2010

Investigating community impacts of a university outreach program through the lens of service-learning and community engagement

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Investigating community impacts of a university outreach program through the lens of service learning and community engagement

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Major: Landscape Architecture

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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2010

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The College of Design at Iowa State University deserves an acknowledgement for creating and supporting the PLaCE program. This program is unique in its blurring of the lines between academia and Extension. Few institutions have a program like this and I salute the College for its vision in offering the program. Thanks also to Dr. Tim Borich, the program leader for Extension to Community and Economic Development, who shares a vision for the program's value and includes it in his program budget.

This research study could not have been accomplished without the generous participation of the twenty-one community stakeholders who agreed to be interviewed. In a time when most people are annoyed by an overabundance of telephone surveys, these community stakeholders were generous with their time and took their role seriously by giving thoughtful and incisive comments about their PLaCE projects. Their contributions to this research cannot be overestimated.

Dr. Nancy Franz provided some helpful data analysis and encouragement along the way. In addition, I would like to deliver a big thank you to my graduate committee: Greg Welk, Carl Rogers, and Lynn Paxson, I appreciate your helpful comments and guidance as the research was designed and written.

Finally, words cannot express my gratitude to major professor Heidi Hohmann. Your sharp editorial comments, gentle guidance, and supportive encouragement were more inspiring than you can ever know. For example, you have a mastery of knowing when to use a sharp pen, and when a word of compliment is the more appropriate tool. Your editorial skills are second to none. Thank you for all of your support of this research.

ABSTRACT

Higher education has been encouraged to become more engaged with its constituent communities in recent years. This encouragement has come from many sources—state legislatures, the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-grant Universities, and through the establishment of designations such as the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification. As a result, service-learning and community engagement activities have grown over the last two decades and recommendations for best practices have emerged. However, very little study has focused on the communities being engaged in these efforts. Do they receive benefits from student involvement and if so, how can those benefits be defined?

This research investigated community impacts of the PLaCE (Partnering Landscape and Community Enhancement) program at Iowa State University's College of Design. The research involved interviews with stakeholders from communities where engagement activities had taken place. Research results indicated that communities benefitted in several ways from student and university involvement of the PLaCE program. These included physical improvements to the community, expanded community capacity, increased project legitimacy, and stimulation of local dialogue, activities, and creative capacity. Some suggestions for maximizing program outcomes and for targeting further research emerged, such as assessment of a community's level of support and determining what constitutes a meaningful project conclusion.

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

> *What would we hear if we listened to community partners about their experiences in partnering with academic institutions? (Sandy & Holland, 2006)*

Engagement of students in learning activities with community partners as part of their academic experience has become increasingly prevalent in today's educational settings. From kindergarten classrooms through high schools and continuing on into higher education institutions, service-learning and other forms of community engagement are accepted elements of academia.

Service to communities as part of the educational experience is not a new idea. John Dewey and others promoted "learning by doing" and linked service to personal and social development in the early 1900s (Duckenfield & Wright, 1995). Service programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, and the Peace Corps were formed and developed through the twentieth century. A new wave of student engagement programs began in the 1980s as Campus Compact, the Campus Outreach Opportunity League, and Youth Service America were formed. In 1989-1990 President Bush created the Office of National Service in the White House (www.servicelearning.org).

As the phenomenon of student service in communities has become more widespread, a field of scholarship has emerged that describes and encourages this work. Several peer-reviewed journals now focus on the topic and conferences are available for presenting and learning about best practices. Many universities have upper-administration-level offices for service-learning, although the title may vary, usually including some combination or selection from of the words "outreach, service, and community engagement".

The premise of engaging students in service with community partners is based on an assumption of mutual exchange, where both parties, students and

community organizations, give and receive something of value. Today, scholars are in general agreement that participation in service-learning activities enhances educational outcomes for students; they also agree on a core set of best practices to create these outcomes (Eyler & Giles, 1999). However, there has been very little research about community outcomes of service-learning. Therefore no consensus has been achieved about what constitutes best practices for the community partners, or even what types of benefits might accrue to communities that participate in these mutual exchanges with academic partners (Cruz & Giles, 2000) .

There are many reasons for this lack of research. Introducing community as a variable makes empirical research difficult due to increased complexity (Cruz & Giles, 2000). Examples of complexity include cultural differences, geography, and the wide range of personality types in any community. In addition, scholarship from the education field has traditionally focused on students and pedagogy, and thus it is understandable that investigation of community impacts would lag behind other lines of inquiry in the field's research agenda. Indeed, scholarly inquiry into the phenomena of service-learning and community engagement is in its infancy and is just beginning to move beyond its early stages to more advanced levels of inquiry.

In an effort to add to the scholarship of engagement, this research looked through the lens of service-learning and community engagement to explore community impacts of one university's program that matches student classroom projects with community development needs. I hope this research will begin a dialogue in the research community about methods for including community impacts when studying service-learning and community engagement.

The program selected is based at Iowa State University's College of Design. The College, along with its unit for Extension to Community and Economic Development, sponsors the PLaCE (Partnering Landscape and Community Enhancement) program. Through this program, community needs are addressed by design students in classroom settings or in research settings. The College of Design

includes the disciplines of Architecture, Community and Regional Planning, Graphic Design, Interior Design, Integrated Studio Arts, and Landscape Architecture

Objectives of the PLaCE program as stated by the College of Design are:

- Provide learning experiences for students outside the classroom;
- Help applicants explore enhancement options,
- Learn how design positively affects change
- Create an environment in which communities and organizations may work more effectively with design practitioners, and
- Assist applicants in establishing and refining goals and expectations (Design, 2008).

When these objectives were written during program formation in 2000, no explicit mention was made of service-learning. However, a comprehensive look at the program shows that the principles of service-learning and community engagement are implicitly a part of the program's mission and general focus.

One focus of this program is to address community development needs through student academic projects. This particular program focus begs the inclusion of service-learning principles, because of its benefits for students and communities alike. Some anecdotal research from this program suggests that student learning outcomes and engagement with curriculum are both improved by exposure to real world projects and by interactions with community members. The anecdotal evidence agrees with the body of scholarship indicating improved learning outcomes when students are engaged in service to communities (Butler & Erickson, in process).

The focus of this thesis research was to investigate community impacts of university involvement in communities through the PLaCE program. The research was exploratory in nature due to the lack of prior research in the field. Initial inquiry focused on primary impacts—did the community proceed with developing the park that students designed? How many business owners gave their storefront a makeover after students provided them with new designs? Did the city administrator

use the updated comprehensive plan to guide decision-making? This initial inquiry expanded to include a wider range of questions—did attitudes change within the city after involvement with university students and faculty? What parts of the PLaCE program process were linked to community satisfaction? Was the final project report useful? Were there changes the university could have made to provide better outcomes for the community?

Research conclusions indicated the importance of ongoing relationships cannot be underestimated. Good communication and clear expectations laid a strong foundation for positive community impacts. Research findings will be useful to enhance and improve processes for the PLaCE program and may also be useful to other service-learning and community engagement efforts at Iowa State University and at other institutions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The mission of higher education has traditionally been focused on three core areas: teaching, research, and service. The service component has taken many forms over time. At Iowa State University, the first Extension Service was formed in 1903, some eleven years before the Smith-Lever Act formed the national Extension Service. The mission of this organization since its inception, and continuing today, is to extend the university's knowledge to people throughout the state. In its beginnings the Extension Service focused on promoting best techniques for farming practices, helping to ensure good crops and promoting healthy economies and communities through the state.

The service component of higher education followed this pattern for many years. Experts from the university would visit a community, impart their knowledge, pack up their visual aids, and return to the university. Through the years the visual aids changed from printed bulletins and posters to overhead projectors and then slide projectors, but the service model of university expertise shared with community did not change significantly.

Through the twentieth century, universities became more focused on research and publishing efforts. This was understandable since university promotion and reward structures and grant funding agencies rewarded these practices (Kerr, 2001). Eventually, the public felt they were not as closely linked with their institutions of higher learning. In response to public criticism that universities had become less responsive and out of touch with societal issues, the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC, recently renamed Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU)) formed a study commission. The study effort was supported by a grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and is commonly called the Kellogg Commission. The group was

charged with defining the direction public universities should go in order to respond to those public criticisms and with recommending an action agenda to speed up the process of change (Kellogg Commission 2001). Within this report, the three traditional missions of teaching, research, and service were redefined as discovery, learning, and engagement.

The Kellogg Commission also stated that if academic institutions are to remain viable and valuable to their constituencies in the future, those institutions would need to become much more highly engaged. The Kellogg Commission defined engaged institutions as ones that have "redesigned their teaching, research, and extension and service functions to become more sympathetically and productively involved with their communities, however community may be defined".

As reported by the commission, an engaged academic institution should have seven characteristics:

- responsiveness to communities
- respect for partners
- academic neutrality
- accessibility
- integration of service mission with responsibility for developing intellectual capital and trained intelligence
- coordination (within university)
- resource partnerships (with government, business, and nonprofit organizations) (Kellogg Commission, 2001)

If adherence to these seven characteristics creates a better academic institution that is in turn valuable to its communities and provides a better education to its students through community engagement, developing a complete understanding of the effects of community-university interactions becomes important.

Community engagement efforts are crafted using a variety of strategies, which vary across academic disciplines, community partner organizations, faculty members, students, community cultures, and other variables. Those strategies are

called by many names—outreach, service-learning, community-based participatory research, public scholarship, and others (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Chusid, 2007; Driskell, 2007; Francis *et al.*, 1984; Jost, 2008; Sanoff, 2000). Each strategy has a peculiar expression that has been studied by its proponents.

Defining Engagement Strategies

Sandmann (2008) wrote an entire paper seeking to clarify this definitional anarchy in the scholarship of engagement. She cited a trend in the literature whereby engagement scholars argue for expanding the traditional concept of service and outreach to embrace engagement, which emphasizes bidirectional interactions, reciprocity, and mutual respect instead of one-way assistance or direction.

Townson (2009) similarly worked to clarify the definitional anarchy. She described a continuum beginning with traditional faculty service and continuing to engaged scholarship. The continuum begins with service, which contributes to the mission of the institution, such as serving on committees or boards. A mid-point on the continuum is outreach, which is characterized by one-way interaction with a community, is expert-based, and is not typically driven by research questions. Fully engaged scholarship, then, is characterized as mutually beneficial, contributing new knowledge or application to a discipline, and driven by significant research questions.

Over the two decades 1990-2010 the general field of community engagement has been refined, strengthened, and sharpened. New views of best practices have been described and recommendations for further research have been shared. The definitional anarchy will likely be present until further agreement is reached and theory of engagement begins to be developed.

Until then, the different activities and the different names they are given—outreach, service-learning, participatory action research, will continue to be practiced and will be subjects of academic publishing. Each discipline and each faculty member practices community engagement in slightly different ways, but community

engagement that is well done will contain certain components: student engagement within a community setting, a goal of meeting identified community needs, and student achievement of a deeper understanding of academic course content. These activities may cover a wide range—from large-scale, top-down, long-range and highly orchestrated programs to localized, intimate, short-term and intentionally functional research (Ibanez-Carrasco & Riano-Alcala, 2009).

Impacts of engagement activities

Community-university partnerships and service-learning activities are generally understood to involve and benefit four audiences:

- Educational institutions
- Faculty
- Students
- Communities (Ferman & Hill, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000).

Service-learning and volunteerism are of benefit to students for career preparation, awareness of community problems, and the connection of theory to practice. For faculty, service is a way to apply theory and knowledge to local problems. For administrators of educational institutions, service is a way to improve relationships between campus and community. Service to the community is a way for campuses to address public perception that higher education exists for its own good (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000).

A review of the service-learning literature yielded strong evidence that incorporating service-learning into the curriculum strengthens student academic achievement and promotes student engagement. (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Cruz & Giles, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; (Jost, 2008); Sanoff, 2000; Tai, Haque, McLellan,& Knight, 2006) It has a positive impact on academic learning and critical thinking, improves students' ability to apply what they have learned in "the real world", and contributes to career development (Chusid, 2007; Driskell, 2007; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001).

Another goal of service-learning, which often goes unstated, is that service-learning activities will provide some benefit to the community (Eyler et al., 2001; Sandy & Holland, 2006). However, community impacts relative to service-learning have been largely unexplored in academic literature.

Community impacts: Lack of existing research

The lack of research about impacts in the community has been noted by several authors. Howard noted that researchers currently know the most about the effects of service-learning on students, a bit less about service-learning's effect on faculty, less still about its effect on schools, colleges, and universities, and virtually nothing about the effects of students' service-learning efforts on communities and community members (Howard, 2003).

Other researchers warned that by not knowing what service-learning does to the communities it purports to serve, there is a risk of creating unintended side effects that exacerbate, rather than alleviate, the problems of the community. They noted that academicians risk burning bridges rather than building them if communities decide students are doing more harm than good (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

Several reasons for the lack of research were suggested. Cruz and Giles (2000) noted that the lack of research on the community dimensions of service-learning was a glaring omission in the literature. They theorized that community impacts have been largely undocumented because communities have no voice in academia. They noted that there has been no cry from the community to research community impacts, that the community is a constituency without a voice in academia and therefore has not been heard. This situation has many political similarities to powerless groups in other power-laden systems.

Methodological problems were also cited as playing a part in the lack of research on community impacts. Because communities are complex constructs, it is impossible to control for all of the variables that can confound a research study.

Variables within a community would include, for example, socio-economic status of residents, demographic factors, cultural background of the community, the community's age and history relative to community development projects, community cohesiveness, and other traits. This makes generalizability difficult, if not impossible to establish (Cruz & Giles, 2000).

Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000) agreed that there is a lack of research in their content analysis of literature related to service-learning. The researchers found that the literature tends to focus on how service-learning benefits the campus and its constituencies more than how it benefits the community. Ward and Wolf-Wendel suggested a simple reason for this focus, theorizing that it may be logical, since academic literature is written by and for academicians. However, they maintained that if service-learning is truly a way to involve higher education in real-world problem solving, then the community must be an integral and active partner.

Despite the general lack of research on benefits of community engagement activities, a few authors have performed studies and some suggestions of general categories of community impacts emerged.

Because this area of research is still in exploratory stages, most research on community impacts is qualitative in nature. However, in one large-scale study the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) used quantitative measures. They considered longevity of projects beyond the life of the grant and use of WKKF grant funds to leverage additional support as indicators of project success (Koch *et al.*, 1996).

Community partners: direct impacts

Project longevity and project support are two indicators of impact. However, the measures used by WKKF may not apply to projects that are smaller in scale. Other researchers considered different factors when studying community impacts of service-learning. A logical place to begin research is with direct impacts.

