

Actualizing Critical Commitments for Community Engagement Professionals

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Abstract

Community engagement professionals (CEPs) often must develop and maintain equitable, high-quality relationships with community partners while supporting student learning and civic development through cocurricular community engagement or for-credit community-based learning programs. Lack of alignment between campus goals and values and those of communities creates challenges for CEPs. Our community partners have expressed the feeling that students were not adequately prepared for community engagement and that it is the university's job to prepare them. To support partnerships in inclusive and equitable ways, CEPs need to be skilled and comfortable with some critical, complex topics before they can train students or provide professional development to instructors. This reflective essay examines specific strategies for CEPs doing this work, informed by the literature, feedback from community partners and social justice training professionals, and classroom experience. Topics addressed include social identity, systems of privilege and oppression, cultural humility, and institutional–community power dynamics. *Keywords:* preparing for community engagement, community engagement professional

Introduction

In Dostilio's competency model (2017), necessary skills for community engagement professionals (CEPs) include the ability to cultivate high-quality partnerships and facilitate students' civic learning and development, tasks that involve spanning boundaries between campus and community. Among other broad roles, CEPs may work alongside students at community organizations, send students into the community as part of coursework or volunteer groups, or consult with instructors on curriculum and partnership development. Tension often arises in this work when campus goals and values do not align with those of the community (Weerts & Sandmann, 2010).

Although service- or community-based learning (CBL) has become a ubiquitous practice in higher education (Butin, 2005; Furco, 2010), community partners have long expressed reservations

regarding the academy's uneven approach to building equitable partnerships (Jagosh et al., 2012; Lantz, Viruell-Fuentes, Israel, Softley, & Guzman, 2001; Sandy & Holland, 2006). Partner organizations we have talked to over the last 10 years want CEPs and instructors to be able to better prepare students to be and serve in the community (Cramer, 2017; Stoecker, Tryon, & Hilgendorf, 2009; Tryon, Madden, & Sarmiento, 2016). According to our partners, a prepared student is professional, culturally humble, self-aware, and knowledgeable about systemic issues and community context. We feel this feedback contains implications for strengthening CEP competencies and improving the ability of CEPs to prepare instructors and students in better upholding the values of equity, cultural humility, and inclusion that create good community engagement relationships.

In order to accomplish the vast and challenging goals in equity and inclusion work that our partners believe institutions should address, CEPs must have a discrete set of abilities. The CEP competency model outlines some functional areas around equitable practice, including facilitating students' civic learning and development, administering community engagement programs, and facilitating faculty development and support. In particular, CEPs are encouraged to have

- the *knowledge* of democratic engagement, students' developmental trajectories, and ways in which students' identities inform and frame their community engagement experience;
- the *skills* to facilitate inclusive, participatory, and reflective practice, collaborate with and support historically marginalized students, and maintain relationships;
- the *disposition* to embrace diversity and promote inclusion, humility, and critical thinking; and
- the critical *commitment* to developing their own and students' critical consciousness, challenging problematic language and contradictions within practice, disrupting unequal power structures, recognizing one's position related to privilege and oppression, and naming injustice. (Dostilio, 2017, pp. 46–51, paraphrased)

How do CEPs develop the ability to actualize these competencies? CEPs may believe fervently in the values and writings of Freire and other scholars and may already be painfully aware of their power and privilege (Green, 2003), especially given that the field

seems to skew “predominantly white and female” (Dostilio, 2017, p. 52). In Dostilio’s volume, Hernandez and Pasquesi (2017) bring out some of these identity perspectives in Chapter 3 and make a good case for centering them. However, many CEPs may still need a fuller picture of what competencies of equity-building look like translated from theory to practice and how to actualize imparting them to students or instructors. CEPs may lack the luxury of reflection or reading time to digest new literature and may require “trainer training” to overcome their own conditioned responses to deeply entrenched systemic challenges, such as implicit biases. Unless they come out of an equity and inclusion professional background, CEPs may need support to locate and acquire that training and then find opportunities to flex new muscles in order to begin mastering these competencies.

