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Outcomes for Students of Student Affairs—Academic Affairs Partnership Programs

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Abstract

Although academic and student affairs partnership programs have been cited as potential means to create seamless learning environments for undergraduate students, little research exists on the outcomes of such programs for students. The Boyer Partnership Assessment Project examined the outcomes for students participating in academic and student affairs partnership programs at 18 institutions. Four categories of student outcomes were identified: acclimation to the institution, engagement, student learning, and academic and career decisions. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

At the beginning of the 21st century, higher education in the United States faces many challenges, including changing student demographics, advancing technologies, shrinking resources, and declining public confidence. For many years, postsecondary reform agendas have beckoned colleges and universities to focus intentionally on undergraduate learning and success to address these challenges (American College Personnel Association [ACPA, 1994; Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, 1998; National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges [NASULGC, 1997, 1999, 2000; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA & ACPA, 2004). Among suggestions to improve student learning, partnership programs—programs developed and offered through collaboration between academic and student affairs units—have received particular attention for their potential to create seamless learning environments (American Association for Higher Education [AAHE, ACPA & NASPA, 1998; Blimling & Whitt, 1999; Kezar, Hirsch, & Burack, 2001;

Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; NASPA & ACPA, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b). Despite exhortations about the value of partnership programs, however, little research has been conducted to identify the specific outcomes of such programs for participants (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Kezar et al.). The Boyer Partnership Assessment Project (BPAP) was initiated in 2001 to address these research gaps. This article intends to identify and describe student learning outcomes of partnership programs.

Review of Research and Literature

Student Engagement

Several decades of research on college impact point to engagement as the primary means by **435** which students learn, develop, and persist in college (Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Engagement has two key components: (a) the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other education-related activities, and (b) the allocation of institutional resources for services and learning opportunities that encourage students to participate in and benefit from such activities (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al.; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). In their recent review of research on college impact, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted:

The impact of college is largely determined by individual effort and involvement in the academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings on a campus. . . . This is not to say that an individual campus's ethos, policies, and programs are unimportant [rather it is important to focus on the ways in which an institution can shape its academic, interpersonal, and extracurricular offerings to encourage student engagement. (p. 602)

High levels of student engagement are associated with a wide range of educational practices and conditions, including purposeful student–faculty contact; active and collaborative learning strategies; and collaboration among faculty, academic affairs units, and student affairs units to produce programs and services (Astin; Kuh et al.; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). For example, research on students' cognitive and

socio-emotional development (Astin; Cabrera et al., 2002; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) concluded that collaborative learning contributes to problem solving, openness to diversity, and persistence in college. Frequent faculty–student interaction in and beyond the classroom also increases academic achievement and student success. In addition, Project DEEP (Documenting Effective Educational Practices) demonstrated the importance of shared responsibility—among faculty, staff, academic affairs units, and student affairs units—for undergraduate learning to enhance student success (Kuh et al.). Effective student engagement conditions may be critical to effective partnership programs.

Academic and Student Affairs Partnerships

Four-year colleges and universities have been critiqued for becoming too fragmented by disciplinary and functional specializations to educate students effectively (Blimling & Whitt, 1999; Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University, 1998; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990; NASULGC, 1997, 1999, 2000; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b; Wingspread Group on Higher Education, 1993). Summarizing their 1991 synthesis of 20 years of research on college impact, Terenzini and Pascarella (1994) noted the negative impact of fragmentation on student learning:

Organizationally and operationally, we have lost sight of the forest. If undergraduate education is to be enhanced, faculty members, joined by academic and student affairs administrators, must devise ways to deliver undergraduate education that are as comprehensive and integrated as the ways that students actually learn. A whole new mindset is needed to capitalize on the interrelatedness of the in- and out-of-class influences on student learning and the functional interconnectedness of academic and student affairs divisions.

(p. 32)

In other words, students learn most effectively in what have been described as "seamless learning environments" (Kuh, 1996; Kuh et al., 2005; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b). Seamless learning environments are characterized by coherent educational

purposes, comprehensive policies and practices consistent with students' **436** needs and abilities, and a widely shared "ethos of learning" (Kuh, 1996, p. 136). Students are encouraged to take advantage of "learning resources that exist both inside and outside the classroom . . . and asked to apply what they are learning in class to their lives outside the classroom" (Kuh, 1996, p. 136). These environments blur the boundaries between in-class and out-of-class, curricular and co-curricular, and academic and non-academic experiences.

