

**A Multilevel Analysis of the Lifespan of the Campus-Community Partnership: From Initiation to Restructuring**

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Often campus-community partnerships are initiated and driven by the college or university. However, scholars have called for universities to closely consider how to collaboratively address community needs. As a result, greater emphasis has been placed upon understanding the nature of campus-community partnerships (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010; Giles & Eyler, 1998; Sandy & Holland, 2006), specifically the web of relationships that form partnerships and undergird civic engagement. Bringle and Hatcher (2002) proposed that conceptualizing campus-community partnerships as relationships could elucidate interpersonal dynamics important to intentionally improving alliances among all stakeholders.

However, while efforts have been made to analyze community-campus relationships at the individual level very little research has yet to focus upon structural and socio-cultural factors (Clayton et al., 2010; Domegan & Bringle, 2010). Until a more comprehensive analysis of the nature of community campus partnerships occurs, effective approaches to improving these campus community alliances will not be adequately realized. The current study utilized campus-community partnership theory paired with aspects of equity and organizational change theories to examine the evolution of a sport based campus-community partnership from a multilevel perspective (i.e., individual, socio-cultural and structural levels).

For the current study, two of Sport Hartford's programs were utilized-the Boys After School and Teens Programs. During a three year span (2008-2011), the Sport Hartford ran an after-school program, the Boys' Program, for early adolescent males (ages 9-13) at a Hartford recreation center (Hartford Rec). Data for the study included individual interviews with the participants and their parents, weekly program records and staff meeting minutes were utilized to inform the study. The Teens Program paired Hartford high schools students with university undergraduate and graduate students with teens to provide academic mentoring and expose them to life-choice and professional options after high school graduation. Data were collected in the form of individual interviews with the 21 teens, communications with community partners, staff reflections and field notes.

Data were loaded into NVIVO 9 and members of the research team deductively coded the interviews independently (Patton, 2002) based on the existing framework of campus-community partnership theory (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). Data were coded to reflect the themes of relationship initiation, relationship building and maintenance and relationship dissolution, while also allowing for sub-themes (e.g., diversity of interaction for the relationship building and maintenance phase (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002). A multilevel approach was utilized in order to capture the complexity of campus-community partnerships on individual, socio-cultural and structural levels (see Dixon & Bruening, 2005).

Results indicated that the nature of inter-organizational relations involving campus community partnerships (i.e. community sports programs) can more adequately be understood through the use of an integrated, multi-level analysis. Specifically, longitudinal data revealed that all three stages of campus-community partnerships (i.e., relationship initiation, relationship development and maintenance, and relationship dissolution) were guided by the individual level factors of personality/interests, maturity and family involvement, the sociocultural level factor of community needs, and structural levels factors of implementation/access and organizational culture/mission. In addition, partnerships were impacted by perceived degree of equity. However, in the current study, rather than dissolving the campus community partnership, the partners entered into an organizational change process to restructure programs and allow for equity to be reestablished.

In an age in which institutions of higher education are being encouraged to align with community efforts to

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collaboratively address civic, social and ethical issues of the day (Boyer, 1990, 1996; Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Jacoby, 2003), it has become increasingly important for more studies to contribute to the knowledge of campus-community partnerships by outlining the history of relationships with the community (Cone & Payne, 2002). The current study attempted to provide the evolution of the campus-community partnership from a multi-level perspective. Like a strategic alliance, campus-community partnerships are heavily dependent on multi-level relationships (e.g. individual, sociocultural and structural levels), require significant time and effort and must be founded upon trust (Maurrasse, 2002; Parent & Slack, 2006). Results from this study should serve to add to campus-community partnership literature, while providing practitioners with insight into “common practices and pitfalls that may assist in” managing “the expectations of all parties involved” (Maurrasse, 2002, p. 137).