Background

Our data gathering over the last decade on community partner experiences with students uncovered issues such as a widespread perception of cultural ignorance, savior mentality, and a mismatch between student personality style or personal beliefs and the need for sensitivity when working with vulnerable populations that make up the constituents of many community organizations students work with (Cramer, 2017; Stoecker et al., 2009; Tryon et al., 2016). These findings were initially discovered during interviews with community partners, which led to creation of *The Unheard Voices: Community Organizations and Service Learning* (Stoecker et al., 2009). These results were confirmed during a 2016 follow-up to *The Unheard Voices* in which students in a community-based research course conducted a survey, focus groups, and interviews with community partners who work with students through CBL classes or cocurricular programs (Tryon et al., 2016). Further confirmation was provided during the process of developing the University of Wisconsin–Madison Civic Action Plan (*Campus Compact*, 2016; Cramer, 2017), in which a community–campus committee sought feedback from on- and off-campus partners through surveys and intensive interviews about civic and community engagement. The number one recommendation of the UW’s resultant Civic Action Plan was “Ensure preparation of UW–Madison stakeholders [students, staff, and faculty] for high-quality community-engaged work and partnership,” where *high-quality* meant sustained, culturally sensitive and aware, collaborative and mutually beneficial with community partners (Cramer, 2017).

Despite the noted shortcomings in student preparedness, most of our partners have continued to accept students as service-learners or research partners. Sometimes they do so from their altruistic desire to educate students about issues that communities outside the “ivory tower” face, just a short bike or bus ride from campus (*Bell & Carlson, 2009*). Some organizations have worked with enough skilled and respectful students to make the burden of training the less competent a worthwhile trade-off (*Stoecker et al., 2009*).

However, a sense was building at UW–Madison that it was the university’s responsibility, not the community’s, to prepare students before they began their community-engaged work, so that limited student hours could be maximized on project work and students could begin the relationship with the principle of “at least, do no harm.” Because our center for public service had been hearing these insights so repeatedly, we began to put in place some programs to mitigate negative experiences that community partners reported in relationships with instructors and students.

In some informal roundtables our center for public service hosted over the last few years, we talked with instructors and social justice professionals who were experienced in preparing students to engage in equitable ways, and we began compiling their recommended resources on our website. Our center also employs a number of upper level undergraduates as community-based learning interns who fan out over more than a dozen CBL courses per semester to assist instructors with logistical support, partner communication, student troubleshooting, reading/annotating reflections, and class discussions. Our professional staff observed that students attracted to apply for these internships often come with skills in facilitating intercultural dialogues, promoting social justice, and supporting culturally humble learning environments. They also tend to be engaged citizens, whether in local or global communities, with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences. Our staff noticed that material they delivered in class presentations was well received by their peers, and instructors were appreciative of their work. Capitalizing on these synergies, we asked the interns to help develop a training module to prepare students for entering their CBL experience. Much of the material we highlight in this essay comes from this combination of sources.

In the following sections, we will review the literature on faculty and student professional development for community engagement to bring in a diverse array of perspectives that may be useful for CEPs. Additionally, we will examine some of the specific strate-

gies that CEPs can learn and use to prepare students directly or help instructors prepare students for community engagement. Strategies include determining topics for student trainings to maximize impact; finding activities to facilitate learning around social justice, self-awareness, and societal issues; and developing skills to facilitate discussions of equity and critical consciousness in the classroom. One point may be obvious but cannot be stressed enough: In our experience and anecdotally, this preparation cannot be considered “accomplished” in a 1-hour workshop. That may be all the time the instructor can allot, but our informal observations have shown that student learning and community interaction outcomes will improve if the content is woven in throughout the course. Future research on the impact of different training durations may provide more specific guidelines, but we have not found literature on this point. Working toward these competencies is complicated for all stakeholders in an ever-changing world, and our hope is that this essay provides just some of the resources CEPs might integrate into their toolkit for developing a training curriculum.

