

# Selling St. EOM's Pasaquan: Service-Learning's Impact on Economic, Civic, and Cultural Life

Christopher J. McCollough

## Abstract

Scholarship on service-learning demonstrates a variety of benefits to students, faculty, and the university. One clear benefit beyond these is the ability of service-learning to support and advance a university's civic mission within its community and region. This article offers an account of the use of service-learning in a collaborative project that included the host university, its art department, a local chamber of commerce, and a state department of economic development. The project addressed the promotion of an emerging cultural venue in rural central Georgia, the economic revitalization of the region through travel and tourism, and the community relations required to acclimate a traditionally conservative community to supporting a visionary arts venue. An assessment of the effectiveness of the project, its overall impact, and improving the pedagogical model is also provided.

*Keywords: art department, chamber of commerce, economic development, revitalization*



In Marion County, Georgia, outside a small town named Buena Vista, a visionary artist named Eddie O. Martin was born in 1908. He moved to New York City and tried his hand at numerous occupations before returning home to care for the property after his mother's death in 1957. Martin changed his name to St. EOM and, from 1957 until his death in 1986, transformed his home into a folk art center called Pasaquan. For some in Marion County, he was a peculiar neighbor, one who produced admirable work and put unemployed or underemployed members of the community to work on the grounds. For others, he was a threat to their way of life, rumored to engage in drug dealing, homosexuality, and other forms of behavior outside the socially acceptable norms of residents in 1950s rural Georgia (Patterson, 1987). His apparent suicide in 1986 left Pasaquan largely unattended, with the exception of a few men and women who formed the Pasaquan Preservation Society.

Over time, Pasaquan fell into disrepair, and

the Pasaquan Preservation Society engaged in the process of seeking support to rehabilitate the property and the artwork for public exhibition. After years of petition, the Kohler Foundation responded and offered to facilitate the rehabilitation of Pasaquan in 2014 (see Figure 1). After this process was completed in October 2016, the Kohler Foundation identified a local university and its art department as the appropriate caretakers for the future maintenance and stewardship of Pasaquan.

This opportunity for the community brought with it challenges for a university and work for the community to prepare for the takeover. Columbus State University (CSU) needed a means to promote the venue that captured the interest of a global audience, the community needed to develop a plan for supporting the venue and a broader appeal for travel and tourism, and the previously split community needed to unify behind a reinvigorated visionary art venue created by a mercurial former community member (see Figure 2).



Figure 1. Pasaquan Revitalization in Progress

Note. Student photo of Pasaquan side yard gate (picture center) and pagoda (picture center right). Students in a public relations campaigns course visited Pasaquan and viewed revitalization work in progress to develop creative perspective to support strategic messaging and design work. Photo by T. Graphenreed, 2014. Used with permission.



Figure 2. Eddie O. Martin's Main House

Note. Student photo taken during public relations campaigns course visit to view revitalization work in progress at Pasaquan. Photo by T. Graphenreed, 2014. Used with permission.

For students in the Department of Communication enrolled in two public relations courses, and for me as their instructor, the process of working toward these goals provided a unique opportunity to cultivate relationships with local businesses, a city government, the state's travel and tourism marketing team, and the university's art department. The experience gave public relations students valuable experience in arts management and arts and entertainment promotion. Moreover, this case demonstrates the value of service-learning in helping a university advance its mission and connect with its core values (Barber, 1994; Giroux, 2010; Kuban et al., 2014) through preserving and making available to a global audience a visionary art environment.

### **Value of Service-Learning to Students and Communities**

Faculty members often receive student complaints that course content has little to do with real life and thus is devoid of any practical value. Service-learning components, when embedded into the curriculum, can add the level of relevance that students perceive as missing. Research suggests that incorporating service-learning components into their curriculum increases levels of student learning outcomes as well as faculty satisfaction (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Kahne et al., 2000). Through the service-learning experiences, students identify with course concepts, find the course material relevant to real-life situations, and gain more knowledge in the theoretical content and more confidence in their command of practical content as they apply both in the service-learning experience. The service-learning model enables faculty to go beyond the basic instruction that provides a skeleton concept of the work to be performed with organizations, and it gives faculty and students the opportunity to engage in deeper learning and meaning as they explore alternative applications for course content outside the classroom (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

Adopting a service-learning model can help meet real needs of community agencies in ways that include expanded capacities—both human and resource—of local agencies (Basinger, 2015; Fletcher et al., 2012); mitigate the dearth of resources in rural and otherwise underserved populations (Auld, 2004; Basinger, 2015; Hall et al., 2009; Miller, 1991); and build vital sustain-

ing partnerships between faculty, students, university, and the community (Fletcher et al., 2012). Research suggests that the presence of reciprocity is one of the strongest predictors of successful partnerships resulting from service-learning opportunities, with each stakeholder gaining from the experience with an equitable exchange of resources (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Jacoby, 1996). Service-learning thus provides community agencies access to knowledge, skill, and human resources they need but could not afford, in the form of faculty and students. In turn, students view community agencies as providers of experience and professional networking—both of which can be helpful in the job search. Effective service-learning partnerships encourage mutuality, shared resources, and accountability, with each service-learning stakeholder contributing resources to help the others (Basinger, 2015; Honadle & Kennealy, 2011). Additional research suggests that service-learning helps build levels of confidence in content and practice (Basinger, 2015; Kahne et al., 2000).

