

Alignment through Community: The Case of a Metropolitan University and the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

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Abstract

The University of Central Oklahoma (UCO) is a public metropolitan university that has developed a highly collaborative relationship with the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (HC). This partnership unites several UCO divisions and the HC in support of a set of shared goals, articulated in UCO's "Vision 2020" strategic planning document and in the HC's seven community development priorities, which include business development, cultural and environmental stewardship, workforce development, and education. To facilitate these partnerships, UCO's Division of Academic Affairs has reorganized its administrative structure to create an Office of Global and Cultural Competencies, which includes a Director of Cultural Outreach and Diversity Strategies, who serves as on-site liaison to the HC; the Division of Academic Affairs also has representation on the HC Board of Directors. These shared efforts provide a means for securing extramural funding, internships, and new leadership programs that will sustain the partnership and affect a growing demographic and economic segment of Oklahoma City. Within the university, this partnership complements the diversity and inclusion initiatives of UCO's Division of Student Affairs and promotes the legislative and economic initiatives led by UCO's Division of Public Affairs. This article addresses the often-unrecognized role that a university's academic mission plays in anchoring community partnerships, and it contributes to best practices in fulfilling an institutional commitment to serve diverse, metropolitan populations.

Keywords: partnerships; urban planning; development; cultural competencies

Introduction

Public universities increasingly confront paradoxical expectations that they engage more directly with the communities they serve and that they do so with diminished state-appropriated funding. This situation has increased the need to develop mutually beneficial outcomes with community organizations that value highly collaborative partnerships. This article outlines the basis for one such partnership, which began in 2013 through collaboration between representatives of the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (HC) and of the University of Central Oklahoma (UCO). HC has set for itself a business-oriented mission with a seven-plank community platform that includes education, while UCO pursues a metropolitan-based mission to help students learn through a variety of degree programs by means of high-impact practices, referred to as Transformative Learning, that include six tenets (Barthell, Cunliff, Gage, Radke, & Steele, 2010). Among these "Central Six" tenets is Global and Cultural Competencies, which forms the basis for an office of the same name within the Division of Academic Affairs, led by an Assistant Vice President and a Director of Cultural Outreach and Diversity Strategies, both of whom are coauthors for this article.

UCO is an ideal educational partner for this collaboration. Founded in 1890 as the Territorial Normal School of Oklahoma, it has played an important role in the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area for over a century. UCO has grown to meet the needs of Oklahoma City and its surrounding communities. Most recently, its outreach has included UCO Downtown, a facility within the Business District that brings metro-centric as well as mainstream courses and programs to residents of Oklahoma City (Barthell, Simmons, & Youngblood, 2018). Oklahoma City has one of the fastest growing Latinx populations among U.S. metropolitan areas, with an 85% increase in the number of Latinx individuals between the last two census periods, 2000 and 2010 (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). UCO has also grown in Latinx enrollment, with over 11% of current students identifying as Latinx (UCO Office of Institutional Research, 2018). More than 50% of Oklahoma City Public School students are now Latinx (Oklahoma City Public Schools, n.d.). It made sense, therefore, for UCO to help the HC in creating a new collaborative space within its current facility in South Oklahoma City. The Provost/Vice President and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at UCO work closely with the HC President and CEO; all three are coauthors of this article. UCO benefits from this relationship by fulfilling its metropolitan strategic plan documented in Vision 2020 (UCO, 2013), while the HC receives both interns and student-centered grant-writing support through collaboration with UCO's students, staff, and faculty.

As Oklahoma City's only public university, UCO has a unique responsibility to create a bridge to the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area's Latinx population. The university's mission to "contribute to the intellectual, cultural, economic and social advancement of the communities and individuals it serves" (*Mission and Vision*, n.d.) is grounded in theoretical and practical insights of scholars. Barber (1992), Gamson (1997), Ostrander (2004), Ramaley (2000), and Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011), have all examined civic engagement in higher education and have studied the goals and dynamics of campus-community partnerships. Indeed, the literature abounds with studies that exemplify the importance of mentorship through high-impact educational practices within academic settings (Tinto 1994, Jonides 1995, Seymour & Hewitt 1997, Crowe & Brakke 2008, Kuh 2008). This may be especially true for underrepresented group students in STEM disciplines (Collea 1990, Estrada *et al.* 2011). UCO therefore has every incentive to encourage community engagement and networking in anticipation of the arrival of new, often first generation, students to our university campus.