What Work to Prepare Students Is Currently Going On?

Community-based learning (CBL) is often thought of as a way to prepare students for future careers or vocational positions (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). Indeed, CBL and other community engagement work often have myriad benefits for students that have been extensively documented, including developing a sense of civic engagement (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011), increased understanding of academic content (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Eyler et al., 2001), and increased cultural humility (Hampson, 2007; Chamber & Mahoney, 2008). However, there has been little consideration in the academic literature of preengagement student preparation/training to work with diverse communities. Even when community partners have longer term relationships with faculty or other CEPs who send students into the community, students themselves are by nature transitory, further necessitating training to help them “plug in” to a relationship smoothly and respectfully.

Some disciplines do have at least *some* built-in preparation of students for community engagement. In the health field, volunteers need training for specific tasks. They may be working with hospice patients (Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 1986) or acting as patient navigators (Duggleby et al., 2018). Health volunteers may also learn about the specific circumstances they will be working in. For example, Floyd (2013) examined a volunteer midwife program in Haiti and

noted that the Haitian health care professionals wished the volunteer midwives knew exactly how Haitians lived, including their historical context, everyday routines, health care experiences, and available resources. As one health care worker said, “They can’t come here with the attitude that they are going to change things in one week. . . . Discard that attitude; come here with humility and eagerness to help in whatever way” (Floyd, 2013, p. 563).

Matthew, Hockett, and Samek (2018) also noted the challenge of preparing health care workers for international contexts, adding that health care volunteers should be familiar with the medical contexts of the volunteer locations along with the overall challenges faced by the community. CEPs included case studies in their volunteer training materials so volunteers could familiarize themselves with the situations they might encounter, stressing guidelines for work in a new country, historical and cultural information, local customs, safety information, and understanding local needs (Floyd, 2013). Preparation for international work often focuses on cultural humility or awareness, “an others-oriented stance associated with curiosity, desire for understanding, and acceptance, while remaining free of egotism or arrogance” (Owen et al., 2016, p. 31).

Other training programs have also recognized the importance of cultural humility, which can be described as a “process that requires humility as individuals continually engage in self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners and reflective practitioners” (Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998, p. 118). For example, one library tutor-training program developed because librarians noticed problematic behavior from tutors, including “declaring that a student’s name is too difficult for them to pronounce, failing to support more boisterous students, making assumptions about the culture and home life of a student, and being unable to relate to diverse life experiences” (Andrew, Kim, & Watanabe, 2018, p. 20). The resultant training focused on structural racism, cultural humility, and interrupting bias, providing ample opportunity for participants to talk through challenging situations and brainstorm solutions. Some campuses have even provided a focus on developing increased cultural humility campuswide or statewide, such as the Collaborative for Intercultural Advancement at the University of Minnesota (Furco & Lockhart, 2018) and the Cultural Agility Coalition, begun as a Minnesota Campus Compact grant (Brown et al., 2016). We have found some additional evidence on cultural training in teacher education (e.g., Diaz, 1992) but little for CEPs in their responsibilities of preparing students for engagement in CBL or community-based research (CBR) specifically.

Community partners themselves are quick to point out that *their* staff are actually best positioned to deliver preparatory training, as they have the most up-to-date and “on the ground” knowledge about issues in a community (Tryon *et al.*, 2016). Some CEPs have used this model, and it has distinct benefits: community empowerment, validation of community knowledge, authenticity, and real-world critical reflection (Kline, Godolphin, Chhina, & Towle, 2013). However, community partners may lack time for advanced student preparation (or don’t wish to use the students’ limited time on site for such training), and the university may not have the funding to compensate their staff time for this extra work. Instead, community partners prefer students to start such preparation *before* entering the community (Cramer, 2017).

What Should CEPs Know in Order to Prepare Students?