The service-learning experience can be as rewarding for the faculty member as for the student. One of the many positive outcomes of service-learning is that faculty members can incorporate these opportunities, which often come from their own personal involvement in the community, to help students experience firsthand how vital and relevant course content can be to meeting needs in the community (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Faculty can draw upon the body of quantitative and qualitative research literature that points to increased content knowledge and levels of awareness and engagement resulting from service-learning components embedded into course curriculum (Honadle & Kennealy, 2011; Kahne et al., 2000; Kuban et al., 2014). Furthermore, research suggests that the service-learning experience “enhances the student’s academic development, life skill development, and sense of civic responsibility” (Astin & Sax, 1998, p. 251).

### **Relevance to Town-Gown Relationships and the University Mission**

On the macro level, the service-learning model offers many benefits. First, the model offers the potential to provide communities with needed resources that are otherwise unaffordable. Additionally, the service-learning model also may help universities

meet their mission of outreach in their communities.

Many American research universities can trace their reason for existence to the need to prepare citizenry to participate in democratic life (Kahne et al., 2000; Schatterman, 2014). Not only does incorporating service-learning into the curriculum help many universities meet this mission, but it also has the capacity to demonstrate the practical value of research and theory to their host communities. In his seminal research, Barber (1994) established that service-learning can help move universities closer to their original mission of educating citizenry. Recent research suggests that, in addition to providing higher learning, academic institutions are also “institutions of community engagement” (Schatterman, 2014, p. 17). As such, colleges and universities are called upon not only to educate and graduate students, but to transition them into society as informed and civic-minded citizens who are effective decision-makers and self-reflective about public issues and the world in which they live (Giroux, 2010; Kuban et al., 2014).

Moreover, research suggests that participation in “high-quality service learning leads to the values, knowledge, skills, efficacy, and commitment that underlie effective citizenship” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 164). Students born in the new millennium prefer interactive learning and want the courses they take to provide answers to relevant questions being asked in society (Giroux, 2010; Kuban et al., 2014; Twenge, 2013). Extant research suggests that the impact of service-learning experiences assists in these areas by promoting higher levels of (a) student cognition, awareness, and problem-solving skills (Schatterman, 2014); (b) self-esteem and confidence (Jones & Abes, 2004); (c) civic engagement (Schatterman, 2014); and (d) postgraduation awareness of career and employability options (Auld, 2004; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Hall et al., 2009; Schatterman, 2014). Additional research suggests that not only can the positive effects of the service-learning experience supplement and enhance student knowledge, they also can continue throughout life (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Jones & Abes, 2004; Kahne et al., 2000). Having established the potential of service-learning models to help improve town-gown relations and to advance a university’s mission, we now move forward and provide some

context on Pasaquan and its larger relationship with Marion County and Buena Vista, Georgia.

### **Marion County and Pasaquan: Site of the Project**

Pasaquan was a venue in need of revitalization by fall 2014. After 28 years of relative neglect, its care and upkeep were left largely to the underresourced Pasaquan Preservation Society. In 2014, years of appeal to the Kohler Foundation ultimately led to a \$5 million grant to restore Pasaquan and initiate public exhibition of its artifacts as a means to bring artists, scholars, and fans of visionary folk art to the local site. One stipulation of the arrangement was that Kohler be able to partner with a local university, in order to ensure long-term curation and preservation beyond the foundation’s work. Ultimately, a partnership with CSU was established to renovate the facilities, restore the artwork to its former beauty, and preserve artifacts for exhibition around the country. The decision to establish a partnership with CSU was a matter of proximity of the university to the venue.

CSU’s president at the time indicated that the decision to accept the venue as a gift to the university’s foundation was a matter of opportunity to raise the profile of the institution and to enhance the reputation of its already strong art department. In his tenure, Dr. Timothy Mescon was a supporter of the College of the Arts, as its units have been an asset at CSU and a growing part of Columbus’s vibrant community arts culture. In the same way the migration of the college to Columbus’s Uptown district helped improve town-gown relations and strengthen the profile of the Schwob School of Music, he envisioned the potential for Pasaquan to put the spotlight on CSU and its Department of Art. In the end, the university president’s agreement to accept Pasaquan as part of CSU’s foundation holdings enabled the project to move forward. Art professor Mike McFalls was appointed Pasaquan’s director and continues to serve in that capacity (see Figure 3).

The partnership came at perhaps the most essential and opportune time for Marion County and its small town, Buena Vista, Georgia. The county and town itself had endured an economic downturn that began with the migration away from production plants in the region and hit its lowest points



Figure 3. Mike McFalls Leading Public Relations Campaigns Class Tour at Pasaquan

Note. Pasaquan director and CSU professor of art Mike McFalls (left center) leads a CSU public relations campaigns class on a tour of Pasaquan grounds to develop contextual knowledge of the project. Photo by T. Graphenreed, 2014. Used with permission.

in the economic collapse of 2008. By January 2010, unemployment for Marion County stood had risen to 11.4% (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). With a minor rebound, and the presence of a Tyson Chicken processing plant, the unemployment numbers had fallen to 7.8% in May 2015 (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). However, the town and county suffered another setback as Tyson closed its facility that May, and unemployment rose to 9.8% within a month (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.).

