Community-Engaged Learning in Liberal Arts Colleges: Developing Engaged Citizens

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ABSTRACT

Employing an institutional case study approach, this manuscript features two high-impact learning opportunities open to Albion College students who seek to contribute to solving real-world problems in collaboration with local and surrounding communities: Albion College Community Collaborative (AC3) and Human Rights Lab. The programmatic approach to community-engaged partnerships featured sought to elevate local knowledge, promote engaged citizenship, and advance social, political, and economic change. We describe each program followed by lessons learned and critical considerations to advance the field and to inform the work of others seeking to employ a programmatic approach.

   Keywords: institutional case study, programmatic community engagement, liberal arts college, experiential learning

Colleges and universities play a crucial role in preparing students for democratic participation and civic life. Yet, communities across the United States are characterized by increasing tension and polarization across differences. Community-engaged learning, especially when paired with a commitment to equity, offers a partial antidote. Integrating community-based learning and policy advocacy into the college classroom strengthens campus-community relationships, promotes engaged citizenship, and leverages collective knowledge to advance social, political, and economic change (Amauchi et al., 2021; Wallerstein et al., 2020). Liberal arts colleges (LACs), due to their institutional mission, are particularly poised to actively contribute to developing more just and equitable futures (Jung, 2023).

   Guided by a powerful aim—to re-envision the notion of "program" in the academy rooted in the tenets of social justice and engaged citizenry—we feature two high-impact learning opportunities for students who seek to contribute to solving real-world problems in collaboration with local and surrounding communities: Albion College Community Collaborative (AC3) and Albion Human Rights Lab. We agree with Baker (2021) who stated, "We must reimagine how such college and community partnerships can progress to meet the changing needs of our institutions and the communities in which they are situated" (para 2). As such, these programs enable students to develop as civic leaders who, in collaboration with community partners, foster community-driven decision-making to strengthen democratic norms and institutions.

   Employing an institutional case study approach, we highlight two service-learning, community-engaged programs that respond to Unger's (2020) charge to embed such programs "throughout undergraduate curricula [which] is perhaps the best hope for sustaining and refortifying the American college" (para 9) given such learning "is not only how our colleges and universities can survive and

thrive, it is how they can justify their purpose to their own stakeholders and the broader public" (para 11). This manuscript includes a detailed overview of both programs, illustrating how students and community partners translate ideas into impact while internalizing civic values and elevating local knowledge. We conclude with lessons learned and critical considerations for building effective partnerships that strengthen communities and student learning outcomes. Such knowledge contributes to current conversations about the advancement of community-engaged learning and practice (Mitchell, 2023), and provides a roadmap for other institutions seeking to adapt and adopt the programmatic-level efforts featured.

INSTITUTIONALIZING CAMPUS-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Albion is a small, multiracial, economically diverse city in south central Michigan with a population of approximately 8,000. Throughout much of the 20th century, Albion was an industrial and manufacturing city whose mills, foundries, and factories attracted a diverse workforce from Eastern Europe, Mexico, and African Americans from the American South during the Great Migration. Like many midwestern "rustbelt" communities, Albion's economic and industrial boon years were followed by deindustrialization—foundries and factories closed, population declined, poverty rates increased, and institutional anchors were lost when the hospital closed and the school system consolidated into a neighboring district. The City of Albion's economic future is deeply tied to Albion College, a private, undergraduate liberal arts institution with approximately 1,500 students located a few blocks from downtown. During the boon years when both the town and the college were economically strong, race and class divisions often separated the two. Albion College's annual cost of attendance far exceeds the median annual income for Albion the city where 28.5% of the population lives in

poverty. In recent decades, however, the college and community have collaborated, recognizing their shared interests and tethered fates, but also the inherent value that both entities bring to their partnership.

Regarded as test kitchens for curricular innovation, liberal arts colleges have incubated some of the academies' most highly regarded high-impact practices (Baker et al., 2012; Kuh 2008). One such high-impact practice is community-based learning, which is described as field-based, experiential learning in collaboration with community partners (Kuh, 2008). Community-based learning is grounded in the notion that personal and professional growth is facilitated when students have an opportunity to apply what they are learning in real-world settings and to reflect on that learning in formative and summative ways.