UCO and HC have implemented several new programs and initiatives, described in this document, in the past five years to support this developing and essential partnership. Below, we detail aspects of the partnership and describe how several new initiatives have contributed to the institutionalization of this partnership, sharing the perspectives of both the HC and UCO through the voices of the authors contributing to this article.

Engagement of Chambers of Commerce with Colleges and Universities

Chambers of commerce create an environment within their service area and/or within their target community in which economic growth and workforce development thrive. These goals link directly to the educational level and workforce readiness of the communities they serve. Thus, chambers of commerce often facilitate partnerships with K-12 systems and colleges and

universities. Nationally, the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce Foundation's University Partnership Initiative focuses on creating a college-to-career pipeline between Hispanic-serving Institutions and industry through education, access, and internships. University of Texas at Arlington is the managing partner and fiscal agent for the initiative, which will launch in Texas with the goal of nationwide expansion (University of Texas at Arlington, 2018). A local example is the Tulsa Talent Hub initiative funded by the Lumina Foundation in 2017. Tulsa Regional Chamber, Tulsa Community College, and Tulsa Technology Center are working to increase by five percent the postsecondary enrollment for Latinx and low-income individuals. This initiative involves creating guided college pathways and customized business and industry training to meet the demand of Tulsa employers (Tulsa Regional Chamber, 2017).

Higher education-chamber partnerships frequently form close ties to business and workforce development, as this is the intersection of their work. As a result, the partnerships could lead to transactional engagement. UCO's partnership with the HC is unique. Efforts to align the collaborative partnership with the missions of the two organizations resulted in campus-wide support for and participation in the partnership and full organizational commitment from the HC and its board. The university's academic mission provides a conceptual framework for the partnership, which fulfills UCO's institutional commitment to serve Oklahoma City's diverse, metropolitan populations and to promote economic development in the region. For the HC, the collaboration with various departments from admissions (college access) to academic programs as well as embedded faculty and staff at the chamber has brought about transformational successes to both organizations as detailed below.

Connecting to the Latinx Population in Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area

According to the Pew Research Center, 18% of the nation's population is Latinx, making this group the second largest ethnic group behind White/Caucasian (Flores, 2017). With this representation nationally, a growth in Latinx-owned businesses has been evident. In fact, Latinx-owned businesses are the "most dynamic entrepreneurial segment of the American economy" (U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, 2017). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2012), there were 3.3 million Latinx businesses nationally in 2012 (latest economic census data), which contributed more than \$468 billion to the economy (U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, 2017). The Latinx population, in turn, has buying power of one and a half trillion dollars (Humphreys, 2017, p. 9).

Oklahoma is seeing this dynamic segment grow and make an impact in the state and the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area. According to a 2010 U.S. Census Bureau brief, Oklahoma's Latinx population experienced an 85% growth over the past 10 years (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, Albert, 2011) and increased its buying power to \$9.4 billion as of 2017 (Humphreys, 2017, p. 24). With close to 400,000 Latinx individuals in the state and more than 110,000 Latinx individuals in Oklahoma City (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016), the Latinx population and the more than 10,000 Latinx businesses (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) are becoming increasingly important. This is not only because of the increasing influence of Latinx interests in the economic development of Oklahoma City and state, but also because businesses create jobs and demand for an educated workforce. This demand marks the point of intersection between the vision and goals of the HC and UCO.

In 2013, UCO began planning for the growth of the Latinx population. The largest public school system in the state, Oklahoma City Public Schools, began to show a demographic shift. At that time, the Latinx student population was increasing at a rapid rate, to become the largest population in the school district. Latinx students are now the majority, with 53% of the district's 46,000 students being of Hispanic or Latinx descent and more than 13,000 students being English Language Learners, with a large majority speaking Spanish at home (Oklahoma City Public Schools, n.d.).