Seeing the potential of Pasaquan and understanding the need for other economic opportunities, the Marion County Chamber of Commerce approached the Georgia Department of Economic Development about bringing in a team to assess the potential for adapting Buena Vista, Marion County, and Pasaquan to a travel and tourism economy. During fall 2014, the team visited all regional venues and held town halls with the citizens to gather as much actionable information as they could mine and to offer a set of recommendations to the town about how to approach revitalization, build mutually beneficial partnerships, and adjust the town mind-set to embrace art and cultural promotion. The finished

product was a 115-page report that detailed the resources available to Marion County, effective models for a travel and tourism economy, and community-specific recommendations for updating storefronts, enhancing sidewalks, and developing the types of business and infrastructure they would need to develop as the new economy began to grow over the next 5–10 years.

One of the chief recommendations was to make full use of the new partnership with CSU and its various departments to achieve mutual benefits that would help improve Marion County and Buena Vista's prospects while enhancing the university's town-gown profile. To highlight the value of this approach for the university, the university's mission statement and core values will be discussed while illustrating how the partnership advances both.

#### University's Mission and Values

The Georgia Department of Economic Development's call to leverage a partnership with the university to support resource-light Marion County not only was shrewd, but also played into CSU's mission statement and core values. CSU's 2013–2018

strategic plan included the following mission statement:

We empower people to contribute to the advancement of our local and global communities through an emphasis on excellence in teaching and research, life-long learning, cultural enrichment, public-private partnerships, and service to others. (Columbus State University, n.d.)

A casual observer will be able to identify how many of these items can be facilitated across the diverse curriculum offered by 35 departments at a comprehensive, regional state university. The next section offers an example of how one communication instructor used the service-learning model to support this partnership and to ultimately help advance the university mission.

### **Instructor Relationship Cultivation and Research**

One challenging element of this partnership was that the university accepted Pasaquan without first consulting the Department of Art about how best to establish and cultivate the partnership. Rather, the department was informed that the university was taking on the venue and would be delegating responsibility for management to the department. Shortly after the partnership announcement with Pasaquan in summer 2014, the CSU Department of Art tasked one of its professors with the role of director of Pasaquan. Among the first challenges he had to address was making Pasaquan self-sustaining. To do so, he would need to cultivate revenue and donor partnerships that could help keep the maintenance and promotion of the venue viable. To achieve this end, he began brokering partnerships with faculty, the community leadership, and the state travel and tourism board. In short, he was engaged in stakeholder management as a relative public relations novice.

To earn the support of university faculty, he brought university faculty out to Pasaquan for a social and tour of facilities to garner ideas in a brainstorming session. Many faculty in the sciences and other social science disciplines cultivated valuable ideas for retreat meetings, conferences, and lab observation of the nature surrounding the venue. Outcomes of this activity included recognizing the need for larger economic development in the community, the need

to effectively brand and promote Pasaquan, and the need to revitalize the brand for Marion County, all while garnering buy-in from the town of Buena Vista.

With this in mind, I brokered a relationship with Pasaquan's director and worked with him to cultivate an active role with the Marion County Chamber of Commerce, a seat on CSU's Pasaquan advisory committee, and a consulting partnership with the Georgia Department of Economic Development's Travel and Tourism Promotion team. These connections would provide contextual knowledge and information for my course design. The role with the chamber helped me build contextual knowledge of the community and its economic challenges. Through the seat on the Pasaquan advisory committee I learned about both the resource and creative challenges the art venue had to address prior to takeover by the university. Finally, the partnership with the Georgia Department of Economic Development opened the door for research data in travel and tourism that students in my courses would find invaluable as they tried to design and pitch a campaign, as well as guest lecture sessions on specific strategies and tactics essential to effective travel and tourism public relations work.

Over the subsequent 6 months, I made a dozen trips to various functions at Pasaquan to strengthen relationships, expand on partnerships, and collect data to build a strong course design that would yield service-learning projects that could have tangible impacts on Marion County, Buena Vista, and Pasaquan. The director of Pasaquan was compensated with a stipend and course release time, and I derived research and pedagogical opportunities from the project without any specific form of compensation. With a sense of the need for effective partnership cultivation established, as well as the lead time for data collection, course design will be covered so that the reader will understand how the projects, partnership, and products were meant to advance the relationship and enhance student skill sets.

### **Course Designs**

I spread the work across two courses: a fall public relations campaigns course and a spring public relations management class. The fall campaigns course used a competitive pitch format involving six student teams in head-to-head competition on behalf of three clients. The teams that win

each of the three pitches earn an A in the course. Those that lose the pitch are subject to full evaluation by the instructor. The purpose of adopting a competitive evaluation model was to encourage a higher quality of strategic planning and material development in support of each team's proposed campaign. Even in losing a pitch, with the exception of one team earning a poor grade due to poor research, planning, and production, the other five teams earned a B or above on the final course project. To assist the clients in selecting a winning pitch, the instructor brought in four public relations practitioners from the community to offer constructive feedback on each team's product and pitch, as well as an informed perspective to relatively uninitiated clients.

Two student teams worked with Marion County personnel on community relations efforts meant to help the community acclimate to supporting an emerging travel and tourism economy, as well as the growth in support for the once-controversial Pasaquan (see Figure 4). Two student groups worked on travel and tourism public relations intended to help develop a larger brand for Marion County and Buena Vista, support

materials to use in promoting the town and region, and a larger strategy meant to bring visitors into town and to push more capital into the community. Finally, two student groups worked with Pasaquan's director on cultivating a brand, marketing materials, and an effective strategy to promote Pasaquan as a visionary art venue with a variety of uses.