Community development improvements

Student involvement in community projects may lead to visible results in the community. Henness (2001) found that community impacts of service-learning were related to achieving goals of community development. Activities he studied also helped rural communities accomplish their goals for community and economic development, sometimes in a timely and cost effective manner. In their wide-ranging look at the body of knowledge related to community dimensions of service-learning, Cruz and Giles (2000) concurred. They cited three key findings: 1) service-learning contributes to community development; 2) service-learning bridges town-gown gaps; and 3) service-learning offers benefits to community partners. Other researchers cited direct community impacts as well (Pickeral & Peters, 1998; Sanoff, 2003; Soukup, 1999; Vernon & Foster, 2002).

Progression of knowledge

Another direct impact is progression of knowledge. Partnerships that rank high on Townson's continuum of engagement strategies are dedicated to creating new knowledge and sharing that knowledge in the community and in the academic setting. (Ferman & Hill, 2004; Ibanez-Carrasco & Riano-Alcala, 2009; Sanoff, 2003; Townson, 2009) Sandy and Holland (2006) wrote that community-campus partnerships provide opportunities for reflection and further new theory that can change both knowledge and practice.

Enhanced capacity. Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon, and Kerrigan (1996) noted that in successful service-learning activities, community agencies perceived an effect on their capacity to serve clients. Other researchers agreed, citing staff and organizational development, enhanced community capital, social capital, and human capital within the organization as well (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Eyler *et al.*, 2001; Henness, 2001; Kotval, 2003; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Vernon & Foster, 2002; K. Ward & Vernon, 1999).

New levels of enthusiasm or energy. In one study, researchers reported community organization staff was rejuvenated by student interaction. The students brought new energy and enthusiasm to the community (Pickeral & Peters, 1998).

Access to resources

Driscoll et al. (1996) wrote that community agencies received economic and social benefits and were satisfied with student interactions. Pickeral and Peters (1998) noted that students bring practical and valuable skills to the community problems that are being addressed.

Sanoff (2003) noted that student design assistance satisfied community needs and enabled students to directly confront community problems in areas of poverty or restricted access to professional designers. Without the student assistance, those communities were sometimes powerless in responding to issues that negatively affect the community.

Interactions with a university may also offer access to university resources such as libraries and laboratories, information networks, as well as relationships with faculty members, departments, or programs (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Ferman & Hill, 2004; Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Community partners: indirect impacts

In addition to direct and visible impacts of community engagement and service-learning activities, indirect impacts were mentioned in the literature.

Access to new networks and relationships

Ibanez-Carrasco and Riano-Alcala (2009) reported that community partners benefitted from access to new networks and relationships. Other researchers agreed, and noted that partnering with university researchers opened doors to broader networks and possibilities (Ferman & Hill, 2004).

Enhanced legitimacy

Many studies cited a benefit to community partners of enhanced legitimacy for their project or organization when partnering with the university. Ferman & Hill (2004) described situations in which funding agencies entertained proposals they would not have done otherwise and cases in which governmental representatives responded to organizations they had previously ignored. Other researchers agreed, citing additional instances of enhanced legitimacy for community as a result of community-university engagement (Driscoll *et al.*, 1996; Ibanez-Carrasco & Riano-Alcala, 2009).

Fresh eyes to examine issues

When students present the results of their project to a community partner organization, the recipients are offered a valuable opportunity. Students bring a fresh look at the community from a critical and informed distance. Students may bring a new perspective to neighborhood issues (Ibanez-Carrasco & Riano-Alcala, 2009).

Further developments

Service-learning and community engagement activities may provide research data for leveraging other funds or grants (Cruz & Giles, 2000). Ferman and Hill (2004) agreed, writing that many community organizations used project results for further development or grant applications.

Community impacts: affected by partnership qualities

Most researchers of community engagement agreed that the partnership is important and that the quality of the partnership was highly correlated with community impacts (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Ferman & Hill, 2004; Horrigan ed., 2007; Ibanez-Carrasco & Riano-Alcala, 2009). Vernon and Foster (2002) wrote that relationships are a major vehicle through which learning and knowledge generation take place for community partners and through which they accrue tangible benefits.

Balance on the benefits spectrum

Community engagement and service-learning activities should provide a balance between benefits accrued as weighed against expenses (Sandy & Holland, 2006). Gelmon, et al. (1998) reported that the experience should be more beneficial, economically and socially, than burdensome to the agency.

Communities share in helping students learn

Service-learning activities are often viewed as valuable learning opportunities for students because they form a bridge between theory and practice. Many researchers noted that community partners value helping with this part of the education process. Some even described a profound dedication to educating college students (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Foster, 2002). Gelmon (1998) wrote that community partners felt that service-learning helped students see how classroom learning could be applied in the everyday world.

Commitment

Successful community engagement work can only occur when both parties are committed to the project (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). Some indicators of commitment are levels of support and interest, a formalized process, communication, and mutuality.

Desire, capacity, support. Ferman and Hill (2004) suggested that both parties—community and university—need to ask themselves if they have the desire, capacity, and support to engage in a meaningful partnership.

Ward and Vernon (1999) cited challenges for community partners when involved with students serving their organizations. Community partners reported that student inconsistency, unpreparedness, and need for training made the work of the partnership more difficult.

Formalized process. Stoecker and Tryon (2009) wrote that commitment to the community was seen as the most fundamental of the principles of community

engagement. A formalized agreement was generally a good indicator of commitment, and clarified expectations for both parties. Sandy and Holland (2006) discussed a formalized process as promotion of equity. They cited a community partner's comment: "There should be a more formal process for soliciting (university) involvement. Right now, it is hit or miss based on a relationship that you are fortunate to have."

Communication. Communication that is effective and timely is another principle for successful community engagement. Stoecker and Tryon (2009) found that effective communication, between and among all three parties—student-community partner-professor—was essential, and often provided the community partner an opportunity to learn about service learning. Gelmon, et al. (1998) wrote about community partners who reported being generally happy with the partnership, although they were sometimes dismayed by educational institutions' bureaucratic and political natures. Ward and Vernon (1999) discussed agency personnel who wanted more coordination and communication with professors.

Mutuality. Kotval (2003) described a model of a partnership that facilitates the experiential learning needs of urban planning students while assisting urban Extension staff with capacity building resources. She noted that a symbiotic relationship between town and gown leads to mutual benefit from mutual prosperity. Both parties can and should benefit from a well-designed community-university interaction. Stoecker and Tryon (2009) agreed, saying that mutuality is important, as the partnership that is set up only for the students' gain is exploitative of the community partner. Conversely, they asserted a partnership that is set up only for the community partner's gain is exploitative of the students. Sanoff (2003) also weighed in on the importance of mutuality. He wrote that within his work related to community-based design research, the work was done <u>with</u> rather than <u>on</u> the community.

Respect and trust

Relationships are built on respect and trust. In a well-structured partnership, college and community partners will be equal citizens (Pickeral & Peters, 1998). Researchers in the field were united in assertions of the importance of respect and trust in relationships between community partners and universities (Heffner & Beversluis, 2003; Holland, 2001; Madden, 2000; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Kelly Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000).

Recommended Methodologies

Several authors have commented on appropriate research design and methodology for studying community impacts and service-learning. One research team analyzed the gap in research related to community impacts of service learning and determined that community-focused research is possible, that it should focus on the community-university partnership as the unit of analysis and that it should use a participatory action approach.(Cruz & Giles, 2000) Henness (2001) used mixed-methods research, combining a survey and case study research methods. Other research teams have used focus groups (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

Because community partners and service-learning projects are widely varied in scale and design, some researchers recommended against using quantitative standards of assessment such as Likert scales. Their viewpoint maintained that pre-determined scales may formulate in advance attitudinal categories and thus stipulate in advance what the community members' attitudes can be and impose limits on their experiences (Pickeral & Peters, 1998). These researchers recommended a qualitative approach to measurement of outcomes. According to these researchers, focus groups, student reflection journals, and open-ended questionnaires may be more appropriate data-gathering mechanisms.

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF) conducted an evaluation of the impacts of 35 of its projects that were funded over a ten year period (1985-1995).

Two key methods were used for data gathering in this study—a review of annual project progress reports and a written survey (Koch et al., 1996).

Several studies have found positive evaluations from community organizations when asked about their experience with student interactions and service-learning (Cohen & Kinsey, 1994; Foreman, 1996; Greene & Diehm, 1995). However, other researchers challenged the depth of these questioning techniques and urged a deeper understanding of community experiences with service-learning (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

Some researchers integrated community participation into their research design, holding to the ethic of reciprocity, a hallmark of service-learning practice, to inform the research design. One study used a place-based, two-tiered approach. These researchers placed a high value on community input, and designed their research to take place in the community, stating that the importance of location is often overlooked in academic research and including this variable in their design had important benefits. Participants were involved with approving thematic interpretations of data, finalizing reports designed to inform and improve their partnership, and the "meta-analysis" of the data (Sandy & Holland 2006).

Impacts in the community may not manifest themselves immediately. Some projects may not show visible results for several years. This is particularly true in the field of community development, where projects always require several years to be accomplished. Francis, et al. (1984) approached this issue by checking back several years later to study project results. Organizational commitment to long-range study of local outcomes is commonly found in the realm of program assessment and evaluation (Fitzpatrick *et al.*, 2004; Mark *et al.*, 1999; Palomba & Banta, 1999) .

In addition to an organizational commitment to gather data, dissemination of research findings must also be given a high priority. Miami-Dade Community College boasted of innovative efforts in community service. The director of their

community service program compiles data assessing the impact of the program on students, faculty, the institution, and the community. Community organizations that work with the college are required to send a representative to a training session that introduces him/her to the concepts of service-learning. In this way, agencies can provide an informed assessment at the end of the students' time in serving them. They noted "no matter how much information is collected, it is useless if it is not sent back out. This is perhaps the most neglected part of assessment" (Young, 1998).

The literature search revealed the importance of community engagement and service-learning activities for building bridges rather than burning them, as described by Stoecker and Tryon (2009). The Kellogg Commission Report also strongly urged institutes of higher education to become more engaged with their communities, in order to remain a valuable resource to their constituencies. Many researchers shared ideas of questions to be asked and strategies for structuring these activities to create positive outcomes in communities. Their ideas and strategies were invaluable in my learning process.

As I moved forward into research design I made every effort to incorporate recommended questioning strategies into my interactions with community partners. I also benefitted from recommended research methodologies and made every effort to build bridges rather than burn them.

CHAPTER THREE: STUDY FOCUS AND RESEARCH APPROACH

Need for this Research

The work of service-learning is complex and multidimensional; it depends on a community-university collaboration in which all parties identify shared goals but also have distinct perspectives. Yet all too often, assessment of service-learning courses is limited to documenting hours of service or collecting journals; worse, it does not happen at all. (Holland, 2001) Other assessment practices rely on a simplistic questioning technique such as "on a scale of 1 to 10, how satisfied were you with the service-learning activity in your community?" This simplistic level of questioning yields data that are neither valid nor useful (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). These data gathering techniques, one qualitative and one quantitative, do not adequately assess the topic of community impacts.

Educational institutions can benefit from evaluating impacts of service-learning. An investment in service-learning must be measured for its impact and effectiveness in serving the educational mission of the institution. The return on the effort must justify the investment. An internal, more academic purpose for assessment is essential to sustaining institutional commitment or expanding faculty involvement in service-learning courses. Faculty want to see evidence that service-learning is making a difference in the learning of course material, student development of social responsibility, or community conditions (Holland, 2001). Faculty also want to know what aspects of their service-learning projects are helpful or hindrances for community recipients (Hohmann, 2009). Research about community impacts of service-learning may be of value to a wider audience than simply administrators and overseers of these programs. For example, university officials might do well to use community impact analysis in assessing the worth of their investment in outreach programs as well as in marketing value of the institution to constituents.

Introduction to the research question

This study's goal was to investigate the community impacts of PLaCE program involvement. The study was exploratory in nature because the literature search revealed that very little research has been done on community impacts of service learning.

An inductive inquiry started with specific observations that led to more general theory. The principles of grounded theory were used to guide the research. In the grounded theory process, theory is built from data, or grounded in the data (Neuman, 2006). This strategy allows the research to be flexible, and allows data analysis to be open to the unexpected. Aside from the research described in the literature search above, very little previous research was available to create expectations of research results. Therefore, a flexible approach was valuable.

My interest in this research came from my work as coordinator of the PLaCE program, which is referenced in Chapter One. My job placed me with one foot in the academic realm of the College and the other foot in the applied knowledge realm of Extension to Communities and Economic Development. From this unusual vantage point, the challenge of the Kellogg Commission—to become a more engaged university--seemed particularly significant. Exploring community impacts of the PLaCE program seemed a good first step along the journey to encouraging a more engaged style of academic practice.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

PLaCE: Context

The PLaCE program in Iowa State University's College of Design began in 2000. Program records indicated 70 projects were completed in the academic years 2001-2002 through 2008-2009. These projects involved over 500 students, and resulted in over $200,000 in fees from communities. This money provided fee reductions for students or wages for student employees.

The PLaCE program is structured as project-based service-learning. The projects were typically discrete projects that could be addressed by studio classes within a five to ten week time frame. Projects that were considered for inclusion in the program contained criteria that met educational objectives for the course, in addition to meeting community development needs as defined by the applicant organization. Studio classes that addressed PLaCE projects generally met for eight to twelve clock hours per week for four to six semester credit hours. This type of studio class format is common within design curricula.

Marketing for the program is primarily done by the unit for Extension to Community and Economic Development. Program contacts are also made in response to telephone inquiries from constituents who call the College of Design in search of assistance with community development projects. These field requests are largely from communities or nonprofit organizations. A program application is available online or by mail from the program coordinator. A website is also in place, showcasing past projects which may serve as a model for other communities with similar community development needs.

		Arch	A&D	CRP	LA	Multi-Disciplinary
2002-2003	**11**	**1**	**1**	**6**	**3**	
2003-2004	**7**			**2**	**4**	**1**
2004-2005	**10**		**4**	**1**	**4**	**1**
2005-2006	**9**		**2**	**4**	**3**	
2006-2007	**12**		**2**	**5**	**5**	
2007-2008	**8**		**1**	**1**	**4**	**2**
2008-2009	**13**		**5**	**5**	**3**	
totals by dept	**70**	**1**	**15**	**24**	**26**	**4**

Table 1.Distribution of PLaCE projects by department

Anecdotal evidence indicates that PLaCE has done well at meeting academic needs of students and pedagogical objectives of faculty. In a survey of students who had participated in a park planning project, the students indicated newfound confidence in their design abilities, especially in terms of representation. They also expressed a feeling of having acquired knowledge and experience related to public input in the design process (Butler & Erickson, in process). However, community impacts have been unexplored by the PLaCE program. As noted in the previous section, the university can only fulfill its mission for outreach and engagement if community impacts of outreach are known and valued. This research investigated community impacts of the PLaCE program and suggests PLaCE as a model or methodology for other programs.