Although we have no exhaustive list of topics CEPs should consider when helping students enter the community, we have compiled those below based on our experiences and community perspectives from the data-gathering efforts described above. These are broad, complex topics that we are only able to cover briefly here. They should be further explored by CEPs and then integrated throughout a semester course (Hanssmann, Morrison, & Russian, 2008). We have annotated a list of resources we hope you might peruse at <https://morgridge.wisc.edu/faculty-staff/community-based-learning-resources-and-partners/cultural-resources/>.

Although we recognize that CEPs may be asked to perform this preparatory work without initial hands-on training, ideally this work should be facilitated by people who are very familiar with the content (Gay, 1992; A. Miller, *personal communication*, March 14, 2017). If a campus lacks skilled cultural awareness, social justice, or other equity training professionals who can consult with CEPs on this curriculum, it may be best to hire local experts to review the curriculum or initially deliver this information within the local context and considerations. Depending on the skills and experience of the CEPs at a university, this could take the form of a multiyear partnership in which CEPs complete this curriculum to become qualified to train students and instructors. These messages can easily be diluted or garbled when using a train the trainer model, so mentoring of instructors and other trainers is key to ensure skills are fully transferring. At some schools, CEPs are hired to train students directly, and at other times they work with instructors who then

train their students. (Our staff frames instructor learning opportunities as “faculty development,” which seems to resonate more with faculty than “training.”) As we dive into following sections below, language focuses on CEPs training students and instructors for simplicity, but readers should bear in mind the need for CEPs to first receive enough training to be or support the student trainers.

Understanding Student Motives

Before beginning community engagement, it is helpful for the CEP to ask students why they are interested in doing it. Do they want to help or give back? Are they eager to learn about unfamiliar cultures? Are they ambivalent about community engagement in general, but have a degree requirement? At this stage, CEPs may learn about reasons for service that are admirable yet problematic. Many students are interested in “service to help the less fortunate” and view service as a unidirectional flow of assistance. Majority and economically secure students may have some awareness of their own privilege and see service as a way to “give back” to the community. Often, these ways of thinking indicate that the student is viewing the experience through a charity or savior lens (*Brown, 2014*). This lens may inherently imply judgment; students with a savior mentality are likely not recognizing community members as coeducators with complex stories, lives, and contexts, but are viewing community-engaged experiences in the deficit model (*Bauer, Kniffen, & Priest, 2015; Boyle-Baise & Efiom, 1999; Seethaler, 2014*).

Having more insight into the level of sophistication in the student’s thought process can guide the training. Redirecting the student can encourage them to develop empathy, rather than sympathy or pity, and prompt the student to reflect on their own thought patterns and behaviors that may be (often unintentionally) dehumanizing, degrading, and disrespectful. Another factor to consider is the spectrum of experience, upbringing, and training within any given classroom, even at a primarily White institution. Therefore instructors or CEPs cannot make assumptions about students’ starting points and should assess and guide students in a way that doesn’t shame the least competent while keeping the interest of the more skilled class members. This may be done by reserving judgment on students’ perspectives and instead asking questions to encourage students to explain and question their own positions. Another strategy is to set clear conversational guidelines for class discussions, such as providing language to use around difficult or unfamiliar topics.

Social Identity

Social identity is an individual sense of self based on the groups one belongs to (*Tajfel & Turner, 1979*). Some examples include sexual orientation, race, age, ability, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, education level, and immigration status. These identities are inherently social because their salience can change based on social settings (e.g., religious identity is more salient during a religious service), and they can be completely socially constructed, yet with very real implications (e.g., race).

When guiding students in learning about social identity, it is helpful for them to reflect on the visibility or invisibility of their identities. Some components are likely more visible than others, such as physical ability, whereas some may be difficult or impossible to visibly see, such as mental illness (*Matthews & Harrington, 2000; Tajfel, 1974*). One can use social identity to bond with similar others or alienate those who are different, leading to prejudice and discrimination (*McLeod, 2008*). To honor the social identity of others and avoid stereotyping, students can be encouraged to question assumptions while staying curious and nonjudgmental. Exercises can spur students to think more critically about social identity when interacting with community members, such as this “Identity List” Activity:

1. Write a list of identities on the board: race, ethnicity, gender, sex, sexuality, ability, religion/belief system, SES, education, hometown.
2. Provide definitions if need arises.
3. Have students write down their identities as they relate to the identity categories. Emphasize that they should **organize this list by their choosing (vertically)**.
4. Once finished, direct them to cross out the fourth, sixth, and eighth items on their lists.
5. Lists should then be reorganized from most to least important, vertically.
6. Cross out everything below the top three.