At the completion of the fall course, the winning bids were collected and held for the spring public relations management course, in which a team of seven students worked with the client to adopt the best of each project in executing a campaign that helped market Pasaquan and Marion County. At the end of the fall course, the client took the community relations strategies and incorporated them in the community through her chamber of commerce.

Although not part of the initial plan, the development and implementation of marketing materials prompted a student from Marion County in both courses, Lauren Minor, to take on a role as a senior intern implementing the program with the client. She spent the final four months of her program of study working closely with



Figure 4. On-site Research at Pasaquan

Note. As part of the course schedule, public relations students engaged in on-site research at Pasaquan. They also traveled to Buena Vista later that day to perform community research in the town square. Photo by T. Graphenreed, 2014. Used with permission.

the Marion County Chamber of Commerce developing a new marketing strategy and executing on the initial stages of promoting Pasaquan and helping continue to bring in new businesses and infrastructure to support the new travel and tourism economy.

I asked Minor to comment on her perspective on the courses, and she offered a perspective that noted the rigor and value of the course experience:

Overall, while the Campaigns and Management courses were challenging, the way in which the classes were taught were very effective. They forced me to take the content taught and apply it to a real-world situation. Having the ability to take what I learned in class and put it into action for a need that I was passionate about made it all the more valuable as a learning tool.

Her perspective demonstrates the potential for students to engage in projects where they have a personal investment while

building skills relevant to professional practice. The following section will highlight the extent to which the clients made use of student work in meeting local needs.

### Quality of Student Products: Winning When You Lose

In reviewing the projects, and considering the ultimate adoption of student materials, it should be noted that the clients made effective use of materials and strategies from both winning and losing teams (see Figure 5). One clear example of this came in reviewing the Pasaquan teams' projects. One team offered very strong graphic design and manuals for standards and practice, prompting the Department of Art to adopt many of their designs in the logos for the venue's marketing materials. In contrast, Pasaquan's director believed the losing team actually cultivated a much stronger perspective on Pasaquan's identity, the concept of visionary art, and the perspective of potential visitors to the venue. Accordingly, much of the naming and messaging that accompanies the logos of the first team actually came from the second team's book.

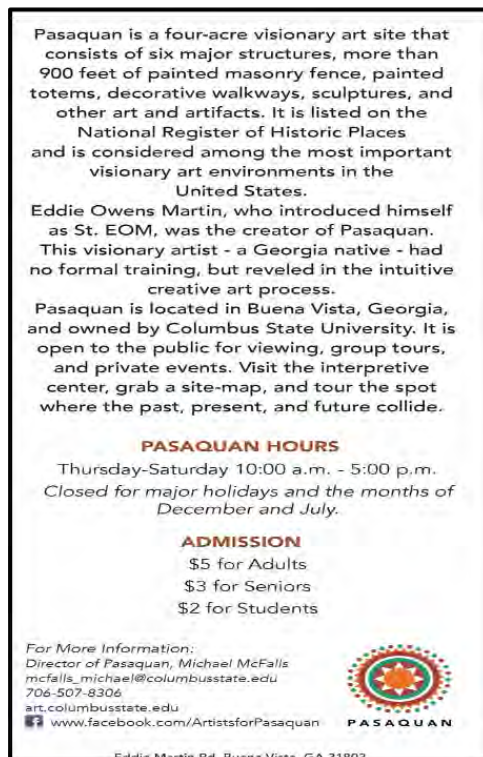


Figure 5. Student Concept Work for Promotional Brochures

Note. These examples of student concept work for promotional brochures incorporate design work from fall 2014 and copy from fall 2014 and spring 2015 public relations courses.



This particular example demonstrates the relative strength of the work of both student teams engaged in a direct competition, and bodes well for competitive modeling in service-learning courses.

That said, some student groups faced a number of challenges. In one group, members were unable to balance group dynamics and individual student ideas, which limited their effectiveness in managing a challenging campaign. In another student group, an inattention to the quality of the writing and media produced for the campaign contributed to superior research and strategy falling short against a better balanced campaign pitch. Finally, one team's inability to communicate with the client for the duration of the campaign left them well behind their opponent with the client, making winning a pitch a very difficult prospect. Even with the limitations on individual projects, the products showed an overall stronger quality than in previous campaigns courses, and helped yield a solid campaign execution in the spring semester. With the project quality discussed, we will shift our focus to the impact on the community and the students.