HC President/CEO David Castillo recalls hearing about UCO's efforts to attract more Latinx students to the university. He saw a news report that UCO was finding creative ways to reach out to Latinx parents, such as offering campus tours in Spanish. He therefore contacted UCO's Vice President for Public Relations to meet and explore opportunities for collaboration and mutual support. At that time, the Hispanic Chamber had just bought a new building for service expansion. The building had a conference room available, as well as extra office space. After discussion at the leadership level, UCO solidified its partnership with the HC by increasing its level of support from a university membership to a two-year sponsorship of the conference room and of one office and by installing state-of-the-art audio-visual equipment.

This initial step offered UCO the ability to use the conference room to provide pre-college workshops and to hold meetings with prospective students and parents, conducted in both Spanish and English, for recruitment purposes. These events were extremely successful because they brought UCO to the community, instead of asking the community to travel twenty minutes north to Edmond, the predominately White/Caucasian suburb where UCO's main campus is located. These efforts have continued since the inception of the partnership, thanks to the commitment of UCO's Division of Student Affairs and Office of Undergraduate Admissions.

Although UCO now has several locations in downtown Oklahoma City closer to the HC, providing services at multiple sites within the community remains a priority for UCO. Doing so builds trust and enhances opportunities to collaborate with and better serve the Latinx community. UCO recently renewed its sponsorship of the conference room for another two-year term and it will be upgrading the equipment by the end of the year for use by the HC and the wider community. UCO's goal is to increase and expand the services provided at the HC through the creation of new and the expansion of existing initiatives, in particular from the Division of Academic Affairs.

Realigning Resources: Office of Global and Cultural Competencies

UCO, like many other public institutions of higher education across the country, has experienced a sharp decline in state funding within the past five years. The Division of Academic Affairs has strategically reallocated existing resources in order to continue to advance the university's mission to help students learn by providing transformative learning experiences, among other means. An open assistant vice president position in the division presented an opportunity to reimagine this position for the first Assistant Vice President for Global and Cultural Competencies. This position's duties include functioning as the university's chief academic diversity officer, promoting international faculty collaborations and study abroad opportunities

for students, and providing oversight to the concurrently formed Office of Global and Cultural Competencies.

In July of 2016, Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs John Barthell established The Office of Global and Cultural Competencies. This new unit brought together existing and emerging programs within the division. Since its founding, it has served as an incubator for new initiatives. These initiatives and programs, which serve a wide variety of constituents both on campus and off, address issues of inclusion, diversity, and globalization, in keeping with the office's overall mission to promote global and cultural competencies. Global and cultural competencies, as defined by the university, include the wide-ranging set of skills and knowledge necessary "to communicate effectively in a complex world, to function in multiple and diverse environments, and to adapt to the continuously changing global society through an attitude of awareness, consciousness, and respect" (*Global and Cultural*, 2018).

The Office of Global and Cultural Competencies includes two full-time staff members, the Director of Oklahoma City Cultural Outreach and Diversity Strategies and the Director of Education Abroad. It has three faculty members with administrative responsibilities: the Director of the Women's Research Center and BGLTQ+ Student Center, the Director of Faculty Outreach and Support, and the Assistant Director of the Women's Research Center and BGLTQ+ Student Center. The Assistant Vice President for Global and Cultural Competencies, one of three Assistant Vice Presidents within the Academic Affairs leadership team, oversees the operations of the office and reports to the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs (UCO Office of Institutional Research, 2018, p. 13). The Office of Global and Cultural Competencies also benefits from the work of a number of student researchers supported by the Office of Academic Affairs, in fulfillment of the university's commitment to engage students in high-impact practices.

The Office of Global and Cultural Competencies collaborates with other campus units including the Center for Excellence in Transformative Teaching and Learning (Division of Academic Affairs), the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (Division of Student Affairs), and the Office of Global Affairs (Division of Student Affairs) to support education abroad activities and inclusion and diversity initiatives. The office has a direct oversight role for faculty-led study tours, semester- and year-length study abroad activities and international faculty exchanges (*UCO Centre for Global Competency*, 2019). It also sponsors a range of educational and professional development programs for faculty on topics related to global and cultural competency, including the ongoing Global and Cultural Competencies Faculty Learning Community, offered in collaboration with the Center for Excellence in Transformative Teaching and Learning (*UCO Center for Excellence*, 2018).

