The
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Group

TRG/Western Kentucky University: All University Collaboration Model

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As an institution built on the foundation of a Normal School, collaboration among faculty members and across program areas and academic units has been part of Western Kentucky University's (WKU) heritage since 1906. In addition to the various collaborative initiatives across campus, there are a variety of initiatives that involve various agencies across the community, including ongoing partnerships with local and area school districts, P-16 Councils, and the Green River Region Educational Cooperative. These collaborations have been enhanced, especially since the court decision resulting in Kentucky's Educational Reform Act (KERA) in 1990 (*Rose v. Council, 1989*). In the early 1990's the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences created the Task Force on Education Reform – High Schools and the Task Force on Research Based Instructional Strategies to facilitate institutional work relative to KERA. Both Task Forces involved faculty from what is now the Ogden College of Science and Engineering and the Potter College of Arts and Letters.

In addition to the added focus on collaborative initiatives with the onset of KERA, WKU has had a tradition of hiring faculty members in content areas who have pedagogical backgrounds. Not only has this facilitated collaborative efforts across the university, it has also strengthened our ability to bridge theory and application and to connect the on-campus learning opportunities with teacher candidate experiences in P-12 clinical settings. The various collaborative initiatives are designed and implemented from a win-win perspective with credit going to the group rather than an individual unit or person. Promotion and tenure expectations convey the value placed on collaborative initiatives and work with our P-12 and community partners.

Collaboration involves opportunities for success along with potential risks, with the absence of success often resulting in new ways of looking at our work and the creation of new collaborative efforts. The following is a description of three collaborative efforts that have involved three colleges at WKU and community partners.

STEM Initiatives

In an effort to increase the number of high quality teachers in the areas of mathematics and the sciences, WKU was successful in receiving an Exxon/Mobile award to replicate the UTeach model for educating STEM focused teachers at the Middle and Secondary levels. Based on feedback from the reviewers of the application, it became apparent that one of the strengths of the proposal related to the strong collaboration between the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences and the Ogden of Science and Engineering. The proposal development team was questioned as reviewers could not believe that the two colleges really worked so closely.

The UTeach replication model at the University of Texas at Austin at WKU is known as SKyTeach and is highly successful in attracting and matriculating individuals who have expressed a desire to make a difference in student learning in STEM (Science, Technology and Mathematics) areas. While the program is unique, earlier collaborations strengthened WKU's capacity to craft a successful proposal. Many of the earlier collaborations were related to WKU involvement in Teachers for a New Era Learning Network (Poliakoff, Dailey, White, 2011) that involved participation by faculty members from across the university and the above-mentioned colleges.   Through our involvement in The Learning Network and critically looking at our programs to prepare educators across the various disciplines, proposals were written and funded

to not only review our curriculum but to develop innovative ways to prepare classroom teachers to make a difference in P-12 student learning.

Through a critical review of our STEM programs and the ability of our teachers to make a difference in student learning, one of the first gaps identified related to the capacity of elementary teachers in the areas of mathematics and science. Pedagogical content courses were developed by faculty members and incorporated in a pilot master's degree program. While the pilot master's degree program did not evolve into a new program, the collaborative efforts did encourage conversations about pedagogical graduate degrees related to content disciplines in Ogden College and influenced the conceptualization of the proposal resulting in our current SKyTeach program. In addition to the work in the STEM areas, content faculty members in the disciplines aligned with the teaching of History and the Social Sciences began looking at their content courses relative to Kentucky's standards and revisions were made in numerous courses.

The above work lead to a commitment to provide mentoring for new teachers and faculty members in the three colleges who were trained along with P-12 educators. A task force was created that involved individuals from all constituent groups. Unfortunately, state professional development funding for the participating school districts was significantly cut, and WKU was not able to fully implement the program. However, the commitment that was developed among the faculty to provide quality mentoring programs is evident in the SKyTeach program.

WKU's SKyTeach program has been highly successful with an enrollment of approximately 250 students seeking middle and high school certification in mathematics or various science disciplines. Students complete a content area major along with a major in Science and Mathematics Education and are mentored in their pedagogy courses by the instructor of record and university-based master teachers. Student feedback on experiences has been very positive as exemplified by the following comments provided by recent graduates: "I not only grew conceptually, but I also was able to practice what I learned in an arena."; "It teaches you not to be the typical teachers."; and "It is all about the relationships." (Mason, 2012).

Building on the SKyTeach Model, WKU applied for and received a U.S. Department of Education Title II Teacher Quality Partnership Award to develop and implement a graduate-level residency program in partnership with the Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) in Louisville, KY. Graduates of the program have a three-year commitment to the Jefferson County Public Schools; two cohorts of math, chemistry or physics teachers are currently employed by JCPS.