## **Impact of the Project**

### **Immediate Impact on the Community and Pasaquan**

Without making exaggerated claims for the outcomes of these projects, it can be observed that Marion County and Pasaquan experienced some very strong early indicators of positive returns in terms of revenue, development, and population growth from the project's completion in 2016 through 2017. Marion County's revitalization is well under way. The chamber of commerce president has reported that the county has obtained \$62,000 in initial grant support targeting economic development and travel and tourism promotion support (D. Ford, personal communication, June 28, 2017). The Georgia Department of Community Affairs presented an updated design proposal for refinishing storefronts, streets, and the courthouse grounds of the town square of Buena Vista in 2016 (D. Ford, personal communication, June 28, 2017). In addition, the community added a new welcome center for the growing tourism economy and created a new chamber of commerce office in 2016 (D. Ford, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

During 2016, eight new businesses have opened in Marion County, and there is a conversation about opening seven additional businesses, according to the Marion County Chamber of Commerce (D. Ford, personal communication, June 28, 2017). Early reports also indicated that new buyers developed recreational hunting and lodging venues and that potential commercial developers made commercial real estate purchase inquiries. In addition to the growth in local businesses, the chamber worked to encourage small business development through multiple seminars for aspiring business owners and travel and tourism promotion seminars. Most important, unemployment numbers shrank to 3.7% from the 9.8% level that followed the Tyson plant's closing, as of the October 2020 report (Georgia Department of Labor, n.d.).

Sales tax revenue was another solid indicator. In summer 2016, the chamber president reported that sales tax revenue, after having bottomed out, had steadily increased each subsequent quarter since. She attributed this increase in revenue to the opening of new businesses and growing tourism numbers in the community related to both Pasaquan and the partnership now in place with the Presidential Pathways program sponsored by the Georgia Department of Economic Development (D. Ford, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

A strong area of concern when the local community entered into the partnership was the potential for community growth, and early indicators suggested success in this area. In 2016, 34 housing permits were approved for additional development—the largest number of permits in the 7 years the building, code, and zoning administrator had been in office. When the president of the local chamber of commerce interviewed the new residents regarding why they joined the community, the strongest reasons included the community culture, the strong school district, and the revitalization under way. Other contributing causes included the relatively inexpensive property taxes and some civic issues with the local government in a neighboring county (D. Ford, personal communication, June 28, 2017).

Pasaquan is showing promising early returns, according to donor correspondence from its faculty director. On October 22, 2016, Pasaquan opened to the public and ownership was transferred to the Columbus State University Foundation. At the opening,



Figure 6. Grand Opening of Pasaquan

Note. Visitors from around the world attended the grand opening of Pasaquan on October 22, 2016. Photo by C. Robinson. Used with permission.

2,200 people from 34 states and 14 countries attended the festivities (see Figure 6). In its first 5 weeks after the opening, 892 visitors came to Pasaquan, averaging 179 visitors a week on a 3-day weekly schedule. Visitors since the opening have traveled in groups from New York; Portland, Oregon; Chicago, Illinois; and Atlanta, Georgia. Graduate students from Cornell University, the University of Wisconsin, the University of Georgia, and Georgia State University have conducted research on site, and it promises to host guest artists and provide source material in its archives to art students for years to come. In addition to several traveling exhibitions and a documentary on the restoration, the efforts of students helped the Department of Art solicit more than \$16,000 in fundraising in the first 5 weeks after the opening. With the early impact on Marion County and Pasaquan discussed, I will now address the impact on university students using data collected by Pasaquan's director of operations.

### Impact for the Students

The project work in Marion County and Pasaquan did a lot more than bring 28 public relations campaigns and eight public relations management students to the

region and help them develop industry-relevant experience and portfolio materials. According to Pasaquan's director, 120 students enrolled at the university have helped to advance the work in Marion County and Pasaquan over the last 2 years. The students come from communication, art, history, geography, and English. The venue's plans for flexible use also promise to bring students from the sciences, business, and social sciences. History and geography students collected oral histories and performed research to develop tourism maps for the region and for Pasaquan to help advance the area's economic revitalization while building professional experience that helped them see the value of their chosen fields of study. English students engaged in creative writing projects aimed at telling the story of Marion County and Pasaquan, helping develop literature that would contribute to the long-term sustainability of travel and tourism in the region. Art students, in both studio and art history, were engaged in the restoration and cataloging effort that helped finalize the restoration in 2016, as well as organization and support materials for the series of traveling exhibitions and museum exhibits aimed at bringing a global audience to the venue. Collaboration in the College of the Arts since Pasaquan's reopening has

produced several on-site exhibitions, as well as a collaborative composition of an opera about St. EOM and Pasaquan, *Eddie's Stone Song: Odyssey of the First Pasaquoyan*, which was first performed by faculty and students on the grounds in October 2017 (see Figure 7). In short, the project brought an intellectually diverse group of young talent together to facilitate solutions that will potentially help revitalize a community and elevate the profile of a unique cultural venue in rural Georgia.

Communication students continue to benefit from these service-learning courses, experiencing improved marketability at graduation as well as enhanced civic engagement. These benefits are exemplified in the student mentioned earlier who took on the role of an intern at the Marion County Chamber of Commerce. She did so largely because of her desire to gain more experience, but also because she was from the region and wanted to continue to help its growth. During the internship, she had a direct role in developing the marketing and promotion for Marion County and Buena Vista. She also aided planning and execution of the launch for Pasaquan and was the first ambassador for the new welcome

center. Her experiences in the internship made it possible for her to earn her first position as the communication director for the Bainbridge-Decatur County Chamber of Commerce in Bainbridge, Georgia. Recently, she's grown in her role with this chamber of commerce and now serves as its president. Hers is an ideal model for the civic and professional benefit of service and experiential learning. In her comments on the experience and its impact since, she said of the course designs, "Working for actual clients and preparing campaigns that worked toward present challenges those clients faced helped me transition into the workforce with real-world experience that has proven itself invaluable."