By its very nature, the LAC mission is focused on developing students in two primary ways: habits of heart *and* mind (Baker, 2020). Habits of heart focus on faith and character formation, helping students to develop an appreciation for diverse viewpoints and the importance of contributing to local, regional, and global communities. Habits of mind seek to instill in graduates an investment in lifelong learning and other LAC skill development including critical thinking and strong communication. Simply put, LACs seek to develop engaged citizens who contribute in meaningful ways to the communities with which they have and seek membership. This aligns well with community-based learning in that "These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life" (Kuh, 2008, para 10). Organizations and communities thrive when higher education and community partners work together as co-creators and co-disseminators of knowledge (Barrera, 2015). This commitment to fostering an engaged citizenry is what fueled Albion College's interest in contributing to public purpose and

professional advancement in more deliberate, intentional ways.

The School for Public Purpose and Professional Advancement (SPP) is home to several experiential learning institutes, centers, and programs at Albion College, including AC3 and Human Rights Lab. SPP is anchored in the idea that higher education institutions have a responsibility to foster a commitment to public purpose in their graduates. To achieve this aim, SPP creates opportunities for experiential learning, professional development, undergraduate research, and field-based experiences aimed at equipping students and civic leaders with tools to develop creative solutions to local and global challenges. SPP recognizes the importance of community-driven processes and the need for diverse stakeholders to work collaboratively to drive innovation to develop equitable communities in which all people thrive.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

We employed a case study methodology (Yin, 2014) to fulfill our aim of providing insights into Albion College's approach to community engagement and community-based learning, specifically via programmatic efforts. Case study methodology is defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context" (Yin, 2014, p. 16). The methodological approach is salient for presenting a descriptive illustration of the pedagogical framework that undergirds each program including evidence of impact. A case study approach facilitates an exploration of the *how*, *who*, *why,* and *what* of a given phenomenon; it is this framework that we use to describe each programmatic case study in the following section that enables us to make an original contribution to the field of community engagement and community-based learning (Yin, 2014).

AC3 and Human Rights Lab are guided by the same aims: (a) build inclusive communities, (b) empower students as change makers who respect local knowledge and collaborate with community partners, and (c) develop civic leaders who practice engaged citizenship. How these aims are achieved, the related experiences executed, and the deliverables disseminated are distinctive. Each case study includes an overview of the program (what), the pedagogical approach that serves as the programmatic foundation (how), the primary stakeholders involved (who), and evidence of student and community partner outcomes (why).

PROGRAMS

AC3

The goal of AC3 is to create an experiential learning opportunity that deploys the attributes of a liberal arts college (community, interdisciplinarity) while also aiming to develop abilities and skills that exemplify a liberal arts education (critical thinking, solving complex problems across disciplines)—all in service to the public. The first author, along with institutional leaders, sought to expand and enhance civic engagement conceptualizations resulting in a more sophisticated approach that engages key stakeholders while also accounting for their growth and development.

Built as an experiential learning lab and modeled after the consulting industry, AC3 enables students to serve as management consultants who work closely with community partners by addressing organizational, social, and community needs. Simply put, AC3 is the quintessential liberal arts college experience that brings together interdisciplinary teams of students and diverse community partners (e.g., for-profit, nonprofit, government, health care, etc), working together to offer innovative solutions to solve unscripted problems while anticipating future needs. A two-year, six-figure grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundations supported the launch and curricular development of AC3. Since receiving the grant, the college has invested modest operating budget funds to support

daily operations. There are two staff members (executive director, faculty director).

What Is AC3?

AC3 provides a distinctly interdisciplinary student, faculty, and community partner engagement opportunity that fosters the development of critical leadership skills (e.g., faculty, community partner and peer mentoring), deepens disciplinary knowledge while gaining exposure to other fields and frameworks, builds capacity both on campus and in the community, and facilitates the sharpening of professional skills (e.g., consulting, problem-solving, project management). AC3 fuels an innate curiosity displayed in our students by facilitating collaborations among key stakeholders.

A combination of formative and summative learning opportunities coupled with in classroom and "in the field" experiences ground AC3. Engagement in AC3 requires students to collaborate in interdisciplinary teams supported by a leadership team approach in which faculty, instructors, *and* community partners mentor and guide students' work. AC3 offers a novel structure in which client engagements occur outside the confines of the academy and academic calendar rooted in a leadership pathway that we discuss in more detail in the following section.

How Does AC3 Work?

There are three core components to AC3: AC3 "DNA," a leadership pathway, and a robust portfolio of formative and summative assessments.