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, and based on the literature review, a case study approach was used. Community impacts of the projects from the PLaCE program were the focus of the research. Data was gathered primarily by in-depth, semi-structured interviews of project stakeholders from communities that have participated in the PLaCE program.

Project Selection

During the study period, seventy projects were completed under the direction of the PLaCE program. The projects were categorized by asking two questions.

1. Was the project addressed by a class of students as an academic project or was the project addressed by a faculty member and a graduate student as a research project?
2. Did the project address a large scale, planning-related community development need or did the project address a smaller-scale project related to physical improvements in the community?

The table below illustrates the distribution of projects.

	Course-based projects	Research-based Faculty-led, Student assisted
Large-scale, Planning-related	26 projects	4 projects
Smaller-scale, Related to community physical improvements	24 projects	16 projects

Table 2. Inventory and Classification of PLaCE Project Types

The diagram provided direction for structuring this research. There was a low number of projects and high degree of variability of project type in the research-based project category (right column). Both of these factors made reliability difficult to assure and evaluation of community impacts problematic. Therefore in this study, only the course-based projects were investigated (left column). Focusing inquiry into this category of projects provided greater

generalizability of findings, since there is less variability in project type. The course-based projects also fall more squarely in line with categorizations of service-learning projects. Because this research examined effects of student involvement in communities, restricting the research population to course-based projects was a workable premise.

Two categories of project types were investigated in the research design: large-scale, planning-related projects and smaller-scale projects related to physical improvements in the community. Because it was anticipated that community impacts might differ significantly within these two project types, in preliminary stages the data were gathered and analyzed as two separate groups.

Data Collection

The literature search revealed that community impacts of service-learning projects can only be discovered by going to the population that lives with the impacts—the community that experienced the project. Only students can describe in detail the educational impacts of a service-learning experience, and only communities can describe in detail the local impacts of a service-learning project. Therefore, for this study the primary source of data about community impacts was knowledge from local project stakeholders.

Sampling

The two categories of projects were described in the preceding section. For Group One, the large-scale planning related projects, a random sample of fifteen projects were selected from the total population of 26. The first ten were intended to be part of the study, with an additional five projects intended as replacements, if interview subjects could not be located or if additional interviews proved necessary. Projects in this group were fairly homogeneous in project type. Due to a small amount of data gathered from some projects, an eleventh project was added.

Group Two contained a variety of project types from three different departments—Art (mostly from the Graphic Design Department), Community and

Regional Planning, and Landscape Architecture. Projects from Group Two were selected using a stratified random sampling technique in order to assure a proportional mix of project types. A sample of ten projects was again selected, with five additional projects selected as replacements if necessary.

After selecting projects from each group, community project stakeholders were identified. The original project applicant was contacted when possible. If this was not possible another stakeholder was identified. These potential interview candidates were contacted by telephone in order to assess their willingness to participate in an interview. During the initial project interview, participants were asked if anyone else in the organization should be interviewed about the project. In some projects this was necessary due to changes in personnel or divided project responsibility.

After completing interviews it became apparent that the sample size was adequate for the study as the data achieved a saturation point at which new information was not being added through additional interviews.

For Group One, the larger-scale planning projects, nine projects are represented in the data. Information was gathered from eleven different stakeholders. For Group Two, the smaller-scale projects related to physical improvements in the community, eight projects are represented in the data and ten different stakeholders were interviewed.

Interviews

Interviews were held with project stakeholders to discover characteristics of community impacts. These interviews were guided by a series of pre-determined questions, but the interviews were kept flexible in order to gather the maximum amount of information possible. Interviews were recorded using an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder, model VN-6200PC and a Telephone Handset Mini Recorder Control, which allows recording through the telephone handset.

Iowa State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) gave its approval of this project, and the approval is presented in the Appendix.

Interview structure

In order to assure internal validity, typical research builds on existing studies and their measurement instruments to guide strategy for data collection. Existing literature was explored and built upon for this study; however, very little information was available, especially in the research area of community development. This area of study is in its infancy and theory is yet to be developed.

The content of the interview questions was informed by two sources—characteristics of the projects and the literature review. The interview was semi-structured; the interviewer sought a balance between a structured list of questions prepared in advance and allowing the community partner a voice in setting the direction of the interview. Some potential lines of questioning were suggested by existing research, notably Pickeral and Peters (1998) and Ferman and Hill (2004).

Open-ended questions were important in the interview. Open-ended questions allow the respondent to answer any way they wish, and provide the opportunity for unexpected information to be given during an interview. This type of question is especially valuable in early or exploratory stages of research (Neuman, 2006). Several researchers urged an even wider spirit of openness to the interview. They noted the importance of allowing the community partner to cover unanticipated territory in their comments (Neuman, 2006; J. Schuh, 1996; J. H. Schuh, 2009; Zeisel, 2006). It was valuable to invite interview participants to cover unanticipated territory, as some surprising information came to light.

The structure of the interviews was also informed by an assessment model that focuses on a series of questions to hone in on the research questions. The "Goal-Variable-Indicator-Method" strategy of research design has been used to assess impacts of service-learning projects in the healthcare teaching profession

(Holland 2001, Gelmon, Holland, & Shinnamon, 1998). When using this model the following series of questions is addressed:

- *Goal: What do we want to know?*
- *Variable: What will we look for?*
- *Indicator: What will be measured?*
- *Method: How will it be measured?* (Holland, 2001).

Gelmon developed a matrix for evaluating impacts of service-learning projects. The matrix is from the healthcare education field, and as such is somewhat oriented to more quantitative measures than was desirable in this research effort. It was a useful organizing and clarifying tool to assist in setting the interview structure (Gelmon et al., 1998). The matrix was adapted for this research project and is included in the Appendix. Some of the variables from the matrix were preliminary themes in the data analysis.

Interview logistics

Informed consent was sought from the participants prior to beginning each interview. Upon receiving consent, interviews were recorded and transcribed. The first set of interviews was done by telephone and evaluated for results. Telephone interviews are generally more efficient for time expenditure but some loss of communication always occurs without direct personal contact. (Creswell, 2003). During the evaluation of the first round of interviews the mode of interview (telephone vs. face-to-face) was also evaluated; it was determined that communication by telephone was adequate for good information exchange. Some questions were adapted for better understanding of meaning but it did not seem that information gain would increase significantly by holding face-to-face interviews.

Developing the list of interview questions was an iterative process; the structured list of questions was revised periodically as it became apparent which questions worked well to elicit responses from interviewees, and which questions needed improvements. The first draft of interview questions was piloted with a single interview. Analysis of this interview experience yielded the realization that

nine of seventeen questions could be answered with yes or no. Despite research-based questioning topics, the format needed adjustment. Meaningful information was still gathered during this interview because the questions addressed substantive issues and deeper probing questions followed up yes/no answers.

After the initial interview, the questions were re-structured to invite more open-ended answers and a revised list of questions was sent to the Institutional Review Board for approval. Approval was again obtained from the Board. The revised questions were more open-ended but addressed the same general topics. The interview was divided into four parts: Process, Expectations, Results, and Final Comments.

Four more interviews were held and the interview structure was analyzed again. This analysis suggested a few minor wording changes to achieve clarity for interview participants. Flexibility was still important in the interviews as each community partner had their own story to tell about their project.

The concepts addressed by the interview questions covered the range of community impacts adequately; no new issues arose during the interviews that necessitated returning to previous stakeholders with additional questions. In some interview-based research, transcripts of interviews are sent back to participants to check for accuracy of meaning and approval. Because these interviews were recorded, interview transcripts were not sent back for a participant check. This researcher is sensitive to the research-related participant burden that already exists for the public in general; for this research, it did not seem that participant check would be a respectful request of participants' time. In addition, some interview participants had already indicated reluctance to give time for an interview; participant check would create an undue burden for them.

Field observation

The research design allowed for making a physical visit to communities in order to view and verify direct and observable community impacts. This was

deemed unnecessary for several reasons. The first and most important reason was that the stakeholders interviewed were all highly invested in their own projects and took their role in the research very seriously. Interview respondents were generous with their time and with the level of detail given to describing the outcomes of their projects.

The second reason is that while direct and observable community impacts are certainly important, the data gathered yielded results indicating many of the impacts of PLaCE program involvement are indirect or not directly observable.

A third reason why field observation was deemed unproductive was the time lag required for community development work. For example, several city parks had undergone development work or had construction plans ready for imminent implementation but no physical progress had been made.

Research Difficulties

One potential conceptual difficulty was in determining causality of impacts. One of the most important, yet most difficult, tasks of an impact assessment is to provide convincing evidence that the measured changes, or impacts, can be attributed to the program being evaluated (Arbuckle, 2008). This potential difficulty can be addressed through mindful structuring of questions during interview situations. Careful wording is important in all phases of research.

This research design was fairly straightforward and major roadblocks were not encountered. Project files were available with contact information for community stakeholders at the time of the PLaCE project. It was difficult to find a project stakeholder to interview for some projects. In some cases the original contact had moved out of the community, or was no longer in a position of leadership and did not respond to requests for interviews It was important to allow plenty of time for pre-interview inquiry to find engaged stakeholders with knowledge of the project. It was easier to arrange interviews with local government officials who could be reached at

their office during regular business hours than to arrange interviews with citizen volunteers.

One important factor during data gathering and analysis activities was to minimize the involvement of my personal bias and feelings during the research, particularly during interviews and data analysis. I coordinate the PLaCE program as my job and am personally invested in the program. Therefore, I worked to encourage interviewees to be truthful in their answers, that the interviews were only valuable if they shared their real experiences. One way I did this is by emphasizing that the results of this study would inform future practices, so that Iowa State University could be of better service to Iowa communities. Drawing on the principles of engaged scholarship, I worked to let interviewees know that they were a valuable part of the research and that their responses would be of value to wider audiences. Removing myself as the recipient of community feedback and transferring that recipient to the behemoth “Iowa State University” also helped to encourage honesty in the interviews.

Another issue with internal validity was the length of time since the project was accomplished by PLaCE. If the project was completed very recently, a community may not have had adequate time to experience progress on their community development project. If the project was completed at the longer end of the study period, memories may have faded related to the project and the community’s interaction with students. I maintained awareness of this potential problem during data gathering and analysis, asking relevant probing questions during interviews as necessary. The time factor was investigated during data analysis but did not appear to be an important variable for this research question.

A last factor of research difficulty was in maintaining research records. A research field with a more developed body of knowledge also has a more developed system of tools. Those tools might include rubrics for inquiry, protocols for record keeping, and established templates and systems for gathering, storing, and

analyzing data. Developing record keeping systems required significant expenditure of time and energy for this researcher.

The seventeen project communities that formed the sample for this research study were mostly located throughout the state of Iowa. One project was located in Ashland, Wisconsin. The accompanying map shows project locations.

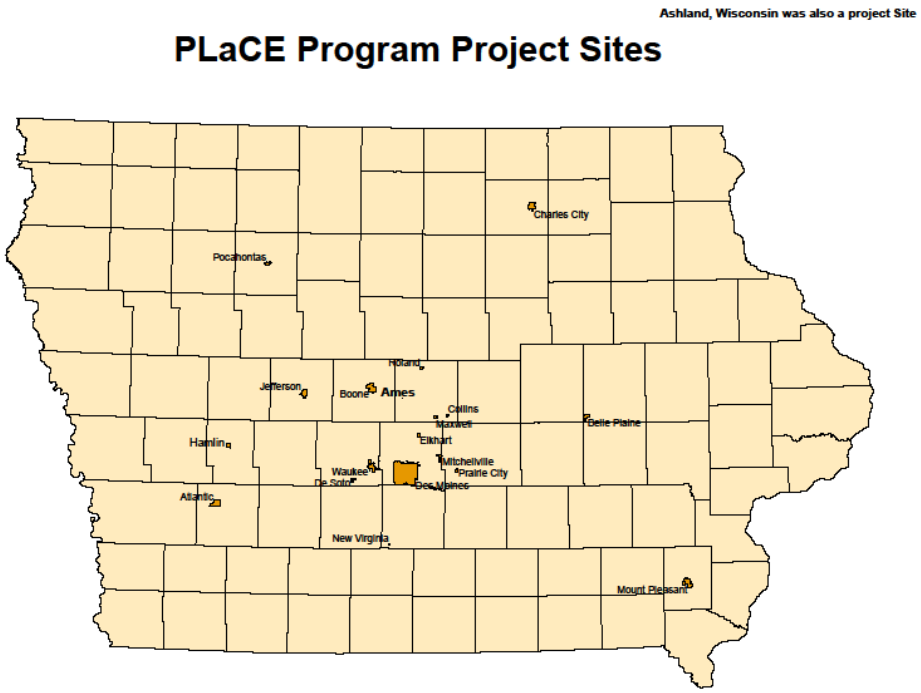

Figure 1. PLaCE Project Locations

Group One: Larger-scale Planning Projects

The first group to be studied was course-based projects focused on large-scale planning projects. These projects all involved a class of students interacting with a community group and proposing guidelines for future development. These projects were NOT directly linked to any immediate changes in the physical environment. Typical projects from this group were city or county comprehensive plans, a seven-county regional trails plan, and a housing development plan.

Comparative demographic information follows, as well as a short synopsis of each project, and information about the person(s) interviewed.

project	project description	academic department	pop	median age	median household income
Collins-Maxwell	community plan	CRP	807	36	$43,125
Elkhart Comp Plan	comprehensive plan	CRP	362	34	$33,000
Waukee	community plan	CRP	12,367	33	$58,024
Henry CO comp plan	comprehensive plan	CRP	20,336	37	$39,087
Ioway Trail	regional trails plan	LA + CRP	NA	NA	NA
Mitchellville Comp Plan	comprehensive plan	CRP	1715	35	$45,250
Lindahl Salvage	brownfield plan	CRP	12,083	38	$38,179
Roland Comp Plan	comprehensive plan	CRP	1324	34	$47,461
Prairie City	comprehensive plan	CRP	1365	40	$42,750

Table 3. Comparative Data Group One (US Census 2000)

Cities that were served by the PLaCE program from Group One ranged from a very small town of population 362 to a city of 12,367. One project was county-based and another covered a seven-county region. Median age for the cities' residents ranged from 33 to 40, as compared to the State of Iowa, which has a median age of 36.6. Median household income for the cities and county served ranged from $33,000 to $58,024. This compared with the Iowa median household income of $39,469. Note that data was from the 2000 census, except for the city of Waukee. That census data was from 2008, due to rapid growth since the 2000 census. Cities that engaged with the PLaCE program from Group One had median ages and median household incomes that clustered neatly around the same demographic factors for the state.

