collaborative networks is not as simple as putting people in a room together. The students who perceived no change in expectation mostly had roles in the service-learning project that did not provide them direct access to community members. Thus we might interpret the enhanced awareness of project difficulty as a combination of exposure to community members, combined with awareness of theoretical developments.

One student summarized the challenge perspective in the following manner:

> At the beginning of this semester, I thought that this child maltreatment problem could be solved if there is established strong network between all related agencies. It seemed to me that collaboration was a magic solution to today’s interconnected policy problems. I did not realize how difficult it was to build a strong network. However, after reading articles and listening to lectures, I realized that collaboration in a network is not an easy task.

**Perceived Barriers**

Based on course readings and exposure to community members, students identified 12 distinct barriers that confront the child-serving community and
their effort to create a collaborative network. Six barriers were identified five or more times in student journals. Several students identified funding as a barrier, particularly in the current recessionary climate. However, some students considered resource constraints as significant, regardless of the macroeconomic condition. As an example, one student offered the following perspective:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Categories</th>
<th>Number of References in Student Journals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have your expectations regarding the project changed as you have read more about networks and network management?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of Theory</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern for Willing Participation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Challenging than Anticipated</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Change</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic for Meaningful Recommendations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pessimistic for Meaningful Recommendations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognized Potential of the Work</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on your readings and class lecture notes regarding network structure and management, what barriers do you foresee in creating a cross-sector network of child-serving agencies in Orange County?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achieving Buy-In</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination across Cultures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordination across Rules</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Leadership</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Legitimacy</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Flow and Communication</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Link to Passion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Evaluation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Management Skills</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational Conflicts</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Constraints</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of Prospective Network</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. 
*Expressed Changed Expectations and Perceived Barriers*
The first and foremost barrier that I foresee is one of survival or self-interest. Many of these service providers are in reality competitors for the same funding sources. If the networking structure indicates that a specific organization(s) need to focus their efforts in a different direction or that funding should be allocated toward an endeavor that is not a core mission of an organization; then that organization faces the need for change or a lack of relevancy.

Students’ reading of the literature and exposure to community members also focused their attention on the potential for relational conflicts, or lack of trust. For instance:

As each organization strives to find its role and maintain relevance in such a competitive culture where limited funding forces agencies to compete against each other. As performance equals funding organizations will seek to create new benchmarks for performance and work to secure funding to maintain their existence. This adversarial system breeds conflict between organizations that may detract from collaborative efforts and service provision.

Last, students demonstrated an ability to apply theory to the barriers. For instance, the following journal excerpt addresses the barrier of coordination across organizational cultures.

A final challenge regarding the establishment of a network among the various agencies is the inherent differences in the sectors involved. These differences in sector orientation are important because they will likely affect how each organization establishes priorities, interprets situations, commits funding, and interacts with other players. The challenge will be in designing a collaborative network that can keep members from each of the sectors committed to the network while allowing enough flexibility so that each of these orientations can be satisfied.

Lessons Learned, Applicable Theories, and Contribution to Community

Table 3 summarizes student reflections from the third and final journal assignment, which was submitted just before the finalization of recommendations to the child-serving community. Students were asked to consider lessons learned through bridging course content with field research, identify applicable theories to assist the child-serving community, and specify the nature of the contribution the class will be making to the community.
Lessons Learned

Most of the lessons learned by students dealt with the application of particular theories, or the development of collaborative and network tools. Overall, these reflections show the apparent success of the service-learning approach in encouraging the internalization of new knowledge. For example, the following journal excerpt relates to the application of theory:

Table 3.
Expressed Lessons Learned, Applicable Theories, and Contribution to the Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Categories</th>
<th>Number of References in Student Journals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do you feel you have learned in bridging course content with field research?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application of Theory</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Awareness</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty Drawing Lessons</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Awareness</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Tools or Skills</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What theories and or tools do you envision as being applicable to the recommendations we will be making to the Children's Cabinet?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Advantage</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict Management</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Database</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Analysis</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Evaluation</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Formation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Network Management</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder Engagement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do you feel you or the class will be contributing to the child-serving community in Orange County?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Plan for Action</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inform Community</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspire Thinking</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lay Groundwork for Future Work</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When I first started this class, I was thinking, “How hard could this be? A network—get some people together who are interested in the cause and, presto—you have a network.” I didn’t realize all the components that go into making a network successful. Because of this course, I am now able to actually identify these factors and even ask in my interviews for the final project about other successful networks the interviewee might be a part of and why. I am able to prompt after posing the question because I understand the deeper aspects of a network.