AC3 "DNA." Students engage in nine core areas of the consulting process: (1) Requests for Proposals, (2) Proposal Submission Support and Recruitment, (3) Proposal Evaluation and Selection, (4) Project Scoping, (5) Student Knowledge Assessment and Planning, (6) Project Design/Memorandum of Understanding

(MoU), (7) Project Launch, (8) Project Engagement, and (9) Project Execution.

Each new client and student team work through this process that we refer to as the cognitive framework, or DNA, of AC3. Templates and work guides for each of the nine areas have been created based on industry best practices and review from subject matter experts to ensure consistency of support and experience on a per client basis. Further, these templates and work guides help direct students' efforts. One of the aims of AC3 is to engage with clients on an ongoing basis. At any given time, students in AC3 are either cycling onto an existing client team or helping to onboard a new client. Given the fluid nature of the client procurement and engagement processes, having this cognitive framework is essential.

Leadership Pathway. The leadership pathway is foundational to AC3, which enables students to enroll up to three times, earning a unit of academic credit each time. The leadership pathway enables students to continue with their team/client in a long-term capacity that ensures institutional memory and knowledge on a given project. Such a pathway allows students to develop a rapport with clients while ensuring a level of consistency in personnel.

Each experience provides the needed scaffolding and skill development that mirrors that which occurs in the consulting industry. Junior consultants enrolled in the 200-level offering, "Learning by Doing," participate in the day-to-day work of a consulting team. Under the mentorship of senior consultants, junior consultants learn the basic elements of the project they are assigned and begin developing an understanding of generalized consulting project work.

Senior consultants enrolled in the 300-level offering are guided by a "Learning through Doing and Mentoring" approach. Serving as mentors to junior consultants, senior consultants facilitate reflection and discussion time with junior consultant team members to explore the learning taking place.

Further, they review and offer feedback on junior consultant contributions to project work. Lastly, senior consultants work together as a peer consultant sub-team to scope and design each project, execute project plans, and develop deliverables for clients.

Team leaders are the AC3 students enrolled in the 400-level offering who are guided by a "Learning through Leadership" approach. Team leaders solicit projects from community partners and clients, evaluate project requests, and work with AC3 leadership to select appropriate clients and projects. As part of their client engagement, team leaders ensure appropriate resourcing and management of the project timeline, and review project deliverable drafts and provide feedback. Lastly, team leaders ensure quality mentorship is provided by senior consultants to junior consultants, while also providing mentorship to senior consultants.

Assessment. Foundational assessment tools in AC3 include a student learning contract and team learning contract that are completed at the start of the initial experience and of every subsequent experience (e.g., 200-level junior consultant, 300-level senior consultant, 400-level team leader). While completion of the student and team learning contracts are student-driven, it is a collaborative effort that involves peer mentoring (engaging that team's senior consultant/team leader) and faculty/staff support (e.g., faculty director, executive director). Students are required to identify professional growth opportunities as well as targeted skill development opportunities they

hope to achieve as part of their engagement. This commitment to growth and learning, as outlined in the student and team learning contracts, coupled with built-in professional development, and mentoring from the senior consultant, team leader, director, and executive director help students discover how to translate their experiences into demonstrable outcomes (e.g., resume, graduate school applications, career-focused platforms). Other assessments include biweekly team report outs, discussion forums based on assigned readings, client team meeting debriefs, and completion of online training modules.

Who Is Involved and How Does AC3 Solve Problems?

Collectively, students and clients identify a particular need(s) or problem, and work to find solutions. Once all parties agree on goals, deliverables, and project work plan, a memo of understanding is executed and serves as the "contract" for a specified period. A regular rotation of "in the field" client meetings, regular client communication, twice monthly report outs and team and peer coaching meetings, and weekly project work sessions enable collaborative processes to advance based on shared aims and purpose. To date, AC3 has worked with 16 unique clients; as of the writing of this manuscript, 177 students have participated since the pilot (spring 2021), representing all four academic divisional areas at Albion College. See Table 1 for a sample of student and client quotes and final deliverables.