Collins-Maxwell Community Plan. The university was involved in this community project one year before data gathering occurred. A Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 432) worked with two communities and the school district serving both towns to address future development plans for the area. This

project was unique in the combination of stakeholders—a school and two cities came together in cooperation. The person interviewed was the current school superintendent. At the time of the project he was in a different administrative capacity, but was directly involved in all aspects of the project.

Elkhart Comprehensive Plan. The university was involved in this community project five years before data gathering occurred. A Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 432) worked with the city of Elkhart to write a comprehensive plan to guide city development. The person interviewed was the city clerk.

Waukee City Center Plan. The university was involved in this community project two years before data gathering occurred. A Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 532) worked with city planners to address the problems of a deteriorating city core. The person interviewed was a planner with the city. He was a recent graduate of the same department at ISU and had participated in a similar project when he was a student.

Henry County Comprehensive Plan. The university was involved in this community project five years before data gathering occurred. A Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 432) worked with the County Planner and GIS Coordinator in crafting an updated County Comprehensive Plan.

Ioway Trail Regional Plan. The university was involved in this community project seven years before data gathering occurred. A Landscape Architecture class (LA 401) and a Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 432) worked with a steering committee from a seven-county region to propose a regional trails system. Two people were interviewed for this research. One was guiding the steering committee during the project, but has since moved on to work in another region. A second interview was held with her replacement. Activity on this project has stalled for the present time, but plans are to begin work again in the near future.

Mitchellville Comprehensive Plan. The university was involved in this community project four years before data gathering occurred. A Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 432) worked with the city of Mitchellville to write a comprehensive plan to guide city development. The city clerk was interviewed. Only a small amount of data was gathered from this project, largely because the city administrator had moved from the position and a replacement had not yet been hired at the time of data collection.

Lindahl Salvage Yard. The university was involved in this community project four years before data gathering occurred. A Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 542) worked with the City Administrator to consider alternative uses for a brownfield site. The City Administrator has moved on and works in another community, however he did agree to an interview. Current city officials are not using the student plans.

Roland Comprehensive Plan. The university was involved in this community project three years before data gathering occurred. A Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 432) worked with the city of Roland to write a comprehensive plan to guide city development. The city clerk was interviewed.

Prairie City Comprehensive Plan. The university was involved in this community project two years before data gathering occurred. A Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 432) worked with the city of Prairie City to write a comprehensive plan to guide city development. The city administrator was interviewed.

Group Two: Small-Scale Projects

The second group studied was course-based projects focused on small scale development. These projects all involved a class of students interacting with a community group and proposing the design of some physical element. Project types included designs for a community gateway, several small city parks, main street storefronts, and a community college campus. Comparative demographic

information follows, as well as a short synopsis of each project, and information about the person(s) interviewed.

project	description	academic department	pop	median age	median household income
Hamlin Park	park design	LA	251	39.5	$27,262
DMACC	campus plan	CRP	NA	NA	NA
Ashland Main St	main street storefront plan	GR DES	8620	36	$30,853
Pocahontas	city plan, main street	CRP + LA	1970	45	$30,865
New Virginia	park design	LA	469	37	$38,750
Charles City Park	park design	LA + CRP	7812	42	$30,568
Atlantic Main St	main street storefront plan	GR DES	7257	42	$33,370
Jefferson Main St.	main street storefront plan	GR DES	4626	43	$32,818

Table 4. Comparative Demographic Data Group Two. US Census 2000

Cities that were served by the PLaCE program from Group Two ranged from a very small town of population 251 to a city of 8,620. Median age for the cities ranged from 36 to 45, as compared to the State of Iowa, which has a median age of 36.6. Median household income for the cities and county served ranged from $27,262 to $38,750. This compared with the Iowa median household income of $39,469. In Group Two, the cities that were served by the PLaCE program were less wealthy and somewhat older than the median for the state of Iowa.

Memorial Park in Hamlin. The university was involved in this community project one year before data gathering occurred. A Landscape Architecture class (LA 202) created concept designs for a new park and trailhead at the site of a former junkyard. Two professors and the program coordinator were involved in contact with the organizing committee. The project was sponsored by a local nonprofit group dedicated to community development projects. This local group also works routinely with the university on other unrelated student engagement activities. The person interviewed, an employee of the nonprofit organization, was directly involved with

logistics of the students' community visit, end-of-semester design presentations, and moving forward with park construction.

DMACC Sustainability Design. The university was involved in this project two years before data gathering occurred. A Community and Regional Planning Class (CRP 494) investigated ways to incorporate principles of sustainability into various practices of an urban community college campus. The person interviewed was directly involved with logistics of the students' visits to the campus, and is heavily invested in moving this project forward at the school.

Ashland Main Street Design. The university was involved in this project three years before data gathering occurred. A Graphic Design Class (ARTGR 470) interacted one-on-one with Main Street business owners to propose newly- designed graphic identities for businesses and re-designed storefronts. The person interviewed is a planner for the City.

Pocahontas Community and Main Street Design. The university was involved in this project four years before data gathering occurred. A Graphic Design Class (ARTGR 470) interacted with Main Street business owners to propose newly-designed graphic identities for businesses and re-designed storefronts. During the same semester, a Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 435/535) investigated ways to improve community image and wayfinding. Two people were interviewed—the city's Economic Development Director, who was not in the position at the time of this project, and the county Economic Development Director, who was directly involved in both projects and interacted with university representatives and students.

New Virginia Park Design. The university was involved in this project seven years before data gathering occurred. A Landscape Architecture class (LA 202) created concept designs for a new park. Two people were interviewed—the first was the leader of a community development organization who was directly involved with students and their interactions in the community. The second was the current

leader of the Park Board, who is new to the board and did not have any contact with the project or with students.

Charles City Riverfront Park Design and Brownfield Site Design. The university was involved in this project four years before data gathering occurred. A Landscape Architecture class (LA 202) created concept designs for a new park. During the same semester, a Community and Regional Planning class (CRP 415) proposed new land uses for a brownfield site, which formerly housed a county maintenance yard. One person was interviewed, the City Parks Administrator, who was directly involved with all aspects of both projects, including interaction with faculty, students, program administration, and further physical development of the park.

Atlantic Main Street Design. The university was involved in this project two years before data gathering occurred. A Graphic Design Class (ARTGR 470) interacted with Main Street business owners to propose newly- designed graphic identities for businesses and re-designed storefronts. The person interviewed is the regional Economic Development Director; she was directly involved in all aspects of the project.

Jefferson Main Street Design. The university was involved in this project five years before data gathering occurred. A Graphic Design Class (ARTGR 470) interacted with Main Street business owners to propose newly- designed graphic identities for businesses and re-designed storefronts. The person interviewed was a locally-based County Extension Director, and he was directly involved in all aspects of the project.

Data Analysis

Group Two interviews were finished first so a qualitative analysis of this data was done first. Data were assembled vertically and analyzed interview-by-interview. This allowed a holistic look at the sense of each interview. Overall themes were noted. Then the data were assembled horizontally, and analyzed question-by-

question. This allowed for looking at themes as they carried across interviews, such as “where did projects generally fall on the balance of benefits spectrum?” or “did attitudes about the university change?”

Data were also analyzed from coding of individual interview comments. Interview participants made comments about some factors at different points in the interview. For example, comments about the impact of community-student interaction were located as responses to questions within the first, third, and fourth interview sections. Comments about the value of the students’ creative ideas and fresh eyes on community problems were located as responses to questions in the first, second, and fourth sections of the interview.

This three-way analysis of the data, along with the principles of grounded theory and input from knowledgeable research colleagues, guided the data analysis of Chapter Five and informed the interpretations and implications of Chapter Six.

Chenail (1995) and Constas (1992) recommended that qualitative data be presented with a spirit of openness, in order to build trust between researcher and reader. These researchers asserted that openness allows readers to judge the validity of the research, and may invite the reader to continue the inquiry presented in the research. The following analysis of data is presented; the reader is invited to continue the inquiry.

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS

When crafting the research design for this study, it was anticipated that planning-related projects might result in significantly different types of community impacts when compared with impacts of design projects related to physical improvements in the community. Therefore, the projects in this research study were separated into two groups. Group One comprised larger-scale planning projects and Group Two comprised smaller-scale projects related to physical improvements in the community.

As data analysis progressed it became apparent that differences in community impacts between Group One and Group Two were less profound than anticipated. During interviews the community stakeholders focused less on visible community changes and more on process-related impacts of university and student involvement. Therefore, the two groups are discussed in parallel through the Data Analysis. Similarities and differences are discussed throughout and summarized at the end.

Four themes became apparent in analyzing data related to community impacts of PLaCE projects: Process, Community-University Relationship, Results, and a general category, Holistic Themes. These four themes related strongly with sections from the interview structure. (Table 5)

Categories of analysis within the themes were similar between Group One and Group Two. Some factors were more prominently highlighted by one group than the other, but the character of the comments was the same. This was likely due to the relatively small sample size and difference in project types between the groups. Within the data analysis, number of comments was less important than quality of comments. The meaning of the comments retained its importance regardless of number of comments.

Process	Community-University Relationship	Outcomes	Holistic Themes
Program Structure Community-Student Interaction Community Contributions University Contributions Final Report/ Presentation Final Document	Learning Experience for students Community-Professor Interaction Setting Expectations Relationship	Expanded community capacity Use of Final Report Enhanced project legitimacy	External variables Value to community Leadership changes Benefit to other entities

Table 5. Data Themes

Some factors differed significantly between Group One and Group Two. In some instances the difference was due to project type. In other instances it was difficult to determine the reason for the difference. Some variables that may have influenced the differences were small sample size, personality characteristics of the interview respondent, and objectives of the professor organizing a project. In spite of these differences, a surprising amount of the data themes was common to both Group One and Group Two.

Theme One: Process

Process was an important theme for both groups, because process is the structural framework upon which the project is built. This is confirmed in the literature--Stoecker and Tryon (2009) wrote that a formalized process is an important indicator of commitment by a university partner.

Within the overall theme of process, however, some categories of analysis were more strongly discussed by participants from Group Two. This may be related to the fact that community partners interviewed for Group One were all familiar with planning processes; they were either city planners, city clerks with planning duties, or other professionals with planning duties. Group Two community partners had a

wider variety of backgrounds. Two were lay volunteers, two were city planners, two were economic developers, and the balance had other reasons for involvement. Some of the partners were unfamiliar with planning processes and may have been more moved to discuss the unusual.

Program Structure

One category of analysis within the process theme was linked to the structure of the PLaCE program. Methods of program marketing and publicity, formalizing of agreements between university and community, and logistical concern were important to interview participants.

University constituents must have an awareness of a program's availability in order to take part in it. A program that is advertised or marketed to the general public in some way provides equitable access to University resources. Community stakeholders became aware of the PLaCE program through several avenues—conference presentations, both state and national; local Extension office; referral from previous university partners or former students; and through the university website. This category of data was important to both Group One and Group Two. Some participants checked with other participant communities before applying to the program.

> *I first heard about [the program] at an APA conference in Philadelphia. [The professor] did a presentation on a previous year's project. I told her afterward that our city would be interested in working with her in a similar capacity. It was a good experience.*

> *My role is that I am the Executive Director of the *** Chamber of Commerce. I heard of the program at a conference and knew of several other cities that had participated in the program. I pitched it to our City Council and our local Community Promotion Commission and they got excited about it as well.*

A variety of methods of publicizing the program provided awareness of the program for participant communities. Interview participants indicated they gained valuable knowledge about past PLaCE projects at conference presentations.

Although the university provides a web presence for the program, it was not mentioned during the interviews.

Formalized program. Program participants voiced their appreciation of program structure. This was most strongly articulated by Group Two, but Group One participants also discussed their appreciation of program structure. A formalized program at the university provided guidance to local stakeholders, enabling them to envision the process from start to finish. Community organizations often made application to the program, seeking community development assistance, but without a realistic idea of time and effort that would be required to move ahead.

> *I think the key is on the front end, [as you did] lay out the time commitment and the thought process, and the experience of others, how this might help us. It's hard sometimes, for people to understand what will be the end result, and how much time will be required to commit.*

Community partners felt a sense of security in having a process in place to help them move forward. A signed letter of agreement provided confidence about matters of cost, timeline, expectations, and deliverables.

> *[The best thing was] the order that the process happened in. Meeting with the professors first, to get a feel for the project, and then bringing the students out and having the community meeting and then taking their ideas back, it made the process flow nicely, gave us enough time to figure out what we needed and what we wanted, and for them to deliver the project back to us.*

They also recognized the importance of good communication throughout the process of being involved in the program. Interviewees indicated appreciation of a coordinator to address details and act as a liaison:

> *We really appreciate [the assistance of] the program coordinator too. It does take someone to drive the process… Half the battle sometimes are the details and [the program coordinator] made that process smooth.*

The formalized program structure included a signed agreement between the university and the community partner relative to factors such as project timetable, fee, and project deliverables. However, there were other logistical factors that created concerns for community partners.

Logistical concerns. Group One participants did not talk about logistical concerns, perhaps because those projects had less complex community interactions in their project organization in comparison with Group Two projects. Therefore, the following discussion only relates to Group Two.

Several interview participants related concerns about logistical matters. They were concerned about timing and arrangement of student visits and preparation and delivery of final project deliverables. Community partners stressed the importance of using time wisely when students visit a community. In most cases students visited the project community only once or twice, due to time constraints and transportation costs.

Working within the confines of the academic calendar was sometimes difficult. For example, some community partners indicated delays in receiving final deliverables. Reasons for those delays related to end of semester project management within the university. Professors shouldered the responsibility for creating the final project report. This task sometimes took a back seat to other competing duties—submitting grades for one semester, preparing syllabi for the upcoming semester, and end of term committee meetings.

One community partner shared difficulties in receiving project deliverables due to the holiday break at the end of fall semester:

> *There were some…businesses who contacted me, they wanted to implement the designs, and they wanted the design files to send to signage fabricators. It took a while to get those files due to the holiday break, and [the professor] had to contact the students and wait for responses from her. Perhaps you could get the design files from the students and deliver them as part of the project report?*

Those concerns were justified for the community but for university participants there were competing time demands at the end of the semester which created delays. Students were at times unresponsive in sharing project files after the semester ended. Once the semester was finished, students may have felt their obligations to the project were also finished.

Some professors devised systematic ways to extract project files from students before the end of the semester. These professors typically had an easier time finishing up their responsibilities related to final report creation. Other professors had a more difficult time and report creation dragged on for several weeks or even months.

Other logistical concerns related to community visits. For example, communities reported the need for plenty of lead time to stir up support for a project—that support may have been financial, but it also may have involved finding a place for 40 students to sleep on a Friday night, or business owners who would agree to be interviewed on Tuesday morning at 10 am.