Partnership programs between academic and student affairs units have been advocated as one means to bridge the academic, social, and affective elements of students' experiences to create seamless learning environments and foster student engagement (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998; Blimling & Whitt, 1999; Kezar et al., 2001; Kuh, 1996; Kuh et al., 2005; NASPA & ACPA, 2004; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b). Indeed, collaborations among faculty, academic affairs units, and student affairs units and staff are associated with high levels of student engagement (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al.; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b). Partnerships inherently require educators from within and beyond the classroom to collaborate in consideration of students' educational experiences. They create cross-functional linkages that merge resources and expertise from separate entities to address the learning needs of students.

Although partnership programs have been advocated as a means to improve undergraduate education, much of the literature regarding the value of these partnerships is anecdotal rather than empirically based (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b). No systematic assessment of the impact of partnership programs for students has been implemented. Do they, in fact, create seamless learning environments? Do such programs actually improve student learning? Do they assist institutions in helping students achieve desired educational outcomes?

These unanswered questions motivated the creation of BPAP. Research questions included: (a) What learning outcomes did partnership programs identify for their students? (b) What evidence demonstrated achievement of these outcomes? and (c)

What did students involved in the programs identify as the outcomes of their participation?

Methods

Research was conducted through BPAP, a FIPSE-funded study directed by The Ernest L. Boyer Center at Messiah College (PA). Seven researchers, all with experience in academic and student affairs administration and several with experience in qualitative research methods, comprised the research team. A qualitative case study design (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) was chosen to discover and describe student learning outcomes associated with partnership programs. Because there is little research specific to the outcomes and practices of partnership programs, we sought methods that would not only provide rich descriptions of the elements and impacts of programs within individual institutions, but would also allow comparisons across types of programs and institutions (Rossman & Rallis). The strength of case studies "is their detail, their complexity, and their use of multiple sources to obtain multiple perspectives" (Rossman & Rallis, p. 105).

Sample

Research began in 2001 with a call for proposals from institutions that had expressed interest in several partnership program initiatives of The Boyer Center. Forty-seven proposals were submitted. We sought variety in institutional type (e.g., 2-year and 4-year), size (e.g., small colleges and large universities), **437** form of control (e.g., public and private), mission (e.g., church-affiliated, independent, research-extensive), and type of partnership program. Selection criteria included evidence of (a) evaluation and assessment data, (b) ongoing academic–student affairs collaboration (including a program "track record" of at least 3 years), and (c) commitment of institutional leadership to the program. Based on these criteria, 12 institutions were selected for 2002–03 participation. Two institutions had to withdraw from participation during that year. The research team went back to the original proposals to select additional

institutions for 2003–04 participation, paying particular attention to evidence of assessment. Eight additional institutions were selected for participation.

TABLE 1.

Boyer Partnership Assessment Project Institutional Participants

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

Table 1.

Boyer Partnership Assessment Project Institutional Participants

Our final sample of 18 (see Table 1) included four community, six public, and eight private institutions. Partnership program types included first-year transitions, service learning and community service, living–learning communities, academic support, interdisciplinary courses, cultural programming, and leadership development.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred from April 2002 through March 2004 via one 3- to 4-day site visit to each institution by two to five researchers. Site visit dates were identified by the participating institutions and designed to provide researchers maximum access to participants as well as opportunities to attend at least one partnership program event.

438 Because of the variety in program types and event schedules across the participating institutions, site visits occurred at different times of the year and involved different numbers and types of participants, each with varying amounts of time involved in the program. Each site visit included approximately 10-15 interviews, with two to three opportunities for observation, and involved approximately 40 to 200 participants. The primary means of data collection were individual and group interviews with institutional and partnership program leaders as well as student and educator participants. Interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes, were audio-taped, and used for within- and cross-site data analysis. Separate interview protocols were developed for students, educators, and administrators (see Appendix). Before and during site visits, we reviewed relevant program documents, including web pages, planning documents, annual reports, assessment data, and marketing materials. We attended program events and observed class sessions. Each visit concluded with a debriefing session with the campus visit coordinator to address remaining questions and seek response to emerging themes.

Data Analysis

Following each site visit, researchers prepared a detailed report of the partnership program. To ensure trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the initial report was returned to the institution for wide distribution and review. After the site team reached agreement with the campus visit coordinator that the report richly and accurately portrayed the program, we used site reports to analyze data across sites.

The research team began cross-site analysis after completion of about half the site visits. Three researchers—hereafter referred to as the data analysts—performed an inductive analysis (Strauss, 1987) of four of the reports to identify initial codes and categories of data. This process yielded 18 potential student-outcome codes, which were distributed to the entire research team. Based on conversations with the research team and new data from the 2003–04 site visits, the list of potential student outcomes grew to 30.