Possible Discussion Questions:

Disclaimer: Students can choose not to participate if they are feeling uncomfortable at any point. The discussion space should be respected and focus should be on students who are sharing their thoughts.

1. What are the top three identities on your list?
2. How did it feel to cross out your identities?
3. Have you ever felt that some of your identities are “crossed out”/unnoticed on campus? Which ones and why? Which identities are emphasized? How does this affect your day-to-day life?
4. Are those the most important identities? Why/why not?
5. In what social contexts would the ranking of your prioritized identities change? Why?
6. From what you’ve read about this course, which identities do you feel will play the most crucial role in your community learning? How?

Systems of Privilege and Oppression

As students begin to understand social identity, it is also useful to explore how systems of oppression and privilege operate using social identity. Oppression functions at the interpersonal level through prejudice and discrimination, but when that behavior is combined with institutional power, institutional oppression (and its counterpart, privilege) affects entire groups, peoples, and identities. Much has been written on this topic by those more expert. As Goodman (2015) states:

While prejudices are harmful to everyone, when a group has social power—access to societal resources and decision-making—they can enforce their prejudices on a societal level, which becomes oppression. A shorthand definition is: prejudice + social power = oppression. Advantaged groups have the social power to act on their prejudice. This can take the form of denying people from subordinated groups access to good jobs, housing, education or health care or being more likely to arrest and incarcerate them. (p. 2)

This system of oppression benefits one group (often called the dominant or advantaged group) over another (often called the target or disadvantaged group). Table 1 lists examples of privileged and targeted identities.

Table 1. Privileged and Targeted Identities

| Social identity category | Privileged social groups | Border social groups | Targeted social groups | Ism |
|---------------------------------|---|---|--|------------------------|
| Race | White people | Biracial people | Asian, Black, Latinx, Indigenous people | Racism |
| Sexuality | Heterosexual people | Bisexual people | Lesbian, gay, asexual people | Heterosexism |
| Gender identity | Gender conforming (cis) bio men and women | Gender ambiguous people | Transgender, gender-queer, intersex people | Transgender oppression |
| Ability | Temporarily able-bodied people | Individuals with temporary disabilities | People with disabilities | Ableism |
| Religion | Protestants | Catholics, Agnostics | Muslims, Jews, Atheists, Hindus | Religious oppression |
| Citizenship status | Native-born United States citizens | Naturalized citizens, refugees, DACA recipients | Undocumented immigrants | Nationalism |

When discussing systems of privilege and oppression with students, CEPs may want to point out that although individuals are operating in these systems (and are therefore a part of them), the injustice of a system does not equate to interpersonal injustice; no single individual is responsible for systemic oppression. Ask students to consider the systems of privilege and oppression that are operationalized in their community engagement settings. How are these systems shaping circumstances and individuals? How do these systems affect the community organization? What does this mean for creating lasting change and equity? Encouraging students to consider these systems not only encourages them to see the “invisible matrix” of oppression that is shaping the world around them (including their community engagement site), it can also deepen their reflection and critical thinking.