Through the Women's Research Center and BGLTQ+ Student Center, the Office of Global and Cultural Competencies facilitates collaboration among scholars and activists on and off campus on interdisciplinary scholarly, creative, and pedagogical projects in the fields of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies (*Women's Research*, 2018). In addition, the Office of Global and Cultural Competencies serves a bridge between the campus and Oklahoma City metropolitan community by playing an active leadership role in organizations including the Oklahoma City

Inclusion and Diversity Consortium (2017), the Oklahoma Center for Community and Justice (2018), and the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce (2019).

Strengthening the Partnership with the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

In 2013, the University of Central Oklahoma forged a partnership with the HC as both organizations sought to serve Oklahoma City's growing Latinx population. This partnership began with UCO's sponsorship of the HC conference room, to provide a physical presence in the community and to cultivate trust within the Latinx community. Once the physical location was in place, UCO's presence in the community expanded through ongoing events developed by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and Pre-College Programs, including college-readiness workshops such as scholarship workshops, ACT preparation, and informational workshops about UCO.

Bringing the programs to the Latinx community instead of expecting the community to come to the university was the first step in creating trust within the community. Offering information, tours, and workshops in Spanish also helped to build the relationship with the community. Having a UCO representative participate in community events continues to build and sustain trust with the Latinx community. After the Office of Global and Cultural Competencies was created, the next logical step was to create a position within the office to connect faculty, in particular Latinx faculty, and faculty projects to the Latinx community.

The Director of Oklahoma City Cultural Outreach and Diversity Strategies position, formed by utilizing existing salary lines as they became available, has strengthened UCO's relationship with the HC. The Director is an integral part of the HC and works in its offices twice a week. She serves on HC and community committees and provides support for HC program expansion. This level of engagement opens avenues for UCO faculty and staff to engage in programs, events, and activities that align with their academic or service interests. One such successful and mutually beneficial program is Latino Leadership Oklahoma City (LLOKC). A graduate from the program herself, the Director for Oklahoma City Cultural Outreach and Diversity Strategies participates in the planning committee and recruits UCO faculty and staff to participate in the program in order to connect and embed additional faculty and staff into the Oklahoma City Latinx community.

A nationally recognized program now in its sixth year of implementation, LLOKC develops Latinx and bilingual individuals into effective community leaders. Participants in the program represent a broad range of organizations, including private, nonprofit, higher education, and governmental agencies. Through the six-month program, participants sharpen their skills in areas including public speaking, leadership development, and event management, and they learn about serving on boards and hear from nonprofit, governmental, media, and educational agencies. The goals of the program are to increase participants' capacity to fill leadership roles and to enhance their commitment to and involvement in community activities in central Oklahoma. The program also increases the network of peers and connects participants to established community leaders (LLOKC, n.d.).

Since LLOKC's inception, UCO has sponsored UCO leaders to participate in the program. UCO's participation demonstrates to the HC the university's commitment to being an anchor institution for the communities it serves by developing leaders who work in a wider capacity, outside of the university, and influence the community. LLOKC also helps the university to increase retention of faculty and staff who are of Latinx backgrounds or bilingual. UCO has sponsored ten of its nearly forty graduates to date. Six of the UCO participants have been faculty members in the colleges of Education and Professional Studies, Liberal Arts, and Mathematics and Science. The four staff members have represented Academic Affairs, Development, and Student Affairs. The employment retention rate for the UCO participants in the LLOKC program is 80%; all eight UCO representatives are engaged in community projects that align with their academic and professional interests. Dr. Kristi Archuleta, Associate Professor of Organizational Leadership and Class III LLOKC graduate, describes how her engagement in the program has affected her career (K. Archuleta, personal communication, April 15, 2019):

“As a mid-career faculty, LLOKC helped me to widen my lens to integrate the Oklahoma City community and advocacy within my work at UCO. Multiple connections and pathways were presented for LLOKC participants to help us navigate and grow in new directions that are in alignment with each of us.”