As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), these preliminary concepts were used by the data analysts to develop a list of a priori codes. A coding exercise was used to determine the validity of the codes and the reliability of the coders. The data analysts independently used the code list to code the same report. Coding results then were compared. The team found that codes used were substantially the same. Differences were identified and discussed, with clearer definitions for codes developed as needed. The data analysts had the opportunity to develop inductive codes if the a priori codes as defined did not fit data found in subsequent reports. The data analysts discussed the individual inductive codes to ensure that the code was substantive and substantially different from those already in existence. If a code was found to meet these criteria, it was added to the code listing for each data analyst.

The qualitative data analysis software, *Atlas-ti*, facilitated our analyses. The software was used to code reports for good practices and student, educator, and institutional outcomes. The software also assisted in the management of coded data. Negative coding—using the opposite of a code—was used to identify nuances and alternative explanations. For instance, the code "acclimation–facilitate transition" was used to capture data that indicated the partnership program had facilitated students' transition to college. Its negative, "acclimation–no facilitate transition," was used to highlight instances when data indicated the partnership program had not facilitated the transition to college. This method allowed the analysts to fully capture **439** the data's complexity. Final data analysis resulted in 118 data codes, including 36 student outcomes codes clustered in five thematic categories.

To assure validity and reliability, the data analysts compared the data generated for several codes for internal consistency and external heterogeneity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At this point, the data analysts shared the codes, thematic categories, and supporting evidence with the full research team. Key study participants were also invited to review themes and evidence as part of our ongoing effort to ensure credibility.

Results

Study results are drawn from the weight of the evidence; not every outcome occurred for every student nor for every institution. Rather, analysis examined the prevalence of outcomes for students across the 18 participating institutions, seeking to determine the extent to which students involved in different programs at different institutions experienced similar outcomes. The results presented here highlight only those outcomes that occurred for a preponderance of students across partnership programs. Caution must be exercised, therefore, in determining whether these results are applicable to other partnership programs.

It should also be noted that the student outcomes outlined here most likely result from the educationally powerful conditions created by the partnership programs. The focus of this study was how partnership programs create these conditions and outcomes. Partnership programs, however, are only one means to creating such educational conditions. Thus, although the results discussed here pertain to such programs, it should be recognized that partnership programs do not represent the only means of securing these outcomes for students.

Analysis of the data yielded four categories of student outcomes: (a) acclimation to the institution, (b) engagement, (c) student learning, and (d) academic and career decisions. A discussion of each category follows.

Acclimation to the Institution

Students, faculty, and staff recognized that academic and student affairs partnership programs help students acclimate to their institution. Participation facilitated students' adjustment and transition to the social and academic demands of postsecondary education. Partnership programs fostered (a) effective transitions, (b) a sense of community, and (c) persistence in college.

Effective Transitions

Partnership programs that helped students maneuver the academic and social transitions from high school to college typically included learning communities, developmental courses, or other first-year programs whose goals focused on facilitating this transition. Through participation, students gained increased knowledge of

institutional processes and resources and developed greater confidence to navigate the institution. Students talked about learning "where to go for help" and said they had a better understanding of how to "work the system" as a result of program experiences. Often, programs provided students with a group of peers, which increased student comfort both in and out of the classroom. A student at Barnard College observed,

I think the In-Residence Seminar really facilitates the transition to college life, schedule, work load, etc. . . . Leading discussions was much less intimidating when you were with people you live with. . . . We're all very friendly with each other, we all know each other's names. Even when it's a class that might be somewhat difficult, everyone's able to relate about that. **440**

Several partnership programs also provided a sense of identity as a college student. For example, the Developmental Math Program (DVMP) at Prince George's Community College comprises non-credit classes designed to help students become independent learners prepared for credit-level coursework. Many students in the program were new to college and unfamiliar with the language and the expectations of postsecondary work. The program assisted students not only in learning math, but also in transitioning to college-level expectations (e.g., time management, staying on task, study skills, use of resources). Educators asserted that student participants "learned how to learn" and gained familiarity with the "language of learning," which improved their ability to talk with faculty.

Sense of Community

Many partnership programs were noted for connecting students to the institution early in their college careers, in effect providing them with a sense of community. Programs fostered a sense of belonging among students within residences, seminar groups, and other academic and social groups. Students connected with experienced adults and peers who cared about them, their happiness, and their success in college. Some students referred to program participants as a "family away from home." A student involved in DePauw Year One at DePauw University said,

I really like how we went through orientation with our seminar group. That way you weren't just alone on campus. . . . After the first night I was glad I was here. I had made the right decision. I had made friends already.