Strings Program

Collaboration has also been at the heart of a very successful program in the performing arts that linked the WKU Music Department with area schools. The department had tried unsuccessfully for years to develop a strings program. In 2001, a local philanthropist endowed the conductor's position for the university symphony. The endowment carried the stipulation that the conductor must take an active role in developing strings education for young people in Bowling Green and Warren County, Kentucky. After an extensive national search, the department hired a conductor with a strong background in public education as well as outstanding credentials as a musician. Working with the university's Division of Extended Learning and Outreach (DELO), the department created a partnership with the city school system and the county school system, offering strings education initially in the 4th grade and then adding a grade each year. Simultaneously, DELO and the Music Department also created a pre-college strings program to give private lessons to individual students.

The results are spectacular. The original 4th graders are now seniors, and 25 have stayed with the program the entire time. The city and county schools together now have 450 string students, and Bowling Green High School has more than 50 students in its orchestra. While the systems originally contracted with WKU for instruction—providing valuable revenue to the Music Department--both the city and county have hired full-time string teachers, an impressive commitment at a time of shrinking budgets. Simultaneously, the income from the program made it possible for the Music Department to begin to hire full-time faculty members. Over the past several years, it has hired three full-time faculty members in strings, and the department is attracting majors in strings for the first time.

In short, through a rather unique collaboration with two local school systems, the university was able to accomplish something that it had failed to achieve on its own. Through pooled resources and common goals, we created shared success. A generous donor and the university's continuing education unit played very important roles as well, and the superintendents of the two school systems were willing to try a new idea and to adopt it broadly when it proved to be viable and a good thing for their students.   The result was a success story at a time when the arts often struggle in the public schools. In the process, this partnership enriched the cultural life of our community, created a learning opportunity for hundreds of young people, established a new program at the university, and created five new full-time jobs in the arts.

Literacy Initiative

The partnerships described above have provided both a strong foundation for WKU's participation in College and Career Readiness initiatives with area schools and the implementation of professional development experiences for university faculty members. As schools explore new ways of structuring student learning experiences and move toward a model of personalized learning, higher education must rethink its work in a way that will provide a seamless transition from high school. Much of the impetus for change at the postsecondary level resulted from the passage of Senate Bill 1, Education Assessment Act (2009) and Senate Bill 163 Adolescent Reading Skills ACT (2009) which included specific mandates related but not limited to literacy, P-12 student learning standards educator preparation programs, and faculty teaching general education courses.

With expectations that college students will be held accountable for their assignments, efforts have been made to provide faculty members with the necessary knowledge and skills relative to literacy. Professional development opportunities have been provided by faculty members from the Literacy and Psychology programs for faculty in a variety of departments across campus including History, Chemistry, and Physics. In addition to the focused professional development opportunities in previous years, WKU has made a commitment to provide professional development to all members of the faculty on the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (Literacy) and Senate Bill 1 mandates during the 2012-2013 academic year.

Looking to the Future

These three specific collaborative initiatives are indicative of the types of commitment that has long been present in our university. However, it is not enough for those of us who are

dedicated to the business of educating educators and advancing the learning of all students to assume that these types of collaborative initiatives will be sufficient to meet the needs of schools in the future. It is clear that elevating the status of the profession and further enhancing the quality of educator preparation will require even more intentional collaborations and partnering as we move forward.   The call for preparation programs to be more clinically based carries with it changing roles for university-based teacher educators – both in education schools as well as in other academic departments – and for our colleagues in the school practice sites.

One of the greatest barriers to achieving the kinds of partnerships essential to the work of teacher educators will be trying to find ways to establish new roles, recognition, and reward systems as well as new methods of accounting for work-time within the constraints and cultures of many of our institutions. Partnerships require time and effort.

In 1986, the All-university Responsibility for Teacher Education Initiative was launched by the California State University System by then-Chancellor, W. Ann Reynolds. The Initiative recognized both that 75-80% of the education of prospective teachers occurred through academic departments and that the issues surrounding the preparation of teachers could not be resolved without the university-wide efforts of faculty and administrators (Campus Progress Reports, 1989). While many campuses still espouse this philosophy and framework for teacher preparation, it is clear that current pressures shaping higher education institutions may make it increasingly difficult to effectively operationalize this philosophy. Partnerships and clinical educator preparation take more resources than programs that are more heavily campus based. Such initiatives as Common Core State Standards (2010) make it even more compelling that teachers gain the content knowledge needed in their classrooms, and this classroom content may not always be the focus of the academic majors taken by prospective teachers. Faculty members are also being continuously reminded of the need to find ways to "do more with less." In this environment, it may be very difficult, if not impossible, to gain the support needed to significantly enhance the clinical aspects of teacher education programs. There will also have to be adaptations in criteria for tenure, promotion, and other recognition systems to support the work of university faculty who are engaged in the partnering required in extensive clinical delivery systems.

Embracing what we have learned from the partnerships that we have successfully created will be essential as we move forward to a future that demands more collaboration both across the university and with our school partners. It may be that some of the most important initial partnering will come among the university-based educator preparation programs as they seek ways to support one another in shared efforts to expand partnerships and also achieve a university culture that will recognize, value, and assure that future partnerships can be sustained.

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