

In celebration of p(P)artnership(s)

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I am sitting at home under the Covid-19 stay-at-home order in Washington state. The entire world is facing a pandemic we cannot control, and a future we cannot see or understand. Now, more than ever, I realize just how small our world really is, and how interconnected we are across the globe.

Small businesses, restaurants, and services that are not deemed “essential” may not be able to resume once we return to the upcoming “normal.” These closures, these endings, will impact people’s lives and our communities long term, in ways we will only realize in the days to come.

In the midst of this chaos, *Partnerships* is ending. Endings may be “natural,” perhaps because a period of time for the work had been predetermined. Endings may be forced — as a small business’ resources run out, or circumstances change, or other priorities arise. A partnership may end as power insists on the “right” way, or that they know what is best. Truly unresolved differences may confirm there is no going forward together. Endings may be mutually agreed upon or catastrophic. In the best cases, those involved celebrate, knowing that together they have accomplished their purpose, and that the work may continue in new and diverse ways, with different partners expanding upon the original mission.

I am grateful to the staff and Advisory Council of North Carolina Campus Compact that for ten years they have published this ***national*** peer-reviewed journal that focused on how theories and practices can inform and improve partnerships, connections and collaborations. But higher education resources are tight and must be invested wisely, and North Carolina Campus Compact is rightly re-focusing on promoting scholarly engagement amongst their constituencies. Again, thank you, North Carolina Campus Compact and team, for the ten years of deepening this conversation and providing a way by which the field can question and learn together.

Did *Partnerships* accomplish all we hoped for when we started this journal ten years ago? There is indeed cause to celebrate. My takeaways:

- There are many faculty, staff, administrators and institutions that are willing to share their time and expertise to think deeply about community engagement. They are asking questions that further conversation, shape our thinking and encourage innovation. The authors who submitted articles to *Partnerships*, and the reviewers who carefully read, corrected and challenged contributions, were the essence of the journal. I have appreciated learning of practice across the globe, and of the research that addresses ongoing questions and challenges.

- When you have the right team, the vision becomes reality. Norman Clark brought the technical expertise, while Tracy Espy and Beth Warner served as initial editors. Leslie Garvin provided concrete support and encouragement to ensure the journal continued for a decade. North Carolina Campus Compact budgeted funds to provide this peer-reviewed journal to readers for free. The editorial board provided guidance and input that ensured the journal was an invaluable resource to the field. Appalachian State and UNC Greensboro helped keep costs down and readership up, posting *Partnerships* through their open access frameworks.

- Editor Spoma Jovanovich is a rock star from whom I have learned so much. Her work to connect Greensboro, NC, college and high school students in addressing local issues has evolved and been sustained with the same partners over many years. It is inspiring, and the epitome of what *Partnerships* has sought to encourage in practice. On top of her full load at UNC she has invested hours to give feedback to *Partnerships* submitters, detailed notes encouraging those whose articles were not accepted to rewrite or contribute elsewhere. She is a consummate leader who well-utilized each editorial board member to support the journal.

- *Partnerships* has made a lasting contribution to the field. Harry Boyte's (2009) vision in Volume 1 can be reinstated with each new generation of community engagement practitioners: "The skills and habits of civic politics in both community and cultural organizations such as relationship-building, tolerance for ambiguity and ability to deal with conflict constructively are not part of higher education curriculum in normal academic or professional disciplines. Capacities for civic politics and civic professionalism have to be *learned* in practice. The process entails, as well, *unlearning* tendencies acquired in formal education, such as a competitive, individualist bent and a posture of intellectual certitude. . . It may take years to fully learn the habits of public work, citizen professionalism, and unlearn bad habits in the process" (p. 16-17).

In Volume 1, No. 2, Bob Sigmon (2010) reminded us that "With concerted efforts on the behalf of students, organizations and colleges and universities, our communities will become richer and more closely aligned in framing and working on local problems and opportunities. Students will graduate committed to lifelong learning with an understanding of their interdependence with others in the communities where they settle. . . . this is the kind of work you can't leave. . . . There is a benefit for all involved, and for future generations" (p. 5). We are seeing today, in March 2020, how current and former students are living in the current crisis interdependently, making decisions that look beyond their own needs and interests to those of their immediate neighbors, and beyond.

- With all the good work that has been described in the ten volumes of *Partnerships*, with all the guidance that is helping to build strong ties amongst students, faculty, staff, institutions and communities, there is so much more to know and understand. In a March 19, 2020, essay, as Covid-19 was rapidly spreading and forcing many stay at home orders by governors, columnist David Brooks calls for "social solidarity," in contrast to social connection. "Some things you do not for yourself or another but for the common whole..." When this is all over, "We need to... ask the obvious questions. Why did we tolerate so much social division before? Why didn't we cultivate stronger social bonds when we had the chance?" How will the field of higher education community engagement evaluate our past work in light of this current crisis? How might the work we pursue in future be informed by what we have learned, while also enriching scholarship, research and creative activity; enhancing curriculum, teaching and learning; preparing educated, engaged citizens; strengthening democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contributing to the public good?

- The work and vision *Partnerships* pursued will continue. Last spring the *Partnerships* editorial team was invited by the Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning and Campus Compact to a meeting with other civic engagement/ community-based scholarship journal leaders to discuss how better to coordinate resources, involve community partners, and continue to be attentive to the needs of multiple stakeholders. For the first time all of those interested in encouraging research that deepened the work of higher education community engagement were invited to be in the same room. I look forward to supporting their efforts in

future, and to encouraging researchers to submit their work to these other excellent resources.

While *Partnerships* the journal is ending, do not grow weary in pursuing the vital, necessary, deep and quality partnerships that the journal sought to foster. The Covid-19 crisis is forcing individuals to realize the importance and value of being part of their communities — local, regional, national and global — supporting and encouraging in ways that put aside ME for WE. Daily inspiring actions and stories remind me of why we do the work of community engagement. Throughout my neighborhood I see signs — “we are in this together.” Communities working together, in deep and powerful partnerships, to empower and equip citizens, to provide equitable opportunities to all, and to interact with compassion and a desire to seek common ground — we ARE in this together. Thank you, *Partnerships*, for ten years of helping us work together better.

References

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