For some students, involvement in partnership programs made their large institution feel small and manageable. Students experienced a sense of personal connection within the much larger institutional or residential context. At the University of Missouri, students and educators suggested that the Freshman Interest Group (FIG) program was successful in "making the big store small." Both FIG participants and student staff discussed how the small size of the FIGs allowed "more personal and individual attention" and facilitated student adjustment to the institution. One student peer advisor noted, "At a large university like this, some entry level courses sometimes will have anywhere from 50 to 400 people. . . . [FIGs help decrease the size of the university, and [students feel not just like a number but cared about."

Persistence in College

Partnership programs contributed to student persistence. Program involvement affected some students' decision to stay, particularly during the first few weeks. Several programs cited improved retention rates as evidence of student impact. According to several administrators at the University of Maryland, the retention rate for College Park Scholars (CPS), at 77%, was higher than that for the general student body, at 64%. Some students remained at their institution because of program involvement. A former CPS student commented, "I was considering transferring out of UM, but the main reason I don't want to transfer is because I want to finish Scholars."

Engagement

Participation in partnership programs fostered student engagement both in and out of the classroom. Students and educators said partnership programs facilitated involvement in campus and community activities and provided opportunities for meaningful interpersonal interactions. Partnership programs increased student engagement through facilitating (a) campus involvement, (b) academic engagement, (c) civic engagement, and (d) interactions with faculty and students.

Campus Involvement

Educators and students at several institutions suggested that **441** partnership programs increased students' awareness of campus activities and events and encouraged involvement in student organizations. Students noted finding out about activities they would not otherwise have known about or considered. Experiences within the partnership program motivated students to get involved. One student involved in New Century College (NCC) at George Mason University stated,

Seeing the drive in different organizations makes you want to go out and do—to get involved on campus and campus organizations. . . . I worked in this treatment place for ex-offenders, [mostly a minority population. . . . So, I [decided to get involved with [multicultural issues on campus. Now I have a leadership role.

Academic Engagement

Enhanced academic engagement was discussed by students and educators at the majority of institutions. Students involved in partnership programs became engaged in their learning and spent time studying and using academic success resources. An educator at the University of Maryland commented that CPS students, compared to non-CPS students "seem more aware of knowledge and learning for its own sake than for other motives." Educators at the University of Arizona observed that a Student–Faculty Interaction Grant experience enhanced academic engagement, as demonstrated by increased class attendance and student interaction, decreased behavioral and disciplinary problems, and increased out-of-class interaction with faculty and subject material.

Civic Engagement

Participation in partnership programs increased some students' awareness of and involvement in community service, service learning, community activism, and civic opportunities. Through programs, students volunteered with local community agencies and advocated for social justice issues. For example, students' experiences with The Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy at Siena College fostered and nurtured an interest in community service, prompting students to realize their capacity to impact

local communities. One student stated, "I also feel like I should get out there more and volunteer more without getting credit for it." Another remarked, "I've learned that you don't need to do everything to help. You don't need to be everything . . . but if you put effort into what you actually do . . . you can make a difference."

Interactions with Faculty and Students

Nearly all the partnership programs observed increased interactions between students and educators, both in and outside of class. Partnership programs provided opportunities for student involvement with faculty outside the classroom and encouraged meaningful conversations and activities in and out of class. Participation increased the level of comfort students felt when interacting with faculty, as they began to see faculty as "real" people available to assist students. A student at the University of Arizona said,

[The Faculty Fellows Program is not so formal, you actually go and talk to your professors. You get to know them on a personal level so when you're in class it's easier to approach them for office hours. You get to know them as a human instead of just a person who talks at you. It's given us a lot more camaraderie as faculty and students. Many students noted positive peer interactions that resulted from partnership program experiences. Through the partnership programs, students engaged in meaningful conversations with peers, both in and out of class. For example, the Villanova Experience at Villanova University created friendships among students who, under other circumstances, might not have encountered one another. One student stated, **442**

In thinking about my friends from my freshman year in St. Mary's [residence hall, one of the things that attracted me to them was they were so incredibly different from me. I had never come across people like this before and it was interesting to get their point of view and we disagreed about things and would argue about things, but when push came to shove, I knew I could count on them.

Peer interactions enhanced student learning, as partnership programs provided opportunities for students to challenge one another, both in and out of the classroom.

Student Learning

Participation in partnership programs yielded a wide range of learning outcomes, encompassing curricular and co-curricular experiences, as well as in-class and out-of-class endeavors. Partnership programs valued student learning and provided seamless learning opportunities, environments, and experiences. Educators and students noted a variety of student learning outcomes, including helping students to (a) make connections between in- and out-of-class experiences, (b) think critically, (c) take responsibility for learning, (d) understand themselves, and (e) understand others.