### Reviewing the University Mission

Looking back on the university's mission, some themes expressed in the most recent strategic plan were clearly in play on the Pasaquan project. Students were empowered to advance a neighboring community, as was clearly demonstrated in the work to help promote travel and tourism and to strengthen community relations in Marion County. Moreover, the promotion of Pasaquan had the express intent of bring-



Figure 7. Premiere Performance of *Eddie's Stone Song: Odyssey of the First Pasaquoyan*

Note. Audience for the opening performance of *Eddie's Stone Song: Odyssey of the First Pasaquoyan* on October 17, 2017. From *Eddie's Stone Song*, by T. Smith, 2017, Michael C. McFalls (<https://michael-mcfalls.com/artwork/4333110-Eddie-s-Stone-Song.html>).

ing an international community of artists to Marion County and Pasaquan, serving the mission of advancing a global community.

Speaking to excellence in teaching and research, the application of service-learning offered an innovative approach that not only provided students with an interactive, pragmatic form of learning that effectively assisted them in applying concepts in work with an organization, it also provided a viable research context for me as their professor and can serve as a model for educators considering how they might make the most out of service-learning courses. Given the three missions of higher education—service, teaching, research—this course project feeds all three legs of promotion and tenure. It provides a viable form of service that faculty can apply in innovative course design to yield data that can be analyzed for scholarship in teaching and learning, as well as within their discipline. This project has led to scholarship not only on teaching and learning, but also on community collaboration that will enhance the practice of teaching in public relations and related communication courses in our department (McCullough, 2018; McCullough & Gibson, 2018, in press).

On the topic of cultural enrichment, we see a clear example of helping communication students cultivate public relations campaigns that take into account not only the culturally rich aspects of Pasaquan, but also the local culture of Marion County and Buena Vista on the related campaigns promoting and enhancing those communities.

Finally, the project itself is a clear example of service to the region that ultimately advances a private-public partnership. Prior to the Pasaquan project, the relationship between Marion County and the university was limited to the occasional field trip or education major working in the local school district. In the aftermath of the project, students in art, history, geography, English, music, and communication now work on various projects in the community, and this relationship enhances both Marion County and the university, providing a best case example of a mutually beneficial private-public partnership.

### Discussion

Literature in service-learning details the value of the practice to individual students and teachers, as well as the larger view of

the benefit to organizations, communities, and the university's original purpose and strategic mission. This case is an example of a project that advanced the university's mission by helping local economic prospects, raising the profile of a visionary art venue, and strengthening a community's buy-in during the process. Further, it is creating opportunities for students in multiple disciplines to build portfolios that will make them marketable in the workforce.

The concerns posed about service-learning as a time-consuming and labor-intensive process certainly hold true here. Leading up to the two public relations courses I would teach, I invested the better part of a year in research and relationship cultivation on site in Marion County with community members, in meetings with faculty in other departments, and in the development of a project design that would facilitate students' opportunity to meet community needs. The intent of this review, however, is to illustrate the long-term value of the advance preparation and effort in advancing the students', community's, and potentially the faculty member's research endeavors. This project prompts further inquiry into the measurable impact of competition on service-learning and further study of the ultimate impact of the service-learning projects on Marion County, Buena Vista, and Pasaquan. From the perspective of an educator, program leader, and community member, the best results in a project like this demand advanced research and planning to set students up for a more productive stage on which to work independently and creatively where they can access the best industry and community experts, as well as cost-efficient resources that produce quality results.

For community leaders, academic decision makers, and other interested parties, this case should also offer an example of the potential value of integrating coursework with practical environments. For community leaders, the local university may be able to serve as an engine for growth and revitalization beyond enrolled students, faculty, and staff living in the region. Service-learning offers an approach to teaching that engenders strong social and civic engagement from students that can facilitate change. For academic decision makers who question the viability of service-learning as a mechanism to promote the university and its capacity for outreach and engagement, this example goes beyond political par-

ticipation and community problem solving and offers an example of economic growth spurred in part by students working both in a classroom and in a real-world lab environment.

The project's early success suggests that it will remain a viable program, although it will require further analysis to assess long-term sustainability. The plan is to transition from a restoration and early promotional effort to establishing a self-sustaining venue that supports the ongoing economic revitalization in Marion County and in the town of Buena Vista. Some of the previous student work has helped Marion County and Buena Vista in this effort. Interview data and the content review of student materials and subsequent promotional materials and grant writing indicate that student work took on a foundational role upon which the community built its materials and arguments for support. The chamber of commerce president reported the county obtained \$62,000 in initial grant support targeting economic development and travel and tourism promotion support. The chamber president noted the state's Department of Community Affairs granted the funds on the basis of an updated design proposal from the public relations management team for refinishing storefronts, streets, and the courthouse grounds of the town square (D. Ford, personal communication, June 28, 2017). This design proposal was based on the recommendations of student teams in the public relations campaigns course tasked with helping the community adapt to effectively support Pasaquan's guests.

In terms of sustaining CSU's role in the partnership, the connection to Pasaquan remains clear and intact. After 3 years, the director of Pasaquan remains in place and the venue is still under the control of the CSU Foundation and stewardship of the Department of Art. Each semester, art students in the undergraduate and graduate programs remain engaged in preservation and exhibition activities on site, and an intern is on staff to sustain existing marketing and promotional efforts. This evidence indicates that a long-term interest in maintaining the partnership with CSU and its art department is viable.