Universities provide professional development opportunities to employees. However, universities often overlook the importance of providing culturally relevant faculty and staff development opportunities. Such professional development opportunities increase retention of faculty and staff because they create a sense of belonging to the university and connect particular faculty, who may not be from the region, to the community that the university serves. Furthermore, Universities often discuss strategies to create a sense of belonging for underrepresented students through programming to increase retention and academic success. Similar strategies can increase retention of underrepresented faculty and staff, especially if faculty and staff from underrepresented backgrounds are proportionally less numerous than underrepresented students at their institution. Creating a sense of belonging within the university and community is essential for the professional success of faculty and staff as well as for student success. Dr. Guillermo Martinez-Sotelo, Assistant Professor of Spanish in the Modern Languages department reflects on his participation with professional organizations at UCO as well as his involvement with the LLOKC program (personal communication, April 12, 2019).

"Being part of [the Latino Faculty & Staff] Association didn't only help me meet other Hispanic & Latinx colleagues around the university campus when I started my position in 2013, but it also opened doors for me to be part of larger projects, such as the Hispanic Success Initiative... [T]he programs that I've had the chance to participate extend beyond the university. Because of UCO's close partnership with the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, in 2017; I also had the chance to be part of the 4th cohort of the Latino Leadership Oklahoma City Program. This program aims to develop Latinx leaders from different industries to work together in the betterment of the community, our community; and by extension the city we live in."

UCO has continued to enhance its community outreach efforts through engagement in HC events. UCO's intentional outreach goes beyond the recruitment of students. UCO is also

intentional in the recruitment of faculty and staff through its attendance at the annual Viva Oklahoma! Hispanic Chamber Expo and Career Fair and the Bilingual Job Fair. The HC's and UCO's community partners see in UCO's presence an unwavering commitment to the advancement of the community, and this builds trust within the community. For these large community events, UCO creates a welcoming environment for community members to speak to UCO students, faculty, and staff.

Because of these efforts, UCO has seen, over the past five years, rising Latinx student enrollment and an increase in engagement within the Latinx community. For example, UCO has seen an increase in state and federal legislative members reaching out to the university to discuss Latinx issues within higher education. The Director for Oklahoma City Cultural Outreach and Diversity Strategies has expanded UCO's partnerships with the Oklahoma City Mayor's Office. The new mayor, David Holt, has emphasized the need to integrate the diverse populations of Oklahoma City, and he continues to invite UCO representatives, including members of the Office for Global and Cultural Competencies, to attend events. A local agency representative stated within the last year, "UCO is everywhere in the community." This statement points to the success of university-wide efforts over the last five years by the Divisions of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, and Public Affairs to connect to and better serve the growing Latinx community in the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area. Tying UCO's efforts to its academic mission has interwoven these successes with those of faculty and students.

UCO links its retention programming for students to faculty, community leaders, and partner organizations such as the HC. One clear example is the Hispanic Success Initiative, a collaboration between Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. The Hispanic Success Initiative connects student participants with peers, faculty and staff mentors, and the community (*Hispanic Success*, n.d.). Now in its fourth year, the Hispanic Success Initiative (HSI) incorporates non-cognitive practices in a co-curricular setting designed to improve retention and foster a sense of belonging among students. Student participants are first-time freshmen and transfer students. The majority of the participants have at least one risk factor – low income, low high school/transfer GPA, or first-generation college-student status. Students receive information regarding the initiative via emails and paper mailings asking them to complete an application coming students and their parents as part of the recruitment effort. Once the application period closes, the initiative selects students based on the above-mentioned risk factors.