Making Connections

According to students, faculty, and staff, involvement in partnership programs prompted many students to make connections between curricular and co-curricular experiences and to integrate cognitive and affective knowledge. For example, students involved with the Residential Leadership Community (RLC) at Virginia Tech perceived the integration of their in- and out-of-class experiences. One first-year student commented,

You could offer the coursework but it wouldn't be the same experience if you didn't live in the dorm. When you live in the dorm, you see what you learned [in class put to work.

Connections were often made through experiential and/or active learning within the program. Students in the partnership programs enjoyed learning through direct, hands-on experience and practical application. A student involved in the Boyer Learning Laboratory at Carson-Newman College stated,

In class the prof tells you about a person but in the Boyer Lab you get to talk with the person. . . . The effect stays with you longer and has a greater impact because you are more active in the learning and not just being told something.

Thinking Critically

Educators and students commented that involvement in their partnership programs facilitated critical thinking. Through participation, students learned to think, use evidence, and pose questions. The Catholic Institute for Lasallian Social Action (CILSA) at Saint Mary's College of California exemplifies the enhancement of students' critical-

thinking abilities. One student taking a service-learning course through CILSA described learning the importance of developing arguments: "I just found myself so much more focused. It just made me develop the ideas of argument, the ideas of evidence, and how to develop your thoughts and how to develop your opinions based on strong logic and evidence." Students involved in service-learning courses with CILSA also reported learning to think critically regarding non-related coursework. One student observed, [CILSA also makes you question the things that you're taught in other classes. Because I know about the WTO [World Trade Organization and the impact of NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement, now in other courses I'll bring those issues up. If it weren't for [these courses/instructors that encouraged you to examine the larger issues, I think I would probably just sit there and take it **443** all in and think that I knew about what the WTO did.

Taking Responsibility for Learning

Students in many partnership programs experienced an environment that emphasized achievement and success. These programs enhanced student desire to learn while promoting high standards and expectations. A student in NCC at George Mason University said,

I like to term the first year as boot camp, because it was insane. I remember saying I think I learned more in my first year of New Century than in my whole high school career because you're automatically having to do all these essays every single night, tons of readings, lots of different types of projects, lots of group-oriented projects. But I loved it at the same time. It was challenging but even when I was doing it I was so happy I was in it, even though it was really frustrating.

Several partnership programs fostered accountability as individuals and peers took on responsibility for the learning process. Students in the FIGs at the University of Missouri expressed responsibility for learning and for helping each other learn. Students described participating in study groups together and providing each other support with courses. One student shared about a time she was behind in her studies and a FIG peer made a special effort to help by quizzing her on notes and exams. Hall coordinators observed students pounding on one another's doors, urging their peers to wake up and

get to class. One person said that when someone skips class, instead of just giving him or her notes, a FIG peer might give them a "hard time." One coordinator said students "bug each other" by asking, "Have you studied yet? Why don't you come to my room and study?" Partnership programs helped students engage themselves and others in the learning process.

Understanding Self

Involvement in some partnership programs increased students' self-awareness and self-understanding. Program experiences prompted self-reflection and led students to a greater understanding of personal identity. For instance, the Chicago Quarter at DePaul University required students to reflect on personal opinions, experiences, and thoughts. Educators explained, "They learn to reflect on where they stand on issues," and "They have to think for themselves and have their own opinions." Student participants in the Chicago Quarter also indicated greater self-awareness. One commented, "I've learned a lot about myself and my strengths and weaknesses, [including time management, how I deal with stress, what my limits are."

Partnership programs also increased the self-confidence of participants. Students became confident to ask questions, speak in class, and interact with peers and faculty. One student in the Learning Community at William Rainey Harper Community College said,

[The learning community changed the way I think about things. They changed the way I perceive the world. I never thought I would be comfortable with myself talking about issues that are very strong, and I feel very comfortable now being able to express myself now and be who I am because of them. They really helped me to grow up.

Understanding Others

In addition to learning about themselves, students noted that they developed a greater awareness and understanding of the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of others as a result of participation in partnership programs. Students talked about exposure to experiences they would not have had otherwise, describing these as "an eye opener" that challenged their worldviews. One student at Messiah College commented that the

External Programs experience changed **444** "how I see myself in context to the world and issues. . . . It changed us in ways you can't articulate." Students in several partnership programs gained a greater sense of empathy and were challenged to confront their beliefs and values. A Messiah College alumna described her experience at the Philadelphia campus as "perception-changing" because it confronted her stereotypes of urban areas and showed her that "this is a home for people, and this is my neighborhood too."