Implicit Bias

Social identity and systems of oppression are inextricably linked to implicit bias, bias for or against a group of people without

conscious awareness of the bias (*Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Tetlock & Mitchell, 2009*). Implicit bias typically occurs instantly and unconsciously, rather than resulting from deeper thinking processes. This is demonstrated in dual processing theory or the elaboration likelihood model as follows: System 1 or peripheral processing occurs very quickly or automatically with little effort, often using visual cues and stereotypes, when there is little motivation or ability to think critically about a situation, like getting out of the way of an out-of-control car (*Evans, 2003; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986*). System 2 or central processing is slower and deliberative, allowing for conscious thought, and is used when people have the motivation and ability to think critically, such as when making a large purchase. Trouble arises when one uses System 1 processing instead of System 2 during interpersonal interactions, resulting in implicit bias. One exercise that can illuminate implicit bias for students is to ask them to take an implicit bias test, such as those found on <https://implicit.harvard.edu/>. CEPs need to do some context-setting before administering these, especially giving students an explanation of what the tests are designed to do, how they can be helpful to an individual's self-understanding of their split-second judgments, and how everyone's brain is hard-wired to contain these biases (*Greenwald & Krieger, 2006; Tetlock & Mitchell, 2009*).

There are several strategies to overcome implicit bias. One can develop mindfulness in thought patterns, slowing down responses and encouraging awareness of instances that may create them. Numerous instances of implicit bias appear in the media; examples include *Scandal*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Parks and Recreation*, *Dear White People*, and *Insecure* (for links to these and other resources, please feel free to contact the authors). Using clips from these and other sources can exemplify the concept for students by providing concrete examples of what implicit bias can look like from familiar contemporary perspectives. Reflection questions based on these media clips can help students identify what is going on in them and develop a plan for addressing implicit bias when it occurs, reflecting on their own social language and behavior. Acknowledging that all people have implicit biases can be very powerful for students, as they realize they are not alone in their understanding and experience.

Microaggressions

Understanding implicit bias and social identity can pave the way for students to consider microaggressions. According to Sue (2010):

Microaggressions are the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. In many cases, these hidden messages may invalidate the group identity or experiential reality of target persons, demean them on a personal or group level . . . threaten and intimidate, or relegate them to inferior status and treatment. (*para. 2*)

Microaggressions often seem innocuous to the person committing them and may be a result of unknown implicit bias coming alive in a stereotype. Typical mistakes can include phrases like *Where are you from? You are so articulate! You are a credit to your race.* Microaggressions can also come in the form of behaviors, including *Crossing the street when you see a black man. A police officer repeatedly pulling over a person of Color. A person in a wheelchair being ignored by a server.* Cumulatively, these microaggressions contribute to increased stress and poor well-being for those with disadvantaged identities (Balsam, Molina, Beadnell, Simoni, & Walters, 2011; Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008).

Students and CEPs, even with training, will inevitably commit an occasional microaggression in the course of their work and daily lives, but to improve their relationships it is important to recognize what they did wrong, apologize, and reflect on what to do differently in the future. Those mistakes may also indicate to a student that they have more learning to do in a certain area.

Cultural Humility

Culture can be thought of as “the way people do things around here” or way of life (Martin, 2006). It has many behavioral manifestations, including food, language, and clothing style, as well as deeper levels of cultural values and interpretations such as thoughts about what is right or wrong and interpretation of everyday situations (Hall, 1976). Culture can be both broad (e.g., of a country) and very specific (e.g., of a classroom). As with social identity, understanding culture begins with self-reflection and understanding one’s own culture before trying to understand others’. By examining their own group membership, interpretation styles, and behaviors and contrasting them with those of other cultures, students may begin to recognize their own normative values and begin to understand that other cultural ways of doing things are not wrong, just different.

This type of reflection allows students to learn about other cultures and can help students resist evaluating them. For example, cultures can have dissimilar conceptualizations of time and punctuality. In many Indigenous communities, it is appropriate to begin a meeting when the time feels right to do so, rather than a designated starting time (*Brant, 1990*). This understanding is different from a Midwestern sense of punctuality in which being considered on time could mean showing up five minutes early to a meeting. It may be helpful for students to consider instances when they were in another culture (e.g., studying abroad), the differences they noticed, and what made them feel comfortable or uncomfortable in a situation.