HSI builds upon "reflect-and-connect" sessions that allow for identity development while creating a sense of community. The cohort convenes bi-weekly to foster communication among students and to guide them through the Integrative Knowledge Portfolio Process using generative interviewing skills (Peet, 2015). This generative process allows students to reflect on their sense of self through discovery of their strengths, values, and purpose. UCO faculty, staff, and peer mentors participate in these sessions with cohort members and reinforce generative knowledge interviewing through mentoring. HSI connects students to UCO's values of leadership, global and cultural competencies, research creative and scholarly activities, and service learning and community engagement. As part of the program, participants hear community leaders and participate in service-learning events with community partner organizations. These values align with Kuh's (2008) high-impact practices shown to increase student retention. Students' reflections on their growth reside in an e-portfolio for assessment by the students' faculty and

staff mentors, using the Student Transformative Learning Record (STLR), to determine the level of transformation that each student demonstrates.

Retention data for HSI student cohorts have shown positive results. Since the beginning, the program has served 101 students; of these students, 86 are currently studying or have successfully graduated. Year-to-year retention data for the first cohort of students shows that HSI students stay enrolled not only at a higher rate than other Latinx undergraduate students, but more than all UCO undergraduates. HSI participants were retained from Fall 2015 to Spring 2017 at a rate of 78%, compared to 71% for Latinx undergraduate students overall and 69% for all undergraduate students. The average GPA for HSI participants in Fall 2016 was 2.94, compared to 2.81 for all Latinx undergraduate students and 2.88 for all UCO undergraduate students. For the second cohort, 97% persisted from Fall 2016 to Fall 2017, compared to 70% for the overall undergraduate Latinx population at UCO, and 69% for all undergraduate students. Early analysis of the third cohort's data shows similar trends. At the end of the current academic year, the program will have data on four-year graduation rates for the first-time freshmen and three-year graduation rates for transfer students who participated in the first cohort of the program. Tables 1 and 2 below provide academic performance and persistence data for the first cohort semester to semester since Fall 2015.

Table 1 *HSI Cohort 1 Academic Performance Compared To UCO Undergraduate (UG) Students*

N = 41	UCO UG Students	UG Latinx Students	HSI Participants
Avg GPA Fall 2015	2.84	2.76	3.18
Avg GPA Spring 2016	2.88	2.89	2.87
Avg GPA Fall 2016	2.86	2.83	2.95
Avg GPA Spring 2017	2.88	2.83	2.91
Avg GPA Fall 2017	2.86	2.81	2.90
Avg GPA Spring 2018	2.87	2.78	3.01

Table 2 *HSI Cohort 1 Persistence* Compared To UCO Undergraduate (UG) Students*

N = 41	UCO UG Students	UG Latinx Students	HSI
Persist* to Spring 2016	84.8%	85.5%	92.7%
Persist to Fall 2016	73.1%	75.6%	87.8%
Persist to Spring 2017	69.4%	71.0%	82.9%
Persist to Fall 2017	66.4%	66.9%	78.0%
Persist to Spring 2018	63.9%	64.0%	78.0%

*Persistence includes continuing at UCO and graduating.

HSI participant feedback, in addition to the academic outcomes, demonstrates a sense of belonging among the students served. At the end of each program year, participants mention they

have gained a sense of community in HSI by seeing other HSI students as well as faculty/staff regularly around campus and within the sessions. This sense of community has made them feel that they are not alone and have connections to the campus, which mirrors the results documented by Hurtado & Carter (1997). Below are two quotations from student participants:

“Being a part of this organization has given me insights and reflection skills necessary to gain a greater understanding of experiences present in my life.”

“As a first-generation college student, being a part of HSI has provided a community, like a home away from home, here at UCO that has made me feel welcome[d] and involved.”

Faculty and staff mentors report the same positive outcomes. Through HSI interactions with students, faculty and staff mentors develop a stronger sense of belonging to the campus and Oklahoma City communities and increase their advocacy work on behalf of students. Many of the faculty and staff mentors are graduates of the LLOKC program discussed earlier. HSI committee planning member and chair of Chemistry, Dr. Luis Montes reflects on the impact of his participation in the Hispanic Success Initiative below (L. Montes, personal communication, April 10, 2019).

“Being a mentor in HSI has helped me understand the importance of being visible in my roles as STEM faculty member, department leader, and faculty leader. While I would do these things anyway, I understand the value in demonstrating to Latinx students that these paths are open to them as well. And more generally, they can be successful in other paths outside of academia or the sciences...From a personal standpoint, the [Integrative Knowledge Portfolio Process] training has helped me to recognize some of my own talents and what I value. The increasing population of Latinx students in my courses has helped me to understand the importance of being a role model.”