To mitigate some of these logistical concerns, community partners appreciated the existence of formalized programs and related processes, in accordance with the literature that recognizes the importance of formalized processes (Koulish, 1998; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). Advance agreements about project costs, timelines, and expected deliverables paved the way for the focus to be placed on the project itself when students visit the community.

Community-Student Interaction

Pickeral and Peters (1998) noted that interaction between community and students provides benefits to the community partner organization. Interview results agreed with their findings in both Group One and Group Two. Community members prized interaction with university students as a valuable component of the program. Interviewees specifically mentioned benefits to local young adults in some projects:

> *Our residents enjoyed the interaction with the college students. Being a small community, although we are growing, there is often a vacuum [of community engagement] in the age group of 19-24. It was very meaningful for that age group of our residents to interact with your students.*

In looking back some interviewees mentioned they wished students had more time scheduled to meet with business owners: "I did not expect [the students'] level of interest in the community—so our timing of the city visit could have been planned out better".

Another community had decided the distance was too great for funding a student visit, so they arranged distance meetings between the community and their student partners. In looking back, they indicated they would have done things differently:

> *In hindsight, I probably should have worked with [the instructor] to find money to fund the students to come up here….[one of the best outcomes was]…the collaboration of students, city, and business owners to try something new and exciting, that benefits everyone involved.*

More than half of all stakeholders interviewed in both Group One and Group Two made some positive comment about the value of interaction with the students. This factor was a central theme to one interview. This person said that her favorite thing about working with ISU was

> *probably meeting them [the students] and going with them to the park and through the community, and then the community meeting at the Methodist Church. They made two trips down here, one was a lengthy meeting and we REALLY got together and bumped heads and it was really neat, that part.*

The importance of interaction with the students for this community stakeholder was evidenced in that she mentioned it at least four separate times during her interview. Just interacting with students was not enough to assure

positive impacts for a project, however. The local community needed to provide some resources as well.

Community Contributions

Stakeholders from communities that had moved forward with projects typically talked about broad-based community support, a high degree of collaboration between different groups in the community, and adequate capacity to support moving ahead with their project. Thirteen comments were received in answer to an interview question about adequate community contributions. Seven people gave an unqualified "yes" as an answer. The six other comments were qualified answers. They indicated "yes, but….", and followed with ideas about how their community might have provided more support to the project. In communities with some of the most successful projects, the partners spoke of "pulling everybody together", of "speaking to all the Board members", or of a diverse group of people who were interested in the project with the university:

> *There were a few [business owners] that were not receptive and did not want to participate. But we saw consumers, retailers, business owners, city council and the Promotion Commission, P& Z [Planning and Zoning Board] that were interested. That was a broad based group that was interested in seeing the results of the project. And [they] were interested in the process as well.*

One community had moved forward with their project but progress had been slow and difficult. Their own analysis indicated a lack of community interest and support.

> *A drawback to the project was probably that we did not have enough people involved to enact progress. We just didn't have enough people involved to make the project go.*

Community capacity for progress was a concern for this project, but stakeholders were persistent and realistic in addressing their abilities.

> *it was a good venture for us. Things will happen, eventually—we work slow, we are a very small town!*

Another community struggled with moving forward on their project. In spite of a very engaged and enthusiastic stakeholder who worked with the university, no physical changes were evident as a result of the project. A lack of collaboration may have been a key to understanding the absence of results in this town:

> *I really thought we were gonna see half the storefronts change as a result of this. Now, we didn't get there. This is not totally to blame on the PLaCE program. This has been going on for a long time in ***, to clean up some of our storefronts. This has been a big frustration of mine for 15 years, and we are still talking about cleaning up the storefronts. We can't get resolution because we can't get folks to make changes. So it's not like it's ISU's fault that nothing got done. It's just some of the barriers that we need to deal with.*

The interviewee in this case worked very hard to make this project a success—it was not for lack of trying that no results could be seen in the town. Perhaps the problem was in his own words: "a big frustration <u>of mine</u>" (emphasis added). If no one shared his frustration, community motivation for change was likely small.

Data from this research certainly agreed with Ferman and Hill (2004), who indicated that communities need to have adequate desire, capacity, and support in place in order to engage in a meaningful partnership. Within this research, contributions of communities where positive impacts were noted centered on broad-based collaboration, community interest, and community capacity.

While community contributions were important in communities where positive impacts were observed, university contributions were important as well. In addition to the contributions of program structure that were discussed previously, students brought many contributions to the communities where PLaCE projects occurred.

University Contributions

The university contributions mentioned in this study are restricted to those mentioned by the community stakeholders who were interviewed. Other university

contributions are important to a successful program, but only those contributions mentioned by community partners are discussed here.

Community partners generally approved of the level of University contributions. Several people mentioned that their original expectations of the project related to creative ideas from students. Some community stakeholders indicated that they requested university participation in their community as a way to access new ways of thinking; others reported they were interested in receiving cutting-edge ideas that students were learning from their classroom instruction.

Creative Design Solutions. Some community partners entered the relationship with a primary goal of receiving creative design solutions to a community development need. This was particularly true of the graphic design projects for storefront redesigns, but was also expressed by one city administrator in reference to a park design:

> *[Our goal was] to have students look at the project sites, thinking outside the box, ideas we would not have considered. We mostly tend to look inside the box. We were looking for fresh ideas and momentum for the project.*

Comments about creative design solutions were only received from Group Two. This was understandable, since Group One projects were not design projects. Group One comments focused instead on bringing new ideas from the classroom to the community.

New ideas. Several Group One respondents discussed the value of new ideas from students. New ideas were not discussed in Group Two. This difference was logical, due to the difference in backgrounds of the interview participants and project types. Two community partners specifically mentioned they had expected to receive new ideas from the university classroom that might be incorporated into their communities. One even mentioned that this was his favorite part about working with

the university, and that students may be better than private consultants for bringing up new ideas, since they are not constrained by practicality:

> *The best thing, from the whole process, [was that] the students were more open to new ideas, as compared with when you have a professional firm come in to do a plan. The professionals sometimes constrain their ideas to what is practical. The students considered practicality, but they were also very engaged in finding solutions that might not otherwise have presented themselves. They considered ideas that were more creative and far-reaching. The students incorporated concepts that they had learned in class or ideas they learned from around the country.*

In contrast, there were other community partners that were not open to new ideas. One community partner expressed frustration when students incorporated ideas into the community plan that were not in compliance with existing city code requirements. She indicated that the city had no interest in considering the students' ideas, and that she wished more of the city council's interests had been considered when the plan was prepared by the students. Her comments disclosed a lack of communication between university and community.

Another community partner expressed disappointment that student work did not incorporate forward-thinking ideas that he had anticipated:

> *I had a vision of where I wanted things to go, based on the public hearings and conversations I had already conducted. What came back was not completely boilerplate but it was pretty standard—Comprehensive Planning 101…. It's better than nothing at all.*

There were also some problems in setting clear expectations and providing good communication between the community partner and the university in this project. The issue of setting expectations is discussed later.

Fresh eyes. In addition to creative design solutions and new ideas, communities from Group One and Group Two expressed the value of students bringing a fresh perspective and a trained eye to investigate community needs.

> *The program itself is a really unique program, to help our business owners. One of the main things it helps with is to really see their business, and the first impression they are making, from a fresh perspective, whether or not they implemented changes, it was a wake-up call, about how well their store fronts were representing their businesses.*

And another community stakeholder said:

> *the usefulness is the fact that when you have individuals from the outside, they can see some things that we walk by and don't see, on a daily basis. Ways not only to improve our communities but to get our citizens to work together to look toward the future. I found that the visioning process—looking toward the future, and the design process were very beneficial and helpful.*

Enthusiasm. This factor was not mentioned significantly in the Group One interviews. In the Group Two interviews, some people discussed the students' enthusiasm as a highly significant part of their experience. They spoke of it as contagious:

> *The refreshing new perspective that they were able to bring to downtown. It's nice to have new ideas, new enthusiasm, come in from outside. That enthusiasm is contagious, for both staff and business owners. Possibilities about what could be…[I hoped]..that the [city] business owners could see the potential of something new and exciting that could market their business better. So getting that enthusiasm from the students, that's what I was hoping to get out of it.*

Koulish (1998) agreed, citing "rejuvenation of the organization with energy and enthusiasm" as one of the benefits for communities of service-learning programs.

Capacity to participate. For both Group One and Group Two, almost all of the stakeholders who responded to this question: "Did ISU have the desire, capacity, and institutional support to successfully engage in this project?" answered positively. One respondent expressed a degree of respect for an ongoing program:

> *From my perspective it seemed like you knew what you were doing because you've done [projects like this] a few times and you have the resources there, you know how to pull this off!*

One community partner answered negatively. He questioned whether it was possible to complete the type of plan he had expected in only one semester. His expectations were higher than some other stakeholders' so perhaps his standards could not be met in one semester's work.

Ferman and Hill (2004) indicated that both parties--university and community--need to have adequate desire, capacity, and support in place, in order to engage in a meaningful partnership. Most community partners agreed that the university demonstrated these qualities in the PLaCE program.

Final Report/Presentation

In Group One interviews, delivery of the final report was not mentioned as an important part of the PLaCE process. The final report was important as a project outcome, which is part of the third major data theme and is discussed under "Outcomes".

For Group Two, presentation of the final report was a major discussion point for several interview participants. Delivery of the final report and/or final presentation of design solutions is typically an important exclamation point at the end of a project in the academic world of design. Final presentations are an opportunity for students to talk about their design ideas and to show those ideas through graphic representation. Final presentation events often take on a celebratory air. Students trade in their blue jeans and t-shirts for professional attire, guests are invited, and food and drink are often shared. Some researchers recommend celebration as an important component of the service-learning process (Tai *et al.*, 2006).

Presenting PLaCE project design solutions to community partners took on widely varying formats as reported by this study's participants. As a whole, interview

respondents attached a great deal of importance to this part of their experience with the students. Comments from various interviews indicated this sense of importance:

> *We did come down [to the university] and see the grand presentation of all the designs, and that was wonderful, to be able to hear why the kids drew the designs the way they did, what pieces were their favorite parts of their designs……the end meeting was useful—hearing their presentations and how they came up with the designs--and the final report was useful as well"…the students' presentations were informative.*

Of nine final project comments, three reported that they came to campus for a formal presentation. One of the comments indicated that a final presentation was held at the university but no one was able to attend due to inconvenient scheduling for the community. One project was located out of state and a live video presentation was arranged. Two presentations were arranged locally in the community. One town received significant follow-up work with a graduate student and received a refined plan for park development, but did not report that a final presentation was held. The last project had no final presentation scheduled but a DVD recording of the student final project presentations was sent to the community along with the printed final report.

> *Yes, [we received the recording] but we did not use it. It was problematic to get the business owners all together at that time of year [December]. And so we thought, what's the value of them watching the DVD, if they can't ask the students questions or anything.*

Finding common themes from these comments was difficult. Certainly the community should be consulted about delivery mode of final project results and the community voice needs to be heard.

There was a lack of agreement in the data about presentation of final design recommendations. The lack of agreement about this one element in the process was perhaps the best illustration of the literature's assertion that studying community

impacts of service-learning is difficult because of the impossibility of controlling for all the variables involved (Cruz & Giles, 2000).

Indeed, in this study, there were widely varying formats and locations of final presentations. The character of the community partner organization also varied according to project type. Organizations included city parks departments, Chambers of Commerce, a Community College, and Economic Development groups. Timing within the calendar year was another variable in the final presentations. Fall semester projects typically held their final presentations in late November or early December, just before finals week. This was problematic on two fronts. First, community stakeholders in the retail business had difficulty scheduling time to attend a meeting, due to the holiday shopping season. Second, late November and early December weather can be a hazardous time for travel in this region; professors hesitated to schedule travel to an outlying community for fear of weather complications. Postponing any event and rescheduling was not seen as feasible at the end of the semester.

One community participated in two separate projects at the same time, with the same person acting as the principal contact/ stakeholder in the community for both projects. The two projects used different formats in final presentation: one project finished up with a presentation in the community, and the second project finished up with a presentation on campus. The stakeholder preferred the local community presentation:

> *[The second project] was equally a good process. There was a public presentation at ISU that I attended, but others from [our community] were not able to attend. I saw some very nice presentations. If at all possible, I think similar to the [first] project, if the presentation could be made at the community so that more community members could attend the presentation, it would be beneficial.*

In contrast, in another community a final presentation was never held—transportation costs precluded a trip to the community, and the late fall schedule

prevented community members from traveling to campus. Their reaction was the opposite of the previous community.

> *We ended up not really having a formal presentation, and I think that was OK. Part of the students' original game plan was that if the budget allowed, they would come back and do a formal presentation. But that didn't work out for various reasons—scheduling, weather, funding, etc.*

It would seem that no firm conclusions could be drawn from this data about the variable of final presentation of design results. One observation that could be made, however, is that among projects that had the most reported positive impacts, two factors were present. Some kind of final presentation was scheduled which met their needs, and some type of final printed document which also met their needs was available for use after the students' interaction with the community was completed.

Final Document

A final document was not an important category of data in Group One interviews. Within Group Two, however, community stakeholders discussed final documentation of the student design documents in detail. Of the nine final project comments from Group Two, eight projects received a printed, bound document containing design drawings and explanatory text. Some communities posted the report on their website, with positive community feedback. In one community, a new economic development director had taken over since the PLaCE program involvement. The new director was not aware of the PLaCE project but had noticed the reports in a desk drawer.

Two of the projects had requested and received poster-size plans of a development project. These plans were posted in public locations such as the local bank or library and helped to create publicity and stimulate local interest in the project.

Another community group only received one copy of the printed report and one CD with printable files. The CD had been lost and the single copy was in high

demand. Due to internal university difficulties, additional copies of the document could not be made. The community's document was still useable but the restricted access was problematic.

The ninth project (which did not receive a printed report) was the first park design project taken on by the PLaCE program. At the end of the student class work, the university found enough funding for a graduate student to work further with the community to refine the forty student designs into one unified design plan. The student produced a graphic plan of a park design and delivered it to the city park committee. This solution (providing the graduate student) resulted in the College's largest commitment of financial resources when compared with all the other projects in this study. However, the satisfaction level of the community was among the lowest in the study.

The presence of many variables confounded an analysis of this piece of data—a very small community, a change in project leadership, and a lack of community collaboration. Nevertheless, the community voice was strong.

