

Developing mutually beneficial relationships with community partners

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Abstract:

The information presented is from personal experiences resulting from one year of planning followed by one year of team teaching The Power of Story with Claire B. Johnson at Monmouth University. The Power of Story is a Communicating Common Ground (CCG) partnership. Information about CCG can be obtained by visiting <http://www.monmouth.edu/~story>.

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Like the hub to the spokes of a bicycle wheel, the faculty member serves as the point person who keeps the service and the learning working together towards a common goal.

Some Qualities of Good Partners

Trust - The faculty member needs to trust the community partner(s) and the partner(s) needs to trust the faculty member.

Flexibility - Starting with the faculty member, all parties must be flexible if the S-L partnership is to be a success.

Similar Interests - The faculty member needs to understand the goals and views of the community partner to ensure that all parties involved have similar interests.

Similar Expectations - Relating to the S-L project itself, faculty member must be sure that all parties have similar expectations.

Enthusiasm for the Project - The community partner needs to share the faculty member's enthusiasm for the project. If the partner's enthusiasm happens to lessen, the faculty member will need to work on regaining it (assessment helps here).

Follow-through - The partner needs to be committed to letting the faculty member work the project through to its completion.

Seven Partners of The Power of Story

National Partners

National Communication Association (NCA)
Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC)
American Association of Higher Education (AAHE)
Campus Compact (CC)

Local Partners

Atlantic Highlands Elementary School (AHES)
Atlantic Highlands Leos Club, an affiliate of Lions Club International (Leos)
Monmouth University's Partners in Learning Program (PAL)

-plus-

Corporate Sponsors/Donors

GPU Energy
Atlantic Highlands Teachers Association
Pathmark, Inc.

Mutual Benefit

Faculty looking to design a new S-L course or add S-L to an existing course must ask: "What do I need from a community partner?"

For the storytelling project at Monmouth University we needed kids to serve as audience members for our telling(s) and a commitment to the CCG national project.

Just as important, faculty must ask: "What can I offer the community partner beyond the obvious benefits of the coursework?"

The Storytelling Project has kept its commitment to the pursuit of local and national press coverage to ensure mutual benefit for all partners.

- In the past year the project has been featured in 8 newspaper, magazine, and new media articles and has appeared on UPN 9 News in the NY tri-state market.
- Articles are currently in the works for The Storyteller and Teaching Tolerance national magazines
- All partners are also featured on the story web page(<http://www.monmouth.edu/-story>)

Additional benefits to individual **national** partners include:

SPLC

- Increase their sphere of influence on a local level
- Taking small steps towards their goal of teaching tolerance
- Reinforce, at a local level, their national efforts to combat hate, hate speech, and hate crime

AAHE

- Serve as a model for activism and community service to other professionals in this interconnected world
- Practicing their goal of students learning and being assessed in non-traditional ways

CC

- Serve as a model for their goal of promoting college and university civic responsibility to the surrounding communities

NCA

- Promoting communication scholarship and education
- Raising the awareness level of communication as a field of study and a means of actively connecting people

Benefits to **local** partners include:

AH Elementary School

- SPLC resources – optional
- Teacher training - we have offered training
- An exciting learning activity for the kids
- Opportunity for kids to interact with college students in the comfort of their own classroom
- Newsletter article - written by Monmouth Professors - for their publication
- Television crews in the classroom - the kids loved seeing the crew doing their job
- General Mills Box Tops - from time to time we make small contributions to their collection for school computers effort
- Substitute Teacher - Some tellers are now certified to substitute at AHES
- Mouse pads & pens to thank the teachers at the school for working with us (the pens and pads say MU Department of Communication on them)
- Library Books - recognizing the need for the tolerance themes we teach to be present in the school all year long, we have solicited donations to purchase books for AHES's library. To date we have collected \$1100, which has made possible the purchase of over 80books.
- Community outlet - at the request of AHES we are currently working on finding a new home for their unwanted social studies - textbooks.

Leos

- Interaction with college students who are doing community work(role models)
- Visit to a college campus - we hosted them during our regular class time in the fall
- Storytelling training - while on campus, we taught them how to tell stories. Now, when the Leos make their regular Thursday evening visit to their local senior citizen center, they use the skills we taught them to tell stories. Also the Leos can better appreciate the real life stories the seniors tell them.
- Support the overall goal of individual community involvement of Lions Club International
- When the Leos help our storyteller in the classrooms at AHES, it increases their visibility and boosts their recruitment efforts.

PAL

- Interaction with college students
- Entertainment
- Tolerance education

Mutual benefit does not have to be as multi-layered as CCG.

When working on an S-L component for my nonverbal communication course, I found local ESL students simply asked for a tour of our historic campus in exchange for my students interviewing them about the nonverbal behaviors of their country of origin. The ESL students will come to campus, get a tour, visit my class during our regularly scheduled meeting time and I will send each ESL student a personal thank you = mutual benefit!

Issues we have faced (related to community partnerships)

- Scheduling elementary school visit - we are all on different academic calendars
- Miscommunication!
- Last minute elementary school changes - turns out the kindergartners will have gone home when we arrive
- Leos adult advisor is hard to reach after many attempts, we found fax and email were the best channels
- Good news, the press is coming. Bad news, we need permission from the
- parents of the elementary school kids who might be seen on the news – in two days' time!
- Assumptions made - turns out college students don't necessarily know how to communicate with kids
- PAL - very flexible and understandable
- Donations - create an unimaginable bureaucracy

Tools and techniques

- Thank your partners - and do it often
- Communicate - let everyone know what is going on
- Get flexible - no matter how flexible you think you are, you will need to get more so

- Involve your campus public affairs office - contact them early, as they will need time to properly support your efforts... they thrive on new story ideas for the media
- Alumni Affairs - most have an electronic or print outlet for a feature article
- Become a cheerleader - talk your project up to everyone!
- Solicit help - Find a mature, responsible, student with strong interpersonal and written communication skills. Sign the student up for independent study credit and appoint him/her your coordinator of promotions and special events. You will appreciate the help if you are careful to recruit the right student.
- Find out if your campus has a "Public Relations Student Society of America" if so, get them involved
- Seek web assistance (your projects should have a web page) from your campus instructional support department
- Approach the best journalism student your department has and ask him/her to write for you (the serious student knows how important it is to develop a portfolio)
- Believe in yourself and in your students