In terms of adaptation to meet the needs of the community and Pasaquan, the lines of contact remain open with Marion County via the chamber of commerce president, as well as with the Pasaquan Advisory Board. I check

in each year to identify new potential areas to explore that have emerged in the ongoing revitalization effort in the region, and the Marion County Chamber of Commerce president monitors the economic data for the county and region reported earlier, so both are tracking economic progress across these dimensions. They are also monitoring grant opportunities for economic development projects like the one mentioned earlier, to help facilitate and expedite the revitalization in progress. Should a need emerge, the ability to partner the community leadership or Pasaquan staff with a service-learning course in the Department of Communication is always available and open for discussion. The philosophical aim for the Department of Communication is to establish and sustain long-term community partnerships capable of meeting needs beyond the initial ask.

In terms of assessing the project beyond the initial engagement, several factors remain in place to provide data to enable a sustainable model. CSU's foundation and Pasaquan's director maintain a record of donors, visitors, and contacts to determine whether the venue is generating enough revenue or donor capital to achieve self-sustenance. The director and his student interns and workers regularly monitor the facilities and art on exhibit to ensure it remains intact and in good condition. As mentioned above, the Marion County Chamber of Commerce pays close attention to federal and state economic reports, and will continue this ongoing process to determine whether the strategic choice to move to a travel and tourism economy will continue to benefit the region economically and civically. As future course project opportunities emerge, I will maintain a similar attention to assessing project quality and impact on students' professional development. An additional area not yet considered is one long a part of service-learning scholarship—the impact on students' civic development (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). In this and future projects affiliated with the region, I will incorporate quarterly self-reflection surveys or blogs to enable analysis of impact on students' civic knowledge, mind-set, and identification with the communities and organizations served.

### **Lessons Learned From This Project With Promise**

Looking back on the project reveals lessons to be learned of value to those interested in engaging in high impact learning practices

that include community engagement. These lessons acknowledge both the challenges of a service-learning approach and the potential of such projects to enhance both the learning environment and the quality of life in the community.

### *Time Demands and Resource Limitations Are Real*

One lesson learned early in adopting a curriculum predominantly couched in service-learning is that it requires the educator to invest time and energy professionally in developing community partnerships, managing expectations with those partners, and letting the knowledge developed in the preliminary phase inform and set the foundation upon which student groups or individual students set up and execute course-relevant projects. The work continues as each semester progresses, and the instructor has to work behind the scenes in managing partner and student expectations and concerns. Finally, really successful programs like this one will require stewardship beyond the course in which the instructor will maintain a dialogue with the partner and work to coordinate subsequent course projects or internships that help to support emergent projects.

In terms of managing instructor and student ambitions for the course project outcome, it is important to remember that not all client partnerships come with readily available resources to use effectively in course projects. Part of the advanced work was to determine what was available, what was not available, and to identify creative means to either cultivate or tap into resources to serve student and community partner interests alike. Even if doors appear closed, other avenues may be open. This brings me to a second valuable lesson.

### *Contextual Knowledge and Creativity in Design Are Key to Success*

For me, this program was an epiphany that brought insight into how creative problem solving that includes effective research of the program context, resources, and organizations involved will enhance the learning environment for students and the potential impact on the community where the program takes place. When entering the project, I understood the basic problems for Pasaquan, but I did not see the potential added-value opportunities for students and the region in community relations and

countywide economic development until I had researched the context further and met with community partners. Establishing a strong baseline of knowledge revealed ways to connect with different audiences to fulfill different needs and achieve mutual benefit for the community, its constituents, and students in the classroom.

### *Relationship Cultivation and Management Matter*

Borrowing the principles of relationship management theory from public relations (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998) established a much more mutually beneficial and successful outcome for every party involved. Once viable partners in the community, at the university, and at the state level had been identified, I networked with those groups strategically to build a sophisticated resource pull that provided students with access to tools and knowledge that fell outside a traditional, text-based learning environment. The supplemental resources made the students' work stronger, enhanced their professional development, and enabled them to network with professionals in the field who could open doors for them.

On the subject of mutual benefit at the heart of relationship management theory, the community and arts center came away from the two courses and internship with a base of knowledge about their assets that strengthened subsequent economic development work and even connected them with viable talent in the courses whom they could hire and bring to the workplace to continue the program beyond the courses. For the university, this program provided a multi-plex means of promoting its academic programs, external venues, faculty, and community. For the state of Georgia, it enabled the Department of Economic Development to establish the value of its work in helping communities, and it helped the university system tout the tangible value of one of its institutions to the surrounding community. In the end, each party came away with something of value. This all came to fruition through the long-term establishment of relationships and engagement among faculty, state agents, and community leaders involved in the process.

### *Sustain Measurement Beyond the Life of the Course*

One of the greatest lessons that I brought away from this program is the value of

maintaining lines of communication not only in the interests of networking, but to also effectively measure the long-term impact of the program on the region. The established forms of measurement and contact with community partners enabled me to identify the upward trends in economic development and impact of community partners and students. Potential scholars and educators who engage in community outreach can benefit greatly by monitoring community programs consistently and well beyond the initial program launch. In a discipline increasingly evaluated on the tangible value of its work to the community, to employers, and to citizens engaged in the learning process, programs like this one can be valuable tools as narratives bearing viable data on the long-term value in supporting higher education programs that engage in town-gown relations and direct contact with community partners.