> *No I didn't ever see a full report, just one colored diagram/plan that the students did. I never saw a write-up, I would like to see it if I could.*

> [And another stakeholder said]*: I think I heard that they never came back with a final print of the park plan, I heard that in a meeting once when I asked about it. I would be interested in receiving a copy of the report.*

> [And the same person said later]: *Well, I don't think we received…all of it, we did have a drawing, kind of a scale drawing…but we were supposed to get more and I don't think we ever got it…. But there wasn't really a good set of plans as a final output.*

One possible explanation was that this community only received one drawing, and no final printed report. A drawing can be difficult to store over a long period of time. A standard-sized printed report can have a long shelf life in an office. Perhaps over a period of several years a printed report is more helpful to the community than

a poster-size plan. Indeed, all of the other interviewees made some reference to the printed document, and many of them indicated that even after several years, the reports were taken down off the shelf and perused for inspiration.

Process Theme: Summary

Community stakeholders voiced strong opinions about how the process affected local impacts of the PLaCE program project in their communities. They heard about the program from a variety of sources, and voiced an appreciation of a defined program structure to help set guidelines and direction for the process.

Community partners especially enjoyed interactions with the students, and valued the enthusiasm and fresh perspective they brought to community planning and development activities. Group One project stakeholders valued new ideas students brought from the university classroom, while Group Two project stakeholders valued creative design ideas. However, some stakeholders had rigidly specific ideas of what students would create or design, and they were disappointed when those ideas were not part of the students' work.

Final presentation of project results was especially important to Group Two stakeholders. For university partners, scheduling of the presentation was sometimes difficult. The long-lasting positive benefit of the presentation seems to warrant an emphasis on a final presentation event. The physical document created from project results was also important for Group Two projects; report creation and delivery processes could be improved by the university.

Theme Two: Community-University Relationship

The Community-University relationship was important as the connector between the two parties. As established in the literature review, this relationship should be viewed as a partnership, with both sides contributing to its success.

Learning Experience for Students

Many community partners from Group One and Group Two expressed concern for the students' experience. One expressed that in his mind, "I can't separate out ISU from working with youth. I always like working with youth in any setting." Other people expressed the importance of providing a meaningful learning experience for students. One interviewee asked several questions about how service-learning experiences are valuable to students, indicating a deep interest in the topic. Others expressed concern about community meetings and hoped that interactions with grumpy citizens or intimidating council meetings had not resulted in negative experiences for the students.

Another stakeholder recognized that student interaction with a real community was a beneficial activity for students. He noted the value to students of doing something useful with their educational projects:

> *[I enjoyed] the energy that the students bring, the thoughtfulness that they put into their assignments. It was an assignment for them, but they also wanted to do something useful for the city, [I liked] to hear how they wanted to make a difference and do something positive for the city. Witnessing that level of caring was pretty nice to see out of some college students.*

Another project enabled university students to engage extensively with elementary, middle school, and high school students. The benefits of community-university engagement became a cycle of positive impacts in this project. All parties involved--university, professor, university students, school district, and young students--were important to the process, and each one gave and received assistance of some kind.

> *I think that was good for OUR [younger] students, to see they could have a voice, not only in the school district but in their towns as well…and so I think that was a nice connection, that students [younger] were asked by students [university] to share their voices and opinions.*

The two quotes above from community stakeholders offered powerful evidence of the important role that community partners felt they played in the learning experiences of university students during PLaCE projects.

In addition, interview participants offered further examples of their concern for student learning experiences. Community stakeholders were asked if conforming to the university's academic calendar had been problematic for them. All respondents said the academic calendar had not been a problem for them. These comments seem to conflict with statements about problematic delays in receiving project deliverables after the end of a semester. Some community partners expressed concern that conforming to the academic calendar may have been a problem for the students, due to weather or other scheduling conditions.

This concern for students' learning and welfare was indicative of the importance of the program to community stakeholders. The self-reported lack of conflict with the academic calendar contrasted with findings of other researchers. The perceived lack of conflict may have been partially due to the project-based nature of the PLaCE program. Service-learning programs in which students provide ongoing service (tutoring, for example) have been reported to suffer from lack of student availability during semester breaks and summer holidays (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Ferrari & Worrall, 2000)

Other findings from this study agreed with other researchers on the value of community engagement and service-learning activities for student learning; findings also agreed with existing literature about community interest and dedication to participating in the education of students (Gelmon *et al.*, 1998; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009; Vernon & Foster, 2002).

Community-Professor Interaction

Interaction with professors was important to community stakeholders. They commented about appreciation of good communication and ease of contacting professors. For one stakeholder, this was the best part of the process.

> *I thought the interaction with the professors was the best. I did not have a lot of interaction with the students as far as the program itself…I hung out with them when they were making smores down by the community center…but the interaction with the professors was probably what made the project happen.*

Nine of the twenty-one interviews contained some positive mention of interaction with professors and ease of communication. This is an indication of the importance of the relationships--not just between the students and the community partner, but also between the professor and the community partner.

> *From start to finish it was easy for our community to be engaged with ISU staff. Communication with the professor—she did a really good job of keeping us informed of information that she needed--any changes that needed to be made accommodate the students schedules as well as working with us to meet our goals and our ambitions for the project.*

Different structures of community engagement and service-learning programs translate into different relationship needs, but for this project-based type of structure, a good relationship between professor and community partner was beneficial.

Two people commented about poor communication:

> *They [university partner] could have communicated back and forth with us [community partner] as the project went along so we could have some conversation about the project. It was pretty much one way communication.*

> *There needs to be more communication between the students and the city council so they can make sure they are moving in the same direction. The students went one direction and the council wanted to go another direction. The plan was not overly useful and was never adopted.*

Community participants were gracious in their comments, however, and acknowledged that both parties need to be responsible for good communication.

> *Umm, I would say yes [there was a breakdown in communication], but I would also take blame for the communication*

> *problems. It's a two-way street and we will take our share of the responsibility for the communication as well.*

Some of the communication problems were linked with a failure to set clear expectations at the outset of a project. A careful analysis of interview comments yielded some interesting information about the importance of setting clear expectations.

Setting Clear Expectations

The importance of setting clear expectations was a significant factor in projects from Group One. Group Two projects have more clearly defined outcomes inherently so setting expectations was not a stated problem.

Four community partners specifically mentioned that expectations were clearly stated at the onset of their project. All of those respondents said their expectations were met at the end of the project.

> *The communication was good, the expectations of the project [both sides] were laid out at the beginning of the project so I knew what to expect. I made time for all of them [students, professor] whenever they came to town…because I respected the value of their time…they came to work here so I gave then my time to help them be effective.*

Two community partners made no mention of setting expectations but their projects needs were narrow in scope and were easily met by the class. They were pleased with the outcomes of their projects.

> *[This type of plan] is something every city should have. We have all the information we need to meet information requests from the county, etc. I learned a lot about this type of plan at the municipal clerks' institute.*

Two of the community partners indicated they were displeased with the project; their expectations were not met. Both of these community partners had specific expectations of what they wanted students to do for them. Those expectations did not necessarily align with the academic outcomes of the students'

classes, nor did the interviewees discuss learning needs of students. Some of the expectations were over details that would have been easy to address.

> *There was not a lot of communication. I mean, the plan just showed up on my desk one day. All printed and bound and ready to go. But that was a problem because it was not in a format that we were willing to use. It was …a waste of paper. .. To me printing is just killing a lot of trees. The printing was especially wasteful since it had not yet been approved by the Board of Supervisors. They should have waited to print until after the Board approved the plan.*

If clear expectations had been set before these projects began, both sides of the partnership might have been more pleased with project outcomes. Better communication would be the first step in crafting a positive relationship between both partners.

Relationship

The literature review revealed a concern for healthy relationships between communities and their university partners. Relationships should be based on trust and respect (Sandy & Holland, 2006). Community stakeholders discussed their relationship with the university, and their comments were overwhelmingly positive.

> *Iowa State is a good partner for this type of thing. We take advantage of this resource whenever we can, and like to strengthen ties there whenever we can.*

> *[This project] confirmed my positive attitude about what ISU is doing with their design college and the planning department.*

Eleven of the seventeen interviewees replied with a positive comment about the people or the university in general when asked about their favorite part about the project. Fourteen of sixteen respondents indicated that their attitude did not change because of the project--their attitude was already positive before the project began. Two stakeholders had previously been unfamiliar with Iowa State University, but now had positive attitudes. One commented,

> *Yes, my attitude changed. The quality of the work was impressive…the final report was really professional. That was a big contributor to my changed impressions.*

Issues of mutual respect were also important to one community partner, who facilitated a project at a community college:

> *Initially I was apprehensive because our [community college] students sometimes feel inferior and I didn't know how the ISU students would interact with our students. I did not even feel that came up as an issue. I thought the ISU students were very respectful. I didn't think our students or their students thought there was any difference between the two groups of students, other than ISU students were further along in the process. The ISU students had excellent attitudes.*

Even community partners who were displeased with the final product that they received had good things to say about the university and working with students:

> *We just appreciate the fact that ISU is willing to work with us smaller communities. At a reduced rate, and to get us a finished product. This [particular project] is just one of those things that didn't work out. Who knows the next project might be wonderful.*

The positive nature of these comments was a powerful indicator of the high regard for this university, its people, its programs, and its students. University officials would be wise to safeguard their reputation and work to maintain it.

Community-University Relationship Theme: Summary

Stakeholders reported they valued the relationship with the university and appreciated its resources. While community partners welcomed the benefits they received from their involvement with the PLaCE program, they maintained an awareness that they were participating in the education of university students.

Interviewees reported no problems in working with the academic calendar. They seemed willing to work on the university's timetable as long as local community planning or design needs were being addressed.

Interaction with professors was a highlight for some project participants. Other participants were not pleased with the outcome of their project, and felt their voices were not heard. These participants wished for better communication between the university and the community partner. Careful data analysis revealed that setting clear expectations before a project begins is one strategy for avoiding disappointment at a project's conclusion. Setting clear expectations was more important for Group One projects, likely because the project type is wider in focus than Group Two projects.

Finally, and most importantly, the relationship between community and university was described as strong and worth maintaining. The relationship should not be taken for granted.

Theme Three: Outcomes

Outcomes were important as they pertained to the initial goals of community and university. For the community, some type of community development goal was common. For the university, academic progress was a primary goal. Outcomes may or may not have related to changes in the physical environment. One community participant said they expected

> *…to have students look at the two project sites, thinking outside the box, ideas we would not have considered, where we mostly tend to look inside the box. We were looking for fresh ideas and momentum for the projects.*

Clearly, this community partner was expecting ideas and energy from the university students, and not a detailed community plan or design for physical development. Ideas and energy from university students resulted in expanded community capacity, which was a highly important component of the outcomes mentioned by interview participants.

Expanded community capacity

The literature search suggested that community organizations may experience enhanced capacity as a result of community engagement and service-learning activities (Driscoll et al., 1996). Community partners in this research indicated expanded community capacity in three principal ways. They reported that their involvement with the PLaCE program stimulated local dialogue, local activity, and local creative capacity.

Local dialogue. Both Group One and Group Two stakeholders described increased local dialogue after the PLaCE program. In one community, twenty per cent of the participating business owners changed their storefronts after receiving student designs. The city also decided on some much-needed changes to their sidewalk display ordinance. However, the community partner said those were not the most important community impacts; she reported the most appreciated impacts involved local dialogue.

> *The deliverables for this project were highly appreciated. Several visible changes occurred in the community due to students' designs and suggestions. However, the most dramatic and appreciated results were to stimulate internal dialogues within the community and the creation of a stronger partnership with Iowa State University.*

Seven stakeholders indicated the PLaCE project helped people begin dialogues about important community development topics. One community experienced significant changes in dialogue with its citizens:

> *[Since the PLaCE project involvement] we have better communication, and we are having quarterly meetings with the residents. We revisited issues that were raised in the SWOT analysis and then brought residents in to talk about those issues, and then we moved forward to address them…we have some people interested in prairie plantings due to our proximity to Neal Smith Wildlife Park. We stimulated people to think about some of these issues if nothing else…This gives us something positive to talk about with residents rather than rocks in ditches and other problems.*

Stimulating local dialogue was not the only benefit to PLaCE communities. Some communities reported increased local activity or projects.

Local activity or projects. Other stakeholders from Both Group One and Group Two reported that PLaCE program involvement helped them move forward not only on the initial project, but on other, unrelated projects as well.

> *What has kept moving this forward was the excitement that our Board members experienced after their interaction with the students. Everyone is still talking about that. They laugh because some of the presentations, in addition to being informative, were entertaining.*

And in another community:

> *One of our jewelry stores that did NOT participate [in the original PLaCE project] did spruce up their storefront afterward. So even some of those that did not participate were motivated to take a new look at their storefronts.*

A third community stakeholder was involved in a planning project combining the resources of a small school district and its two affiliated communities. School officials were impressed by the way the elementary, middle school, and high school students were included as an important part of the community plan. School officials were so moved by this planning strategy that they transformed some of their processes.

> *The inclusion of our students in the [PLaCE] process has inspired me to expand upon this in my work [as a school administrator]. Our high school principal resigned last year—and we included students on the search committee. I think if we have the right students, they can help pick the right person for the job….. We had some budget concerns this year. I went to talk to our high school classes—economics, government. And they had some great ideas about what we could cut. I took those ideas to the school board. We have an Applied Communications class that is offered to seniors for [Community College] credit. The teacher switched the focus to school improvement ideas, and then the students presented to the school board some other ideas for school improvement. So I think, that [the*

> *PLaCE] report and process allowed us to expand and honor the student voices in our schools—that has been a fabulous change.*

Five different stakeholders made comments about moving forward on projects in their community.

Local creative capacity. Finally, three community stakeholders from Group Two made comments during the interview about PLaCE program involvement stimulating community members to become more creative in their thought processes.

> *The final report really got people thinking about how our campus could be a different environment. People have been happy with the status quo and they haven't thought about developing it into something else and giving it a different kind of feel. But I think a lot of people saw those plans and got pretty excited, I've heard lots of people talking about the campus becoming a kind of urban oasis, people from the school and the community feeling comfortable to come and hang out on the campus, with it having a park-like environment. I've heard some buzz about it, and there's still talk about it now, 2 years later. It definitely got some ideas rolling and brought it to the forefront of people's minds.*

These community impacts must not be underestimated in their importance. Changing thought patterns of institutional decision-makers was a powerful impact that might be overlooked without careful consideration.

Use of Report (Group One)

Planning projects formed the study population of Group One. Some direct indicators of community impact were legal adoption of the report, following guidelines contained within the report, or using some components of the report. Seven of the nine projects in Group One used the report in some way. Two cities legally adopted reports as prepared by the student classes. One city and one county used some parts of what the students wrote in preparing a report locally. Three other projects used report recommendations and guidelines in some way. One project in particular moved forward fairly quickly:

> *The plan was officially adopted…We are now in the process of finishing Design Guidelines, probably this month [October 2010]. After that we will revise our Zoning Ordinance for the downtown area, to allow for different uses that were proposed. We are always looking for other things to check off the list to get the plan realized….we are still referring back to the action steps the students outlined in their plan.*

One project had not been used due to financial constraints. The community stakeholder indicated that the report had been valuable for investigating land use alternatives, but no feasible land use had been found. In one sense, the report was used to decide to do nothing with the project site.