One can strive for “cultural humility”—or continuous reflection on cultural differences and similarities—and approach other cultures with a willingness to learn and an open mind rather than relying on cultural generalizations and assumptions (*Owen et al., 2016; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998*). Cultural humility also encourages students to understand the context and history of the communities they are working in. For example, we have created a short guide to an area of our city that has a high number of non-profits and a historically underresourced population. CEPs can use such resources to help their students get to know the community and develop a more robust appreciation of the assets of its residents and cultures before initiating their engaged work.

Power Dynamics

In Dostilio’s 2017 volume on CEPs, Hernandez and Pasquesi (2017) review some of the literature exploring the power differential between universities and communities and present a solid rationale for examining and disrupting this imbalance as much as possible (pp. 64–66). In general, although universities face their own pressures, they hold greater resources and prestige than community organizations. Those working and studying within them have access to a myriad of opportunities often inaccessible to many community members (e.g., transportation, library access, meeting space, experts, public communication channels, technology). Universities also have a keen desire to protect their self-interest and avoid liability. Too often, university partners initiate and control projects rather than working alongside community constituents on their priorities, using the outputs for professional gain (e.g., to publish research, receive tenure, or earn course credit) even if the outcome has no benefit for the community partner. Cash funding is often in the hands of the institution and used to control the partnership

process (*Lantz et al., 2001*). Due to institutional inflexibility, financial incentives to communities that would increase and enhance their participation and lead to more successful outcomes are often difficult or disallowed (*Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009*).

CEPS should reflect on the specific imbalances between their institutions and community partners, even with all the previous factors set aside, and communicate the pieces of that dynamic to students. Understanding this dynamic informs the issue of trust or the lack thereof (*Horowitz et al., 2009; Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998*). In examining trust, CEPs, students, and partners can ask:

Is there transparency in decision-making? Is there follow-through on promises? Are relevant parties included throughout? Without trust, there is little chance of developing a relationship where all parties are given the “benefit of the doubt.” Without this factor, if a partner’s action produces harm, the other partner may assume . . . it was intentional. (*Tryon, Slaughter, & Ross, 2015, p. 194*)

Students and CEPs may not be able to change this power structure, but they can act in more equitable ways to build mutual trust and share power in relationships. The following list of practices should be considered a starting point in this process.

1. Focusing on community-identified priorities and end products (*Beckman, Penney, & Cockburn, 2011; Strand, Cutforth, Stoecker, Marullo, & Donohue, 2003*).
2. Using an asset-based approach rather than focusing solely on community deficits (*Minkler & Wallerstein, 2011*).
3. Respecting community members as coeducators with valuable knowledge and experience essential for project success (*Clayton, Bringle, Senor, Huq, & Morrison, 2010*).
4. Using communication methods preferred by the community and asking for partners’ feedback (*Stoecker et al., 2009*).
5. Sharing decision-making power by use of community advisory or ethics review boards (*Blumenthal, 2006; Quinn, 2004; Shore, 2007*).
6. Cocreating research designs (*Mauser et al., 2013*). As we heard from one community partner, “Every time I hear the word ‘research’ I want to run the other way screaming! But if the researcher asked me what I would be interested in

having data on, that would be a different story” (*community partner, personal communication, March 7, 2007*).

Special Considerations

Talking about issues of identity, oppression, culture, and power is very complex, and CEPs must be able to navigate them with skill, but some considerations can help these discussions progress. First, CEPs can reflect on the characteristics of students entering the community. At our institution, 69% of the student body is White and 19% are students of Color, excluding international students who make up the balance (*Office of the Registrar, 2018*). In contrast, around 58% of noninternational college students in the United States are White (*U.S. Department of Education, 2018*). Not surprisingly, the feedback from our partners primarily indicated the need to train White students to work with their constituents of Color. CBL courses and community engagement programs often have a significant number of White students who may be unfamiliar with conversations around race, culture, and power. Although it may be easy to focus on White students, centering on their experiences and normalizing Whiteness, CEPs and instructors need to make space in the classroom for all voices and levels of consciousness. Racial affinity spaces may be helpful for students if White students need space to process the meaning of Whiteness and White guilt (*Michael & Conger, 2009*). In decentering the White experience during community engagement preparation, it may be tempting for CEPs to lean on the wisdom and knowledge of their students of Color and other marginalized identities, singling them out for questions and looking to them for guidance. Those students cannot speak for their entire race or other social identity group, nor should they be asked to do so. Instead, all students in the classroom can be encouraged to share their stories and lived experiences if they feel comfortable. It is crucial that CEPs feel confident when facilitating these discussions, and we reiterate the advice to engage specialists if needed to help CEPs learn to avoid unintended negative outcomes.