Having the Director of Cultural Outreach and Diversity Strategies embedded at the HC has also supported HC staff in enhancing programming supported by Academic Affairs. The Director has connected chamber projects with UCO’s colleges and academic departments, as well as with other university departments. Faculty have made connections HC programming. For example, a faculty member from the Adult Education department has served on the LLOKC planning committee.

UCO also provides grant-writing expertise for HC program development and expansion. The Director and a faculty member with reassignment time, provided through the Transformative Learning Scholars Program, work closely with HC staff to identify opportunities and to write proposals for external funding. The faculty member assists the Director in finding external funds to support community initiatives that further UCO’s role as an anchor university.

HC recently received, with UCO’s assistance, grant funding for a project to provide culturally responsive business development services to women who are of Latinx descent, who belong to other underrepresented groups, or who are from low-income backgrounds. The project’s service-delivery progresses by a community-building approach that will foster a sense of belonging, confidence, and skill development for women entrepreneurs through support groups,

mentorships, and networking. This project will revolutionize the way in which business development services are delivered in central Oklahoma.

As part of this project, UCO's College of Business will provide assistance by engaging faculty content experts for curriculum development, presentations, and mentorships for aspiring women entrepreneurs. Students will reap the benefit of the faculty members' involvement. The Customized Education department, a UCO unit that runs the Catbird Seat, a successful business incubator, will provide resources and support to the HC project participants by sharing curriculum and providing seats in incubator workshops. Staff from UCO's business incubator will also assist high-achieving women in the project, including those who have an established business and are seeking to expand.

Finally, the Director has been able to connect students to the HC via grant-funded internships. These internships operate through the Student Transformative Learning Record grant, a Title III grant awarded to UCO by the U.S. Department of Education. Interns have assisted the Director and HC staff in data collection for grant-writing purposes, as well as program evaluation, program development, and event-planning assistance. HIS members have served as interns, connecting students to community organizations and business leaders.

UCO's Division of Academic Affairs has expanded the partnership with the HC since the establishment of the Office of Global and Cultural Competencies more than two years ago to connect faculty and students to the community. This relationship could not operate at its current level without the buy-in from the top. HC President/CEO David Castillo has stated on multiple occasions that UCO's engagement and investment can be seen at every level of the university, including the President, Provost, and the Vice Presidents for Public Affairs and Student Affairs. From the Vice President for Public Affairs' original discussion with HC regarding conference room sponsorship to its current support and equipment maintenance, from the first campus tours in Spanish to the current efforts to market and advertise to the community to hire diverse individuals and recruit diverse students, UCO's wide-ranging support is evident. An example of this support can be seen in UCO's regular attendance at annual events such as the Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber Luncheon (see Picture 1 below). Additionally, the Hispanic Chamber President/CEO is part of the UCO President's Council of Advisors, and the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs is the current chair of the HC Board of Directors.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Building and strengthening transformational partnerships requires investment by parties working toward a similar goal. As a metropolitan university, UCO invests its future in the success of the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area and its growing Latinx community. The decisions UCO leadership have made in order to connect to the Latinx community have resulted in increased retention of students through programs such as the Hispanic Success Initiative, as well as increased retention of faculty and staff through culturally-relevant professional development programs, community engagement efforts, and internship opportunities. Investments of time and resources require financial support. With continued reductions from state support, the challenge will be to sustain and grow the partnership with the HC.



Picture 1. UCO delegation to the 2017 Greater Oklahoma City Hispanic Chamber Luncheon include UCO President Betz, vice presidents for Student Affairs, Public Affairs, and Finance, five assistant/associate vice presidents for Academic Affairs, three college deans, faculty representatives, student and academic affairs staff, and students.

Because applicants for the Hispanic Success Initiative are a self-selecting group, another challenge will be to scale the initiative to serve additional students who might not otherwise participate. UCO plans to expand the initiative by incorporating a first-year success course that will reach Latinx students who may have limited availability to participate in co-curricular cohort activities due to job or familial obligations and might not consider applying to the initiative because of these requirements. Once the course is underway, additional research will need to compare the outcomes of the cohorts based on different delivery methods.