The second unused project was never adopted by the city nor was it ever used by them. This project suffered from a lack of communication and relationship with the university.

> *We didn't really get to review anything beforehand to say yes, this is what we are looking for or no, this is not what we were looking for. All we got was, here's our final presentation and each student presented the part they had worked on, and a couple weeks later we got final copies [of the report.]*

After further discussion in the interview, the community partner disclosed that this was the third comprehensive plan that had been done for this city, and none of the plans had ever been adopted. Given this past history, it is possible that the city officials were not highly motivated to work towards achieving a final document that was satisfactory to them.

Most of the communities from Group One experienced positive direct impacts from their PLaCE program involvement. City officials have used plans as they were intended to be used, and indicated they valued and were following recommendations for community development.

Use of Report (Group Two)

Physical improvements. Group Two projects involved design of physical improvements. Within this group, direct indicators of community impact were

project-related physical changes in the community. Of eight projects in this group, six reported some type of physical improvement related to their PLaCE project. Parks were developed, Main Street storefronts were changed, and streetscapes were enhanced.

> *Five businesses changed their storefronts. Also staff and planning commission had a conversation about our sign ordinances….were they too restrictive? So we are revising our sign ordinance now as a result of the PLaCE project in [our city].*

> *The river front project has moved forward over the last few years. We have participated in the National American Bloom Contest…we have judges in town, we talk about the project and what's taking place. We refer back to PLaCE as being a key element for getting people thinking outside the box. Since then that project has spawned into a major development, things are beginning to take place. We are talking about a $2 million investment in that area. Not all the students' projects are being incorporated but [the project] got us thinking about different development opportunities.*

Two projects reported no physical changes. One was a public organization that was adversely affected by economic downturn; they reported plans to move ahead with improvements when economic conditions become more positive. The second project reporting no impacts had no plans for change. This project suffered from a lack of community contributions and the community did not seem to have a desire to change.

Use of Final Report Documents. As stated previously, Group Two stakeholders reported being aware of final project reports and of using them to help move a project forward. Use of the final report was mentioned in six of the interviews.

> *The report was fantastic. I put it on the city's website for awhile, it might still be there. It was nice, the business owners who did not participate, they could reference the report and some creative sign ideas for the business owners. It allowed me to advertise—or advocate for graphic design-based solutions for signage for other businesses as well as the ones that participated.*

> *We took the completed drawing and displayed it in the bank; also put an article in the local newspaper about the project. The whole [park] site is much more attractive now.*

Two of the communities that engaged with landscape architecture classes for park design ideas used the reports when they engaged private landscape architects to provide design services. The community park boards used the final reports as starting points for design ideas when they met with private designers. Two other organizations reported they anticipate moving forward with future development work: the reports have cast a vision for the future.

Two communities that engaged with graphic design classes for business identity and storefront designs reported that the reports were useful for business owners and for other groups in the communities. The graphic design class format was unique in that students were paired one-on-one with store owners. At the end of the semester some of the store owner "clients" requested design files from the students so that they could use the students' designs for storefront improvements. Community stakeholders reported difficulties in procuring design files from their student partner and asked if that process could be improved.

This is an area in which the PLaCE program could work on a better partner relationship. The solution is complicated because of issues related to intellectual property rights for the students and access to project ideas for community members.

Enhanced Legitimacy

A last area for discussion of project outcomes was a change in how the project was perceived. Stakeholders reported that a partnership with the university lent projects enhanced legitimacy, both for local citizens and for external parties. The program's link with Extension was mentioned in some interviews as providing enhanced legitimacy to the community participants. This enhanced legitimacy is verified by Ferman and Hill (2000).

Group One and Group Two community stakeholders reported that partnership with the university was valuable for validating project worth, both internally and externally. Within the community, some citizens viewed the project with increased legitimacy due to the link with the university.

> *[The PLaCE project] really gave us a shot in the arm. We got a lot of name recognition,…[a local designer] got a website going for us…our meetings had a lot better attendance, things were really taking off, we were starting to get more projects. It gave the whole project a boost….at some of those meetings, we had thirty or forty people there, and that is wonderful.*

Beyond the community, stakeholders mentioned they had included the PLaCE report in grant applications, and that grant applications were more favorably received by granting agencies due to the partnership with the university.

Outcomes Theme: Summary. The Outcomes theme focused on tangible community impacts. Were plans formally adopted by City Councils? Were parks built? Did storefronts change? For the most part, the answer was positive. The great majority of Group One and Group Two project reports were used in some way by their respective communities.

Moreover, progress on initial projects was not the only tangible community impact of PLaCE program involvement in communities. Many local stakeholders reported expanded community capacity in the form of additional local dialogue, progress on other community activities or projects, or enhanced creative capacity within the community.

Community partners also reported that working with the university and use of the final project report enhanced the project's legitimacy within the community and with external granting agencies.

In addition to the three narrower data themes of Process, Community-University Relationship, and Outcomes, some data applied across all the themes

and was general in nature. It was important to consider this information from a different perspective, as it took a broader view of community impacts.

Holistic themes

Some data from the interviews was holistic in nature, applying to all aspects of community impacts of PLaCE projects. Analysis of this data yielded further information about external variables, value of the project to the community, the consequences of changes in leadership, and changes in perceptions of project legitimacy.

The nature of this data also illustrated the complexity of research into community impacts of community engagement and service-learning activities. Data presented in this section applies to both Group One and Group Two.

External variables

Many variables influenced the community impacts of PLaCE projects. Some could be controlled by the university and some could be controlled by the community. Other variables were beyond either sphere of influence. For example, three projects within this study were blocked by financial difficulties. Some, perhaps, will never be feasible. Some will wait until the financial climate changes for community development improvements.

The most successful projects in this study, as defined by the community impacts and benefits observed within the research, all had a dedicated core of stakeholders who worked to build community capacity and move the project forward. This was best articulated by a community partner:

> *I think the issue is the council or the professional staff or someone has to push [the project] afterwards—if a project is just paper and words and then it goes on a shelf, it doesn't matter how much it cost—$3,000 or $4,000 or our streetscape project, with final design cost of $100,000, the value is nothing if it just sits on the shelf. It's important to move forward with it at the end.*

This statement illustrates the importance of a dedicated project champion. The PLaCE projects with the most positive community impacts typically had one or more project champions who were integral to project success.

Value to Community

One of the indicators of community impact is balance on the benefits spectrum (Sandy & Holland, 2006). For the community, was the experience worth their expenditure of time, energy, and money? Fifteen participants answered this question. Thirteen answered yes; eight answered with particular enthusiasm.

> *No question, it was very economical, and worth every cent we spent for it. The youth were all very positive, cordial, and creative in what they designed—and their work pushed our board to think more creatively.*

One community reported the balance was equal.

> *I think it was on par. There wasn't a lot of money put out. I would do it again, but I would do some things differently next time.*

This participant continued to work with the PLaCE program and was very supportive of student work. This indicated a willingness to continue to search for practices that function well for both the university and the community.

One participant replied that it had not been worth their investment. In spite of a negative experience, her attitude about the university and the PLaCE program remained positive and she was open to the possibility of working with the program in the future.

Community stakeholders were asked to give the program a grade, indicating their level of satisfaction with the program. Sixteen responses were received. One participant gave an A+, ten gave a grade of A, two gave a grade of A-, two gave a grade of B, and one gave a grade of C-. Six of the A grades included enthusiastic comments: *"Our results were all positive"*, *"I was a very happy customer", and "this project allowed us to explore options we would not have pursued otherwise."*

Leadership Changes

Change of leadership within the community stakeholder group was another variable that may have affected community impacts of engagement activities. The data from this research was insufficient to determine the correlation of leadership change with progress on community planning or development activities. However, the conclusion could be drawn that a written project report was helpful for project continuation when a leadership transition occurred. This was convincingly illustrated by one of the projects in this study, where after five years a new leader reported that she was using the report to begin new efforts on the project.

Benefit to other entities

A last area of broad impacts of PLaCE projects dealt with benefits to entities beyond local communities. Four of the seventeen projects resulted in hiring of private consultants to carry planning or design work to a higher level of completion. This planning and design work resulted in economic benefit to design consultants and to the construction industry upon project installation.

PLaCE projects have also been the focus of presentations at community development and academic conferences, enabling other communities and academicians to consider replicating similar projects in their home institutions and communities. Some community officials have shared their experiences within their professional communities via electronic and print newsletters, and PLaCE has been highlighted in university news sources. These efforts may have created impacts in extended locations, but understanding those impacts is difficult.

In addition, community development improvements benefitted user audiences beyond the local community. For example, within Group Two, impacts of a new park design in a very small town were investigated. One year after completion of the PLaCE project, the park now functioned as a trailhead; it served a regional group of several thousand trail users, although the city's population was less than 300 people.

Holistic themes: Summary. Holistic themes applied to projects broadly, addressing external variables, value to community, leadership changes, and benefit to other entities. External variables included general financial climate, which hindered community impacts for some PLaCE projects, and the presence of a local project champion, which facilitated positive community impacts in other PLaCE project communities.

Community stakeholders reported that involvement with the PLaCE program had generally provided positive value to the community, and had been worth their expenditure of time, energy, and money. Data was insufficient to determine how local leadership change affected community impacts of the PLaCE project, but evidence was found that a project report can help a new leader continue work on the project.

In addition, interview participants noted that entities beyond the local community received impacts of PLaCE projects. Some of these entities were design consultants and construction companies. Others may have benefitted indirectly by learning about the projects through conferences, newsletters, and other modes of communication. Finally, projects such as regional park facilities are used by a wider population than the local community. A comprehensive accounting of community impacts of PLaCE projects, both negative and positive, would be a difficult task indeed.

General Summary

> *The intangible results [of the program] are what various individuals took away personally when they listened to the students, professors, and program coordinator talk about the project. You don't know what they internalized from listening to you, but I know they took some positive benefits away from those interactions.*

This community stakeholder discerned that a complete understanding of PLaCE program community impacts can probably never be achieved. He described intangible results that might never be revealed beyond one person's experiences.

However, some tangible results were suggested from this research. Benefits that communities gained were more far-reaching than expected; community capacities were expanded, perhaps with greater impact than the intended project—whether it was a trail system plan or new storefront designs for Main Street.

Study participants were great enthusiasts for this university. They were delighted to engage with this program because of its affiliation with their educational institution, and their perception did not change based on project outcome. One community stakeholder shared the most significant impact of the project in her community:

> *[The most significant impact was] building the partnership with Iowa State! The results were great, and everything else was wonderful, but becoming aware of the resources at Iowa State and thinking of Iowa State as a partner in our Community and Economic Development was the best part. It made us more aware and more appreciative of what we have here, so that was super.*

CHAPTER SIX: INTERPRETATION AND IMPLICATIONS

Interpretation of Study

After analyzing data from twenty-one interviews related to seventeen project communities, some research results emerged. These results revealed some best practices of the PLaCE program as well as areas for program improvement. In addition, some implications surfaced for wider application to other service-learning and community engagement programs.

Methodology

The methodology for the study was effective. Interview participants took their role quite seriously and worked to give meaningful answers to interview questions. Some complications were experienced in locating community stakeholders for interviews and in scheduling interviews. Recording, transcribing, and analyzing the interviews was time consuming but within expected parameters for this type of research. As mentioned previously, record keeping was challenging and more diligent attention to creating and maintaining research records would have lessened the burden of data analysis.

Suggestions for program improvement

Some areas for program improvement surfaced in the data. Service-learning and community engagement are implicit in the structure of the PLaCE program. However, this is not stated explicitly in the College's goals for the program. It has been ten years since the program began. Perhaps this would be an appropriate time to re-evaluate the program and incorporate principles of community engagement into the program's goals, structure, and guidelines. Incorporating principles of community engagement would align the program with the Kellogg Commission recommendations for becoming an engaged university (Kellogg Commission, 2001). With this re-alignment, the program would be poised to better serve the University, its students, and the communities and citizens of Iowa.

Another factor for program improvement was mentioned specifically by Stoecker and Tryon (2009); they recommended that communities choose their partners carefully. Within this study, the issue of community contributions was an indicator related to community impact. Communities needed to exhibit broad collaborations, adequate interest and support, and capacity to participate fully in the project. More careful choice of community partners for acceptance into the PLaCE program would probably have led to more positive community impacts. In the future, communities might also be directed to methods for enhancing levels of volunteer leadership and support before engaging with the program, if community capacity seems lacking.

Setting clear expectations at the outset of a project was also observed to affect community impacts. This issue would be best addressed by more strictly defining and adhering to program protocols. In addition, university partners could attach more importance to the final presentation at the end of the project, making it a celebratory event when appropriate. This issue could be addressed by sharing information with professors about the observed high level of community appreciation for the final presentation.

In some projects the process for delivering students' design files to clients was unsatisfactory. While this might seem to be an obvious area for improvement, finding solutions will be difficult, as legal issues of intellectual property for students are involved, as well as timing issues related to end-of-semester schedules.

A final suggestion for improvement relates to gathering data on project impacts. A program protocol should be created to check back on PLaCE projects at specified time intervals. Some models exist within the university for checking back with previous program clients. One model is located within the Center for Industrial Research and Service (CIRAS). This center provides assistance to manufacturers for improving their processes, and follows a strict protocol for following up with their clients. Checking back with PLaCE program community stakeholders would provide

an opportunity to offer communities further development assistance if needed, and it would also be a way for the College to evaluate the continuing community impacts and effectiveness of the PLaCE program.

Relationship

Perhaps the most powerful community partner comments related to their enthusiasm for Iowa State University, and the value they placed on a relationship with the university. University representatives helped to build that relationship with every encounter they had around the state.

While the PLaCE program is physically located within the College of Design, it is structurally housed within the unit for Extension to Community and Economic Development. The program's links with Extension enable creation and maintenance of relationships with communities in unique and valuable ways. Program marketing and visibility are coordinated through Extension. In addition, the proposed addition of regular program follow-up, as discussed just previously, can be accomplished using the resources of Extension. Resources for program follow-up are often difficult to secure through academic departments.

Extension can be a valuable partner for academic departments in maintaining relationships with constituent communities. It is important that quality outreach and engagement work continue in order to maintain and sustain these valuable relationships.