Several partnership programs increased student awareness of cultural differences in society. Program involvement provided interaction with individuals from diverse backgrounds and exposure to issues of race and class. Students learned about human differences and recognized their own stereotypes, prejudices, and privilege. A student involved in the Multicultural Awareness Council (MAC) at Portland Community College (PCC) noted that her involvement with MAC "taught me I really need to understand and really focus" on the variety of cultures at PCC. As a White student, she found

the tables get turned in this position. We're the outsiders so you learn to relate to how they're feeling. . . . We are going to make a difference in someone's life by our events. It's diversity. We live in a very diverse part of town and we need to work together.

Academic and Career Decisions

Partnership programs played a role in students' choices of colleges, majors, and careers. Awareness of the partnership program influenced some students' decisions to attend their institution. Students from about half of the institutions reported that involvement in the partnership programs exposed them to different majors and careers, which helped them choose their field of study and future careers. Partnership programs influenced students' (a) choice of college, (b) choice of major, and (c) choice of career.

Choice of College

Some students knew of the partnership program prior to applying to the institution, which influenced their decision to attend. For example, several students indicated that they selected Saint Mary's College because of CILSA or CILSA-related activities. One student, who learned about Saint Mary's through her Lasallian high school, stated, "The

reason I chose Saint Mary's is because they had the Bonner program. I felt that if the school would have a program like that, it must be dedicated to serving others and living out the Catholic faith." Another student said, "[CILSA is one of the reasons I came to Saint Mary's College last year. Saint Mary's College was nice, but CILSA was the catcher." Although not typically a stated goal of the programs, the positive impact programs had on students' decisions to attend their institution was discussed by many educators.

Choice of Major

Students and educators noted the influence that partnership programs had on students' selection of majors. Involvement in partnership programs enhanced students' exposure to and understanding of their academic discipline. Some partnership programs sought to expose students to majors and careers, thus encouraging informed decisions early in their academic careers. Some students at North Carolina State University asserted they had no idea what they wanted to do with their lives upon entering college, but the First Year College Living-Learning Community (FYC) helped them choose a major. One student said,

FYC allowed me to see all the resources on campus, and helped me develop my interests and explore options. It's been immensely helpful, because I found I really do love chemistry and biology and things like that. I hope to go to medical school, and biological sciences is the track. **445**

Choice of Career

Partnership programs also affected students' selection of careers. Some students gained career-related experience (e.g., teaching, research, internships, etc.), which helped them decide about future careers. For instance, students involved with the Center for Service Learning at Brevard Community College commented on the extent to which service experiences influenced their career choices. One student indicated her service involvement exposed her to a wide variety of experiences and inspired her to consider a career in politics. A Siena College alumna discussed the dramatic impact a Franciscan Center for Service and Advocacy internship had on her life, as she took a year

deferment from medical school to work at a community agency as a case manager. She said,

I re-evaluated my priorities. After working at [the agency for a year, gee, I only had a bachelors, but I was really helping people. I was doing something that I got to sleep every night maybe worrying about them a little bit but feeling good that I was doing my part.

Summary and Limitations

Overall, evidence suggests that partnership programs foster learning outcomes for students. Students and educators discussed how involvement in partnership programs led to outcomes such as acclimation to the institution and increased student engagement and learning. Partnership programs also were noted for their influence on students' academic and career decisions.

Interpretation and application of the results of this study are limited by the research methods. Because we selected our sample purposefully, we do not assert that our findings can be generalized to other institutions or other partnership programs. In addition, the purpose of our study—to identify student outcomes—focused on some elements of the institutions and partnerships and disregarded others. Finally, as with all team research, there was variability in the richness of site reports, which affected the detail possible in analyzing data and reporting results. Discussion of findings and implications for practice and research follow.

Discussion

Advocates of higher education renewal laud the role of academic and student affairs partnerships in creating seamless learning environments for students (Blimling & Whitt, 1999; Kuh, 1996; Schroeder, 1999a, 1999b). Until now, however, little evidence existed of the outcomes of partnerships for students. This study sought to identify student outcomes of partnership programs.

Four conclusions can be drawn from the results. First, partnership programs can and do foster desired outcomes for students. Second, although expectations of partnership

programs matter, such programs also yield unexpected outcomes. Third, student outcomes are mutually shaping and mutually reinforcing. Fourth, asking students what they are learning, and how, provides important information for academic and student affairs professionals and might also foster student learning and development.

