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Community Partnerships and Impacts

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Achieving reciprocity and mutual benefit from service-learning and community engagement collaborations between higher education institutions and their communities is essential to making such ventures impactful, responsible, and sustainable. Framing these collaborations as “partnerships” helps those in the field hold themselves and their colleagues (on and off campus) accountable to such standards of practice as centering community voice in agenda setting, assessing mutually beneficial opportunities and needs, and evaluating outcomes important to all stakeholders. In practice, building partnerships that integrate the research and learning aims of higher education into community-driven agendas for addressing urgent societal issues calls for deep and lasting attention to relationship-building among students, faculty, administrators, and community partners. The articles in this section of *IJRSLCE* focus intensely on impacts and outcomes from sustained engagement in the design and articulation of reported collaborations.

The following article by Marjorie Schaffer, Carol Hargate, and Kemo Marong presents an encouraging approach to immersing and embedding undergraduates in long-term, multi-faceted, experiential placements. This approach not only is relevant to the pedagogies and curricula of nursing education but offers potential applications to undergraduate teaching and learning in other fields as well. The University of Pennsylvania's Ira Harkavy once noted, with some irony, that whereas “communities have problems, universities have departments.” This critique points to the challenge of building community-engaged strategies that effectively overcome the constraints that organizational and disciplinary governance exert on universities’ capacity to take truly responsive stances toward academic engagement with community challenges. It is also important to acknowledge that community partners often express a strong desire for extending the typically constrained horizons for engagement, governed by academic calendars, as a means of enhancing relationship-driven, multi-dimensional collaboration. Schaffer, Hargate, and Marong describe a program of service-learning that is constructed to be a long-term and holistic means through which students engage with community health challenges. They explore educational strategies constructed around concepts of “inter-professional” team-building and comprehensive collaborations for improving public health by considering the multi-dimensional nature of health disparities, including special attention to the challenges presented by racially, culturally, and socio-economically diverse communities.