> *[Our county and community] have a fine relationship with ISU. We have been fortunate, especially in the [Extension employees]—they are some of the highest respected people in our community, so automatically there is a good image of Iowa State. Plus there are a lot of alumni and students around here. So as far as the relationship with ISU, it is fairly positive in this area.*

The Kellogg Commission Report (2001) looked in depth at the topic of the public's relationship with land-grant universities. The report cited public frustration with public land-grant universities; they were perceived to be unresponsive, out of

touch, and unable to play a role in solving society's current problems. In addition, the report stated the public had a "perception that, despite the resources and expertise available on our campuses, our institutions are not well organized to bring them to bear on local problems in a coherent way". The report went on to recommend that public universities become engaged institutions that focus on a commitment to sharing and reciprocity. The Kellogg Commission envisioned partnerships, two-way streets defined by mutual respect among the partners for what each brings to the table.

Data from this research did not demonstrate the public frustration or disconnection described by the Kellogg Commission Report. Instead, this research found a deep appreciation for the university and an expressed eagerness to form partnerships and build on existing relationships. Although positive attitudes were expressed by community stakeholders in this research, the qualities of an engaged institution are nevertheless valuable qualities to incorporate in PLaCE program goals. A university does not need to wait until its constituents feel disconnected and frustrated to begin to work toward positive relationships.

The positive attitudes about relationship with the university that were described in this research are valuable and should not be taken for granted. All relationships require maintenance to be sustainable. Incorporating principles of engaged institutions such as commitment to sharing and reciprocity will contribute to ongoing healthy relationships between the university and its constituent communities.

Implications of Study

This research concludes that the PLaCE program serves as an effective program model for facilitating community engagement and service-learning within a small college at a land-grant university. Because of the resources available at a land-grant university, the program's connections with Extension also provide helpful bridges within the university and around the state.

Research findings are only valuable if they are shared with others for critique and for adding to the body of knowledge that informs practice. In that spirit these generalizable implications are proposed for a wider audience of service-learning and community engagement programs in other colleges and at other educational institutions.

Suggestions of best practices

Mention was made early in this thesis of the paucity of research about community impacts of service-learning and community engagement activities. This study used existing literature as its foundation, then gathered new data, and now proposes some principles for best practices. Incorporating these best practices into service-learning activities may increase the likelihood of enhancing community impacts.

A formalized program with specifically assigned staff is a helpful beginning point. The program should be visible to the public through various media formats and personal contact should be available to respond to community inquiries. Staff should have the opportunity to receive training in the principles of community engagement. Because this is an emerging field, making connections with staff from similar programs at other institutions would be supportive to the program.

The program should incorporate protocols to facilitate clearly stated expectations of project processes, timelines, fees, and deliverable products. The expectations should be explicitly described in a formalized agreement that is signed by both parties.

Program staff and participating faculty should work together to choose community partners carefully. Before committing to the project, the faculty member and the community partner should reach an agreement about project goals and outcomes which satisfies academic needs of students as well as needs of the community organization. Program staff and faculty members need to work to give

community partners reasonable expectations of students' abilities relative to the community problem or need that is being addressed.

In addition, when choosing community partners, program staff and participating faculty members should look for communities that exhibit signs of broad-based community collaboration and support for the project. A committee that consists of only one community member showing interest in a partnership with the university is unlikely to result in a project with meaningful community impacts.

Interacting with students can be a powerful and enjoyable experience for community partners. Students often bring fresh and valuable insight to community problems, and community members usually place high value on the students' ideas. Faculty and community partners should work to enhance interaction between students and the community. Opportunities for developing this interaction occur during class visits to the community but community members may also be invited to campus for progress reports during the project period.

Some type of event at the end of the project period should be considered, if appropriate for the project type. This event can be held in the local community, but might also be held at the university. The important consideration is to work for some type of interaction between students and community as a final part of the project.

Community members, faculty participants, and program staff should also be aware of types of impacts that can be anticipated as a result of service-learning and community engagement activities. First of all, impacts that relate directly to the project can be expected. Those impacts will, of course, vary widely according to academic discipline and project type.

Likewise, indirect impacts can be anticipated. Indirect impacts include expanded local community capacity and enhanced legitimacy of the project. Communities may also experience a ripple effect, whereby the initial project stimulates community action on a separate, but related project.

Program staff and administrators should be mindful of the benefits of program assessment. Research should be conducted on a regular basis to determine if community needs are being met by the program. It will also be valuable to assess the program for meeting the needs of the university, faculty, and students as well. A program must be valuable to all four groups if it is to be sustainable.

Community impacts of service-learning and community engagement activities cannot be guaranteed; there will always be potentially restrictive factors beyond the control of university or community. For example, a downturn in the local economy, an event causing social upheaval, or a change in the political scene could arrest project development in any community.

Another suggestion of best practices relates to the academic community. Service-learning activities are helpful for universities, faculty, students, and communities when they are done well. However, learning about how to do those activities well requires that practitioners add to the body of knowledge.

Community engagement practices across the disciplines

As stated in the literature review, community engagement efforts are crafted using an assortment of strategies, which varies across academic disciplines. These engagement efforts have evolved over decades in some disciplines; each discipline has crafted its own peculiar vocabulary to describe its engagement efforts. One unfortunate result of this disciplinary isolationism is that the disciplines have failed to learn from one other.

Within the design disciplines, for example, Henry Sanoff engaged in community based design for over thirty years with the Community Development Group at North Carolina State University (Sanoff, 2003). Furthermore, incorporating community outreach projects into the curriculum was a staple of many design disciplines before the term ‘service-learning’ was coined. In spite of this long history of engagement efforts, the design disciplines have been a nearly silent voice in the

current academic discussions of service-learning and community engagement which are occurring in wider academic circles and at administrative levels.

In contrast, the medical education disciplines are perhaps at the forefront of implementing service-learning and community engagement activities into their curricula, and they have published widely about their practices. They share information effectively through their organization, Community-Campus Partnerships for Health (www.ccph.info). They also share information effectively outside of the medical education field, for example at the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (www.servicelearning.org). This type of sharing might be appropriate for the design professions, perhaps through professional groups such as the American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Landscape Architects, the American Planning Assocation, or the Environmental Design Research Association.

One nascent organization has formed within the design disciplines in an effort to promote the principles of service-learning in the design classroom. This organization, Erasing Boundaries (www.erasingboundaries.psu.edu), has achieved some accomplishments in the first years of its existence, but the organization is largely invisible outside of the design academic realm.

Finally, what might the different disciplines—medicine, design, law, and engineering, to name a few--learn if they shared information with each other about successes and failures of service-learning and community engagement activities, projects, and strategies? As the scholarship of service-learning and community engagement becomes more integrated and cross-disciplinary, further research will enable the disciplines to learn from one another and strengthen academic practices at the same time.

CHAPTER SEVEN: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Recommendations for further research

Some recommendations for further research emerged, both for the PLaCE program and for addressing broader questions about community impacts of service-learning and community engagement programs.

PLaCE program

There are several research questions yet unanswered relative to the PLaCE program. A factor that was not a consideration in this research was the impact of community engagement and service-learning projects on faculty members. Some data from the analysis hinted that faculty incentive for participation in the PLaCE program or type of faculty position may be linked to quality of communication and clarity of expectations between community partner and university.

Some other questions about faculty issues can be posed. Why do faculty choose or do not choose to participate in the PLaCE program? Where is the balance on the benefits spectrum for faculty? There are currently more PLaCE applications from communities than faculty willing to work with PLaCE projects. Understanding the balance on the benefits spectrum for faculty would help to address the imbalance between supply and demand.

In addition to studying faculty issues relative to PLaCE, College of Design strategic vision for community engagement could be investigated in future research. Would there be a benefit and/or interest in choosing one underserved population or community development group to serve with all the College's departments working deeply on one community development need, while developing some rich expertise in one specific design practice area? As an example, could the College of Design begin to use its academic resources to study and assist in development of small town Main Street communities across the state?

As this deep expertise was developed, communities could be partners in developing the expertise, and would receive development assistance along the way. Rich expertise in one specific design practice area could at the same time become the focus of faculty research, publication, and scholarship. Students would also develop valuable and marketable skills with this scenario.

Alternatively, would the College's departments be interested in a longitudinal study, working with one community very deeply over a period of several years and recording changes over time? Working under this scenario, community partners, faculty, and students would also work together and receive mutual benefits.

Further research into the PLaCE program itself would mostly benefit the local university. However, many questions remain unanswered about community impacts of service-learning and community engagement. Answers to these questions will benefit a wider audience.

Further research on a wider scale

Larger research questions should also be addressed. Community impacts of other programs like PLaCE should be studied as a group to investigate if research results from this study are generalizable to a larger population. A larger group research study would make a valuable contribution to the body of knowledge relative to community engagement.

Some of the data from this study may only apply to the design disciplines. But other data likely applies more globally. Service-learning is currently practiced across most academic disciplines and it would be valuable to know about community impacts of projects from other disciplines. As mentioned previously, the medical educational community is already deeply engaged in service-learning practices. Other disciplines would benefit from an examination of their service-learning and community engagement practices.

Discussion of Community Engagement

Much of the current discussion about community engagement in academic circles focuses on long-term, deeply rooted partnerships between a community and a university. This model is certainly valuable and helpful in many situations. The Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) has consistently recognized this type of project with its highest award for community engagement, the C. Peter Magrath Community Engagement Award (www.aplu.org).

However, this researcher extends a word of caution and proposes that long-term, deeply rooted partnerships are not the only helpful approach to community needs. There are also merits to shorter-term models of community engagement.

Valuing long-term, deeply rooted partnerships over shorter term partnerships ignores the reality of diversity in types of community needs, faculty scholarship interests, and resources of academic disciplines. Accommodating and valuing a range of partnership types within the field of community engagement will allow for the diversity of needs within communities and resources within academic disciplines.

Conclusion

This research report began with a question from researchers Sandy and Holland (2006). *"What would we hear if we listened to community partners about their experiences in partnering with academic institutions?"* This research study did exactly that—listened to the voices of community partners about their experiences in partnering with Iowa State University's PLaCE program.

Talking to community partners and listening to their voices was an enjoyable research experience. Their stories were interesting, encouraging, and surprising. The stories were interesting because they told about their personal connections with students, professors, and the projects. The stories were encouraging because PLaCE projects have been valuable in the partner communities. And the stories were surprising because community members were less focused on the physical

improvements in their communities and more focused on positive changes in relationships between the residents in the community.

> *[The most significant community impact was] the beautification, the computer modeling, the enthusiasm of the students, those three things. And maybe I should reverse that a little. When you get a lot of young people –young leaders-- that really helps a community think about the future rather than about the past. And I think that's one of the key issues, to get people to think about the future.*
>
> Here's a salute to the future of PLaCE project communities.

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CHAPTER NINE: APPENDIX.

1. Goal-Variable-Indicator Chart
2. Interview Form
3. IRB Approval, August 2009
4. IRB Modification Approval, March 2010

What will we look for? *(variable)*	What will we measure? *(indicator)*	How will it be measured? *(method)*	Who will provide the information? *(sources)*
Visible results	Project installation	Site visit	PLaCE applicant or city official Photographs
Direct impacts	Adoption by city council	Personal affidavit	City clerk or other official
Enhanced organizational capacity	Projects achieved New development related to project	Include in interview questions and/or data analysis	Project stakeholder
Ready to move forward/progression of knowledge	Has project moved forward? Grants identified and/or applied for?	Personal affidavit	Project stakeholder City clerk
Project resources were more affordable	Self-report	Include in interview questions and/or data analysis	Project stakeholder
new energy and enthusiasm new skills or expertise new networks identified	Self-report	Include in interview questions and/or data analysis	Project stakeholder
Gain access to university facilities	Self-report	Include in interview questions and/or data analysis	Project stakeholder
Use project results for further development	Self-report	Include in interview questions and/or data analysis	Project stakeholder City clerk
Enhanced legitimacy for the organization	Self-report. Successful grant application	Include in interview questions and/or data analysis	Project stakeholder
Balance on the benefits spectrum	Self-report	Include in interview questions and/or data analysis	Project stakeholder
Community assisted in educating students	Self-report	Include in interview questions and/or data analysis	Project stakeholder
Commitment of both parties is perceived	Self-report	Include in interview questions and/or data analysis	Project stakeholder
Respect and trust in the community-university relationship?	Self-report	Include in interview questions and/or data analysis	Project stakeholder

Table 6.Goal-Variable-Indicator Model (Gelmon et al, 1998)

Interview form

Time/Date:

Medium:

Interviewee:

Project:

Process

Tell me about your experience with the PLaCE project (provide details if necessary).

What did you find useful about particular components of the program?

Were there components that were not useful?

What was your favorite thing about working with ISU? About working with ISU students? What was problematic?

Describe the quality of the relationship with ISU

Have you done any other projects with ISU since then? Why or why not?

How do you feel you were treated by university representatives?

Expectations

What were your expectations about the project? About the relationship with ISU?

How did your attitudes about ISU change as a result of this project?

In your judgment, did ISU have the desire, capacity, and institutional support to successfully engage in this program/project?

Did your community have the desire, capacity, institutional support to successfully engage in this program/project?

Results

What happened as a result of this project?

What has worked well?

What did not work well/could have been changed to provide better outcomes for you?

After the PLaCE project involvement in your community, what happened next?

What is happening currently in regards to (insert relevant project information)?

Wrapping Up

Was it worth your investment of time, energy, and money, for the benefits you received?

It's your turn to give us a grade. On the whole, how satisfied were you with this interaction with PLaCE?

A= very satisfied
B= satisfied
C= just average
D= not satisfied
F= dissatisfied

What do you think were the most significant community impacts?

Are there any other comments you would like to make about the community impacts of this project?

Is there anyone else I should talk to about this project?

Initial IRB Approval, August 2009

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

DATE: August 27, 2009

TO: M. Susan Erickson
326 Design

CC: Heidi Hohmann
479 Design

FROM: Jan Canny, IRB Administrator
Office for Responsible Research

TITLE: **Examining Community Impacts of the PLaCE Program**

IRB ID: **09-365** **Study Review Date:** 26 August 2009

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair has reviewed this project and has declared the study exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b). The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**
- **You must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application**, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or if required by the IRB.
- **Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuing Review and/or Modification form, prior to making <u>any</u> changes**, to determine if the project still meets the Federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please be sure to **use the documents with the IRB approval stamp** in your research.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. **Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

IRB Approval of Modification, March 2010

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

Date: 3/3/2010

To: Susan Erickson
326 College of Design

CC: Dr. Heidi Hohmann
479 College of Design

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: Examining Community Impacts of the PLaCE Program

IRB Num: 09-365

Submission Type: Modification

Exemption Date: 3/2/2010

The project referenced above has undergone review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b). The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**
- **You must carry out the research as proposed in the IRB application**, including obtaining and documenting informed consent if you have stated in your application that you will do so or if required by the IRB.
- **Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB on a Continuing Review and/or Modification form, prior to making any changes**, to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please be sure to **use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the **recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp**.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. **Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.