Fostering Desired Outcomes

Our results support assertions that partnership programs foster desired outcomes for students. Partnership programs contribute to (a) acclimation to the institution, (b) engagement, (c) student learning, and (d) academic and career decisions. These outcomes are essential for student persistence and success in college (Astin, 1993; Blimling & Whitt, 1999; Kuh et al., 2005; Tinto, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). **446**

Partnership programs facilitate students' academic and social acclimation to their institutions. Programs assist effective transitions from high school to college, provide a sense of community, and give some students a reason to remain enrolled at the institution. Helping students make social connections and adjust to postsecondary academic environments influences integration into the institution, a critical step in promoting student persistence to graduation (Tinto, 1993). Acclimation contributes to student success in college (Kuh et al., 2005), reflected not only in graduation but also in the accrual of desired outcomes and benefits of college (Kuh 2001). By facilitating institutional acclimation, partnership programs influence not only persistence but also college success.

Partnership programs enhance student engagement by encouraging campus involvement, academic involvement, civic engagement, and interactions with peers and faculty. Student engagement has been recognized as fundamental to what one gleans from college (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al. 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). That is, "what students *do* during college counts more for what they learn and whether they will persist in college than who they are or even where they go to college" (Kuh et al., p. 8). Partnership programs use strategies such as active learning, community building, peer connections, service learning, diversity education, academic advising, student–faculty

interaction, undergraduate research, and celebration of achievements to involve students in purposeful curricular and co-curricular activities. These efforts foster engagement; that is, these efforts relate what one *does* while in college with what one *gains* from college.

Particularly noteworthy is the extent to which participation in partnership programs enhances student learning. Students and educators emphasized the roles partnership programs play in helping students make connections across and among curricular and co-curricular experiences, promoting critical thinking, and encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning. Participation enables students to integrate their experiences into coherent learning outcomes. Students at numerous institutions, for example, described thinking more critically about course readings, out-of-class experiences, and social issues. Students increase awareness of the self through reflection on experiences, opinions, and ideas. Awareness of the self broadens to include others as students learn about societal pluralism and develop increased cultural awareness. Poignantly, students also increase understanding about their own stereotypes and pre-conceived notions of race, ethnicity, and culture.

Apart from being desired results of a college education, these outcomes suggest the sort of educational seamlessness that higher education has been called upon to provide and for which partnership programs have been commended as potential architects. Many of these programs emphasize student learning as a purpose, if not *the* purpose, for their existence. Cross-functional collaboration exists as a means of influencing student learning rather than as an end in itself.

In addition, students commit to academic and career decisions as a result of participation in partnership programs. Students enlarge their awareness of academic disciplines, thus making "informed decisions" early in their academic career. Programs offer effective environments for helping students in their majors and in making career decisions. Experiences such as teaching, research, internships, and service help inform and solidify career choices. Further, students redefine their priorities and commitments, leading to new and/or renewed commitments to major and post-college aspirations.

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Attending to Expected and Unexpected Outcomes

Well-articulated expectations for partnership programs are important for success. Partnership programs at Missouri and William Rainey Harper, for instance, specified improved student retention as an expected outcome. Retention among student participants at both institutions improved. Programs at Villanova, North Carolina State, and DePauw identified successful transition to college and acclimation to the institution as intended outcomes of participation. Students at all three institutions indicated their respective programs helped them adjust to the demands of college and provided valuable information about institutional resources. Desired outcomes guide the partnership programs, suggesting that expectations matter.

Even with thorough planning and goal development, however, unexpected outcomes did occur. At Brevard Community College, for example, the partnership program connected students with the local community and fostered civic engagement through service learning. The extent to which students reflected on and decided their majors and careers as a result of these experiences was an unexpected, though positive, outcome. Similarly, the CPS program at the University of Maryland was designed to improve student retention and ease student transitions to college. The program, however, gained regional and national recognition and served a critical role in students' selection of institutions. Many partnership programs emerged to address institutional crises (e.g., attrition, financial) or to respond to national movements (e.g., first-year programs, service learning, diversity education). The synergistic nature of partnership programs is seen in the prevalence of unexpected, though desirable, student outcomes.

Mutually Shaping and Mutually Reinforcing Outcomes

The results of this study indicate that student outcomes are mutually shaping and mutually reinforcing. Each outcome contributes to the molding and strengthening of other outcomes. Acclimation to and engagement with the institution is inextricably linked to student learning. What students gain from college depends on what they do

while in college, which, in turn, depends on the extent to which they are integrated into the academic and social life of the institution (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005; Tinto, 1987, 1993). Students involved in DVMP at Prince George's, for instance, interacted with faculty and student affairs professionals, in and out of class, to learn the language and expectations of postsecondary education and how to be successful in college. Providing DVMP students with information about college success helped them transition to college while also providing opportunities for engagement with faculty and personal responsibility for learning.