As CEPs discuss these difficult topics with students or support instructors in preparing students, it can be useful to cocreate a foundational agreement with students for the discussion. Discussion leaders should note, however, that these agreements can be a double-edged sword. Students may use them as a “safe” space for espousing views that are harmful to others, presenting false information as a “valid” opinion, ignoring the negative impact of a well-intentioned statement, or allowing dominant narratives and power structures to remain in place (*Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014*).

Luckily, other authors have thought critically on this issue and developed more updated discussion guidelines (Arao & Clemens, 2013; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2014). Sensoy and DiAngelo (2014) offer nuanced guidelines that may be useful to start from when creating a foundational agreement, focusing on humility, understanding the difference between opinion and knowledge, and accepting discomfort as part of growth.

Intergroup dialogue (IGD) also presents a useful framework for facilitating classroom discussions. IGD provides a facilitated space to discuss difficult and polarizing topics through collaborations, relationships, critical self-reflection, and appreciation of difference, without assumptions and the need for determining what is right or wrong (Dessel & Rogge, 2008). Although other authors can provide more specific details about this process, some initial techniques include sustained communication, critical social awareness, and bridge building. These are achieved by creating an environment for dialogue, learning about differences and commonalities of experience, exploring conflicts and multiple perspectives, and moving to action through alliance-building (Zúñiga, 2003). Constructive dialogues occur when people feel comfortable with each other, which speaks to the importance of encouraging students to get to know each other through icebreakers, team-building experiences, and plenty of opportunities to work together.

Conclusion

Dostilio's (2017) competency model for community-engaged professionals is a seminal, groundbreaking step toward standardizing skills and best practices for CEPs. This reflective essay suggests further clarifying several of Dostilio's desired competencies while also outlining ways for CEPs to develop the *knowledge, skills and abilities*, and *dispositions* to work toward them. In order for CEPs to build high-quality partnerships, especially when working across lines of identity as many CEP partnerships do, they must possess or develop self-awareness of their social identities, culture, and how they move through the world, as well as a deep understanding of systems of privilege, oppression, and power (Diaz, 1992; Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Wallerstein & Duran, 2006; Weil, Reisch, & Ohmer, 2012). If CEPs hope to support students' civic learning and development, they must educate students on these topics before and during community engagement. This requires CEPs to have *knowledge* of these topics, the *ability* to educate others on them, a growth mindset (*disposition*) that humbly recognizes learning is never finished, and a *critical commitment* to keep improving and admit it when they fall

short. Community partners have plainly told us that preparatory work is no longer optional if faculty, students, and other CEPs wish to continue to partner with them, and indeed, we unfortunately still hear about partnerships that dissolve because of students' poor preparation (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Quezada, Alexandrowicz, & Molina, 2018). As higher education institutions struggle to maintain their relevance in their communities, sustaining excellent collaborative community partnerships must be a top priority for CEPs and the people they support.

CEPs and students alike can never be fully prepared for every situation they may encounter when working with community partners, and this essay is not intended to provide a comprehensive guide for preparation. Rather, we have highlighted some major topics worthy of reflection and attention and will applaud all energies directed toward integrating more cultural humility and equity/inclusion work into the CEP competency model. We hope this essay acts as a starting point to a larger conversation about the work CEPs, students, and universities must perform to support high-quality community partnerships and student civic development.

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