Specific skills or tools learned included those associated with group work as well as the application of specific tools in network analysis. The following two statements capture these perspectives.

The service learning approach used in Cross-Sectoral Governance demands that students apply skills such as managing group dynamics, scheduling multiple events, communication among agencies, conflict resolution, and coordination of efforts. All of these skills are vital to success in the workplace and they are very difficult to simulate in the classroom. This experience is even more valuable when students know that their efforts have the probability of making a positive difference in the community. It is an unfortunate reality that most academic work is simply a practice in “honing one’s skills.” Usually, only the instructor will see a student’s work. Through the service learning process, student efforts actually have tangible results in the community.

Second:

We found an opportunity to apply our theoretical learning to field practices. For instance, as a survey analysis group, we learnt something about UCINET [a social network analysis software program] to look at the network between ties and nodes. However, if we were not involved in the process of entering survey data to UCINET, we would not learn more how to enter data, how to interpret data, [and] how to deal with data.

Applicable Theories

To assess particular student lessons learned with respect to theory, students were asked to specify those theories they thought to be most applicable for the child-serving community. Students identified eight theoretical areas or specific theories, which are listed in Table 3. This excerpt is a single brief
example of a student discussion in this area, taken in this case from the stakeholder engagement category:

Finally, I think that the network once created needs to learn from citizens that utilize services some of the concerns that they have regarding service delivery. Using methods of citizen engagement that were discussed in class, the Cabinet can begin to work with citizens to create a network that fits their needs, which is the ultimate purpose. This might involve information exchange between citizens and service providers. Additionally, using deliberative methods (issue forums, study circles, and deliberative polling) to learn from citizens about what they feel their needs are and possible solutions that might be useful; while also considering the ideas of the “experts” in the field.

**Contribution to Community**

Last, students were asked to reflect on what precisely, after all their work, they were contributing to the child-serving community. Four specific contributions were identified. First among those was the development of a plan for action for the community. Second is a contribution of providing the community with new information. Third is the hope that the research and report will inspire new thinking in the community. Last, one student suggested that the contribution is the first step of several in laying the groundwork for future progress.

**Conclusion**

Dicke, Dowden, and Torres (2004) identify four rationales on the use of service-learning pedagogical strategies: (1) community service, (2) moral, (3) political, and (4) instrumental. The case reported herein offers documentation of how a course can be taught in furtherance of a community service objective and an instrumental objective, primarily. Students reflected on the contributions made to community while also acknowledging skills learned and applied in offering a consultation service to community members. Additionally, students had the opportunity through journaling to reflect on their role as emerging leaders in the public administration discipline. As one student wrote in defining his expectations for the project, “I think our service learning project will be our road to becoming professional citizens.”

As networks, collaboration, and cross-sector relations become topics increasingly taught in Masters in Public Administration classrooms, and as scholars continue to innovate in researching these topics, it is important to apply these theories in practice. Developing collaborative relationships between universities and communities through service-learning and other client-based courses is a strategy that can enrich the learning environment and orient our faculty, staff, and students toward the pursuit of public work and professional citizenship.
References


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**Footnotes**

1. The final report is available to view and download at: http://www.cohpa.ucf.edu/pubadm/documents/BRYERChildrensCabinetFINALREPORT.pdf

2. All quotations are confidential. Quotations were gathered from student journal entries made during the Summer 2009 semester at the University of Central Florida.