In addition, the information gathered through sustained measurement can provide multifaceted support for collaborative partnerships. Evidence of continuing benefits can be used to build the case presented to administrators for continuing a program; garner fiscal support for the program from donors at the regional and state level; and demonstrate the program's value to educators, students, and partners to keep them engaged in the program well beyond the initial phase. Although many might question the value of Pasaquan as a separate entity unto itself, the data around the larger program of work revitalizing the surrounding community and the work integrating the community and venue into the statewide travel and tourism program makes the case for sustaining and perhaps growing support to keep the revitalization of Pasaquan and Marion County moving forward.



### About the Author

*Christopher J. McCollough is joining the Department of Communication at Jacksonville State as an associate professor of communication in the spring of 2021. He was previously tenured as an associate professor of communication in the Department of Communication at Columbus State University, where he engaged as an educator and scholar in public relations. He studies industry trends that public relations educators should be bringing to students in the classroom as well as the benefits of high impact learning practices in the teaching and learning of public relations to students, educators, the community, and institutions of higher learning. He received his PhD in mass communication and public affairs from Louisiana State University.*

## References

- Astin, A., & Sax, L. (1998). How undergraduates are affected by service participation. *Journal of College Student Development*, 39(3), 251–263.
- Auld, C. (2004). Behavioral characteristics of student volunteers. *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 9(2), 8–18.
- Barber, B. (1994). A proposal for mandatory citizen education and community service. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 1(1), 86–93.
- Basinger, N. W. (2015). Incubating grassroots nonprofits: A service-learning approach to organizational capacity building with communities of immigrant and refugee background. *Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education*, 6(2), 19–29.
- Bringle, R., & Hatcher, J. A. (1995). A service-learning curriculum for faculty. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 2, 112–122.
- Columbus State University. (n.d.). *Columbus State University 2013–2018 strategic plan overview*. <https://dev1.columbusstate.edu/strategicplan/index.php>
- Cruz, N. I., & Giles, D. E. (2000). Where's the community in service learning research? *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, 7(1), 28–34.
- Eyler, J., & Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where's the learning in service learning?* Jossey-Bass.
- Fletcher, F., Rousell, D. D., Worrel, S., McLean, B., & Baydala, L. (2012). Measuring academic capacity: Research in relationship. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, 16(3), 99–102.
- Georgia Department of Labor. (n.d.). *Civilian labor force estimates*. <https://dol.georgia.gov/document/press-release/civilian-labor-force-estimates/download>
- Giroux, H. (2010). Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy. *Policy Futures in Education*, 8(6), 715–721. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2010.8.6.715>
- Hall, M., Lasby, D., Ayer, S., & Gibbons, W. (2009). *Caring Canadians, involved Canadians: Highlights from the 2007 Canada survey of giving, volunteering and participating*. Statistics Canada.
- Honadle, B. W., & Kennealy, P. (2011). Using service learning & civic engagement to educate students about stakeholder analysis. *Partnerships: A Journal of Service Learning & Civic Engagement*, 2(1), 1–19.
- Jacoby, B. (1996). Service learning in today's higher education. In B. Jacoby et al. (Eds.), *Service learning in higher education: Concepts and practices* (pp. 3–25). Jossey-Bass.
- Jones, S., & Abes, E. (2004). *Enduring influences of service-learning on college students' identity development. A national study of volunteering and charitable giving*. London: Cabinet Office.
- Kahne, J., Westheimer, J., & Rogers, B. (2000). Service-learning and citizenship in higher education. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, Special issue No. 1, pp. 42–51.
- Kuban, A. J., O'Malley, M. M., & Florea, L. J. (2014). Students' knowledge and perceived confidence in an interdisciplinary experiential learning environment. *Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education*, 6(1), 30–38.
- Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (1998). Relationship management in public relations: Dimensions of an organization–public relationship. *Public Relations Review*, 24(1), 55–65.
- McCullough, C. J. (2018). Competition and public relations campaigns: Assessing the impact of competition on quality of projects, partners, and students. *Journal of Public Relations Education*, 4(1), 25–48. <https://aejmc.us/jpre/2018/05/22/competition-and-public-relations-campaigns-assessing-the-impact-of-competition-on-quality-of-projects-partners-and-students/>
- McCullough, C. J., & Gibson, D. M. (2018). NPACE: Service learning that enhances civic and community health. *Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education*, 10(1). <https://discovery.indstate.edu/jcehe/index.php/joce/issue/view/33/showToc>



- McCollough, C. J., & Gibson, D. M. (in press). NPACE: Building mutually beneficial community relationships. *Journal of Nonprofit Education and Leadership*.
- Miller, B. (1991). Service-learning in support of rural community development. In A. Waterman (Ed.), *Service-learning: Applications from the research* (pp. 107–126). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Patterson, T. (1987). *St. EOM in the Land of Pasaquan*. Inland Book Company.
- Schatterman, A. M. (2014). Academics meets actions: Community engagement motivations, benefits, and constraints. *Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education*, 6(1), 17–30.
- Twenge, J. (2013). Teaching Generation Me. *Thinking of Psychology*, 40(1), 66–69.
- United States Department of Labor. (n.d.). *Local area unemployment statistics map*. <https://data.bls.gov/map/showMap.jsp>