Students at Saint Mary's College described interactions with faculty as "pushing" them to think differently about issues such as poverty, crime, and globalization. One student explained that he prepared vigorously for a class where the professor routinely challenged his thinking. His purpose in being prepared was not simply to defend his position but to be able to dialogue effectively with his professor. A desire for continued interaction with his professor motivated this student to read additional materials and to be more critical in his preparation and evaluation of arguments. Other students offered similar examples of the relationship between engagement and learning. This notion of mutually shaping and mutually reinforcing outcomes supports previous research highlighting the connections between **448** acclimation, engagement, and student outcomes (Astin, 1993; Kuh et al., 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Partnership programs appear to provide the seamlessness of learning they have been expected to address.

Asking Students About Learning Yields Important Information

Experiences with the partnership programs in this study suggest that intentionally soliciting students' perspectives reveals not only what, but also how, students are learning. Students spoke to the richness of their experiences and the meaning gleaned from them, articulating not only what they were learning but also the ways they were integrating their learning. Students provided ample examples of the application of partnership program experiences to courses, student organizations, daily lives, and

decisions about the future. They described instances of critical thinking, integration of learning, faculty interactions, peer interactions, and improved understanding of self and others—all desirable outcomes of college. In fact, precisely because of the unexpected outcomes of partnership programs, asking students to discuss their learning provides information that might otherwise be overlooked.

Most students cited our interviews as the first time they had been asked about their experiences. Although some programs incorporated regular reflection into student participation, most had not. According to the students, these interviews provided an important opportunity to consider their learning and to reflect on their experiences. Asking students to think about their experiences and the application of those experiences, provides students an important opportunity to actively reflect on their learning, thus fostering further learning and development (Baxter Magolda, 1999).

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The results of this study hold several implications for individuals interested in using academic and student affairs partnership programs to enhance student learning. First, capitalizing on the potential of such partnerships requires considering outcomes during planning and assessment. Intended outcomes should be stated clearly from the initial stages of planning and incorporated into assessment efforts. Most of the partnership programs in this study specified outcomes and conducted student needs and satisfaction assessments. Few, however, assessed student outcomes. It is difficult to argue for the value of partnerships on the basis of student satisfaction alone. More reliable and valuable arguments rest on institution-specific evidence that participation yields desired student outcomes. Thus, assessment efforts should be incorporated from the initial stages of partnership planning—beginning with the statement of desired outcomes—and should gather information about students' needs, levels of satisfaction, and outcomes of program participation. Such efforts must ascertain the achievement of stated outcomes and the occurrence of unexpected outcomes.

Second, academic and student affairs partnerships enhance undergraduate education to the extent that they emphasize student learning. Creating partnerships for the sake of bridging academic and student affairs, although a worthwhile endeavor, overlooks the full potential of such collaboration. Faculty and student affairs professionals should guard against narrow views of program impact. For instance, this study suggests that a first-year transition program can foster a number of outcomes for students, beyond mere acclimation to the institution. Maintaining an emphasis on learning connects students' **449** curricular and co-curricular experiences through the institutional mission and provides the seamless learning environments necessary for undergraduate education (Kuh, 1996).

The results of this study also propose an agenda for future research. Although the BPAP study provides initial evidence of the impact of partnership programs for students, the topic remains ripe for further exploration. Given the breadth of calls for academic and student affairs partnerships and for the creation of seamless learning environments, research identifying the full range of outcomes for students is critical. Both qualitative studies—capturing the nuances of "how" and "why" through participants' own words—and quantitative studies—seeking to measure and standardize learning outcomes—are needed. Further research might focus on determining specific outcomes of participation in partnership programs, correlations between specific partnership programs and desirable student outcomes, comparison of participants and non-participants in educational gains and learning outcomes, characterization of students most likely to benefit from participation, and effects of institutional contexts and program types on the specific outcomes achieved.

Conclusions

The BPAP study sought to understand the impact of academic and student affairs partnerships on student outcomes. Although partnerships have been hailed for their potential to revitalize undergraduate education, little research exists to document their effectiveness. Until now, questions, such as whether partnerships actually improve learning, contribute to the achievement of desired educational outcomes, or create

seamless learning environments, remained unanswered. Results of this study support the exhortations of the effectiveness of academic and student affairs partnerships. As evidenced here, partnership programs do in fact enhance student learning by contributing to acclimation to the institution, engagement, learning, and academic and career decisions. Programs arising from collaboration between academic and student affairs units play an important role in helping institutions achieve desired outcomes for students and in fostering student learning and success.

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