Appendix

Community Interview Guide

Preface

We are interviewing you today to seek your input on the development of a possible network of child-serving agencies and organizations in Orange County. We are students in the [University Name] Department of Public Administration, studying with [instructor name] in a class entitled Cross-Sectoral Governance. This summer, our class is working collaboratively with the Orange County Children’s Cabinet to recommend how agencies across government, nonprofit, and private sectors might work together differently in order to (1) reduce the number of children falling through the cracks in terms of getting needed services, and (2) enhance the focus on prevention rather than treatment. I have a series of questions to ask you to help us accomplish this goal. Before I begin, do you have any questions for me?

Before I start, I need to let you know that I am recording this interview. I am doing so only to ensure that we have an accurate record of what you say. All digital audio files will be kept on Dr. [name]’s UCF office computer in a password-protected folder, accessible only by him. Your name or agency name will never be associated with anything you say in any written report that may be generated from this interview.

Section I—Identify Problem or Information Needs

1. What is the function of your agency/organization/church with respect to the well-being of children and families in Orange County?
2. In thinking about the needs of children in Orange County, what do you perceive to be the greatest needs?
3. What are the barriers to achieving the needs you have identified?
   a. (Prompt once respondent completes answer: Sharing information across agencies? Lack of resources? Competition for scarce resources? Outreach to clients, for example, children and families?)
4. What would help you and your agency to better meet the needs you have identified?

Section II—Identify the Type of Network

5. The Orange County Children’s Cabinet has expressed a desire to create a network, or a stronger set of relations, across agencies that serve children and families in Orange County. Would you like to see a network created that
   a. Allows for the sharing of information across agencies? Why or why not?
   b. Allows for the sharing of resources across agencies? Why or why not?
c. Jointly deliver services to children and families in the county, across agencies? Why or why not?

d. Develops a policy agenda to promote with local government officials as well as state officials? Why or why not?

e. Facilitates the development of a healthier community focused on prevention? Why or why not?

f. Do you see another need that a network of agencies across sectors might address?

Section III—Identify Possible Network Members

6. Thinking about a potential future network, who needs to be involved in some form? What agencies, organizations, and/or individuals? (Interviewer: Allow the respondent to be as broad or specific as they wish; you can seek types of organizations and types of people as well as specific names).

7. What stakeholders have the greatest amount of interest in the work of child-serving agencies and organizations?

8. What stakeholders have power in the county and should be included? (e.g., if required, power to provide resources, set policy, other).

Section IV—Existing Relations

9. What kind of relationship do you have with the organizations and stakeholders just discussed? (e.g., if needed, share information? Share resources? Jointly deliver services? Other?)

Section V—Environmental Conditions

10. What factors in the environment or in the county might influence the ability of the network to operate or achieve its goals? (Prompt as needed.)

a. Are the problems facing children and families hard to pin down or frequently changing?

b. Do events, like a severe economic downturn, limit your resources or the needs of your clients on a regular basis, or are needs and resources relatively stable over time?

c. Do employees of child-serving organizations and agencies leave their positions frequently? That is, is there high turnover?

d. Do political priorities change often with respect to serving children in the county?

Section VI—Strategic Orientation

11. When you think about your participation in a possible network, do you have expectations of how relationships will be managed?

a. Would you prefer a network that is bound by clearly stated
rules and procedures for decision making and some hierarchical accountability mechanisms?
b. Would you prefer a less hierarchical and rule-based structure that is built around teams with shared interests or goals?
c. Would you prefer a decentralized structure where all or most decisions are made by group consensus and dialogue?

Section VII—Network Structure
12. How would you envision a network being governed?
a. Would you prefer a self-governed network with no administrative core, in which all or most decisions are made through dialogue and consensus?
b. Would you prefer a lead organization, in which a single member of the network serves as primary decision maker and face of the network?
c. Would you prefer that a network administrative organization serve as a broker between network members, facilitating communication, sharing information, and making decisions? A network administrative organization would be a separate organization, not a network member.

Section VIII—Other Thoughts
13. [Interviewer: Ask any additional question you feel to be relevant for your respondent].
14. Do you have any additional thoughts to share that might assist us as we prepare a recommendation to the Children’s Cabinet regarding the development of a network of child-serving agencies in Orange County?