Engagement of faculty and staff within the Academic Affairs initiatives has had a strong positive impact professionally and personally on those who have been involved, as the statements above illustrate. For UCO, the benefits are many. The university is retaining these employees at higher rates, and an even greater value emerges from strengthened ties to the community and to community organizations, which in turn enhances faculty and staff members' sense of belonging. Faculty and staff are proud ambassadors of the university and use their skill-sets and knowledge to advance the economic, social, and intellectual development of the metropolitan area. Tenure and promotion requirements for faculty and end-of-year staff reviews can limit participation when these community outreach activities do not specifically align to the division's or department's mission, values, and initiatives. Additional research shall need to find how these processes can be adapted in ways that recognize and support collaborative partnerships.

For the HC, the lessons learned with the highly successful collaboration with UCO will serve efforts to cultivate and strengthen partnerships with area K-12, vocational, and higher education institutions. Many of these entities are engaged in HC activities and programs. HC President/CEO David Castillo knows relationship building takes time, resources, and buy-in from both organizations for the partnership to be mutually beneficial in the long-term. Building the buy-in from the institution from its leadership throughout the entire organization will be key to ensure replication of highly collaborative partnerships with educational institutions throughout the metropolitan area.

Projecting forward and social mobility

UCO is a member of the Regional University System of Oklahoma (RUSO) with a specific charge to serve the Oklahoma City Metropolitan Area. As a public regional university, UCO strongly supports the social mobility of its diverse student body, many of whom are first-generation college students. A recent study by the Equality of Opportunity Project reveals that universities like UCO are far more likely to create this mobility for these students than are research-intensive public or private universities (Chetty, Freidman, Saez, Turner, & Yagan, 2017).

One of UCO's primary goals should therefore be to create opportunities to help students from such communities, including Oklahoma City's Latinx Community, which is a growing and highly productive component of the state's workforce. Indeed, the Stanford Graduate School of Business's Latino Entrepreneurship Initiative Report shows a national 46% increase in Latino-owned businesses this year, compared to a six percent decline in White/Caucasian-owned businesses during the same period (Orozco, Oyer & Porras, 2018). Because of the unprecedented increase in the Latinx population in Oklahoma City and the resulting increase in Latinx high school graduates, the partnership described in this article is essential for both UCO and the HC.

At UCO, the College of Mathematics and Science recently (Fall 2018) became the first academic college to reach a "majority minority" status. Just over fifty percent of the college are now non-White/Caucasian. The college's rate of Latinx enrollment is increasing more rapidly than in any other UCO college during the last five years (UCO Office of Institutional Research, 2018). The need for STEM-related jobs, a topic often noted in private- and public-sector settings in Oklahoma, has obvious implications for UCO and its future enrollment patterns, as it does for the communities UCO serves. The Oklahoma City Innovation District, for example, has emerged as an area of investment to increase wealth-generation through STEM and especially BioScience disciplines; the Brookings Institution has identified UCO (Andes et al., 2017) as a key contributor to the workforce in the Innovation District. The College of Mathematics and Science has already made great strides in developing programs that will encourage Latinx students and students from other underrepresented group to participate in STEM fields (Barthell et al., 2013), and it can serve as a model for other colleges.

Throughout this article, we have tried to convey that it is essential to act in substantive ways in collaborations of this sort and to understand the importance of return on investment, both financially and in terms of human capital. Community partnership must be authentic and deep. Both UCO's President and Provost, as well as other members of the President's Cabinet,

regularly attend events hosted by the HC and vice versa. Both parties must therefore commit staff and administrative time to ensure that the partnership remains mutually beneficial in its outcomes. Initiatives in both domains must also entail substantive investments such as the Hispanic Success Initiative and the Latino Leadership Oklahoma City programs described in this article. Pursuing these avenues is rewarding and essential in the challenging environment that currently surrounds public universities in metropolitan environments; deep collaboration is the key to our future.

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