Table 1

AC3 Evidence of Outcomes and Final Deliverables

	Economic Development Center (9-month collaboration)	
Student Learning	**Client Learning**	**Final Deliverable(s)**
~ "Progress I made was working with different communication styles. Not only did team members have different communication styles but so did the client. I was successful with adapting to the different styles and knowing how I needed to communicate to get the job done."	~ "The student perspective was so valuable to advancing the needed work. Without this team helping, I am not sure we would have a coordinated strategic plan or been able to engage area youth in the conversations."	• 5-year Strategic Plan • Goals achievement flyer
	Student Farm/Whitehouse Nature Center (9-month collaboration)	
Student Learning	**Client Learning**	**Final Deliverable(s)**
~ "My group was full of leaders, all willing to take charge, so I sometimes just had to step back and let someone else lead."	~ "We are under resourced, and the AC3 team became a critical extension of the SF team to advance needed work. Their energy and creativity [were] invaluable to meeting desired goals of strategic partnerships and a marketing strategy/brand."	• Maple Syrup Product Line • Logo/Branding • Marketing Plan • Local distribution channel
	Walk the Beat (18-month collaboration)	
Student Learning	**Client Learning**	**Final Deliverable(s)**

~ "One of the biggest takeaways we learned as a team was that we needed to be flexible with deliverables and the client changing their mind. We learned that we needed to take control of the direction of the meeting by creating an agenda to easily and respectfully bring [client] back on track."	~ "The collaboration with AC3 and the students was necessary to advance WTB aims. They bring a fresh perspective, boots on the ground support, and enable WTB to have a broader reach through social media."	• Summer concert series planning and scheduling • Social media strategy/content • Fundraising strategy and execution • Student/teacher recruitment for music lessons

Engagement in AC3 is a living example of "Doing Well and Doing Good" by providing opportunities for students to see the impact of their community client collaborations to local, regional, and national communities. AC3 has also been successful in helping to advance a 21st century notion of experiential and community-engaged learning that is in service to a liberal arts college mission that seeks to develop engaged, democratic citizens (Unger, 2020).

Human Rights Lab

The COVID-19 pandemic and the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020 highlighted the vast inequities and injustices in American communities. Human rights issues are prevalent in the United States—in neighborhoods and on college campuses. Inspired by contemporary campus and community activism, Human Rights Lab is an experiential learning lab for advocates-in-the making. The Lab seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice by training students and community partners to use research, policy, and advocacy to build more inclusive and equitable communities. Through "learning by doing," students deepen their knowledge and develop skills through direct experience, addressing real-world problems alongside people who have on the ground experience (see Bradbury & De Maio, 2019, and Simmons, 2019).

Human Rights Lab evolved out of a partnership between the second author and the Albion branch of the NAACP supported by a Rollin M. Gerstacker Foundation community-based learning grant. Students and community partners participated in a semester-long human rights course. The goal was to link classroom learning to lived experience, connect learning outcomes to civic engagement, and tie student skill development with community building. Students and community partners explored how human rights relate to their own lives and developed rights-based policy proposals and advocacy plans to implement in the Albion community. Students served as researchers, policy analysts, and social justice advocates, while community members served as issue experts, consultants, facilitators, and clients. Students publicly presented their proposals, integrated community feedback, then transferred ownership of the strongest education, health, and policing plans to the Albion NAACP for their future use.

At the same time, the second author was also collaborating with an undergraduate research team to publish an advocacy toolkit of practical ideas to help students prevent bias, challenge hate, and broaden inclusion on college campuses. Both projects expanded human rights education while solving local

needs. Human Rights Lab was created to organize, institutionalize, and scale up these collaborative efforts. It is created as an interdisciplinary, experiential learning hub that builds the capacity of student and community leaders to address local rights and justice issues. Grounded in the belief that justice labor should be fairly compensated, the Lab operates a student employment model but can substitute academic credit for wages. Human Rights Lab is operated by a faculty director; its programming is supported financially through the operating budget of its host academic unit, the Gerald R. Ford Institute for Leadership in Public Policy and Service. The Lab uses existing campus employment opportunities, partners with funded student research programs, uses grant funds, and connects Lab activities to academic courses to generate its student staff.

What Is Human Rights Lab?

The goal of Human Rights Lab is to prepare the next generation of human rights professionals to identify injustice, analyze its causes, develop policy solutions, undertake strategic advocacy to promote equity, and support community organizations and initiatives while doing so. Through hands-on learning, students learn how to advocate on issues important to them while performing the hard work of making the world, and their communities, a better place. In the process, they learn the value of local knowledge for justice work and practice community-driven decision making.

Human Rights Lab operates three projects. Each engages students in addressing real-world problems while simultaneously developing core professional capacities (e.g., communication skills, time management, policy analysis, and strategic advocacy).

1) The Advocacy Toolkit offers tools and strategies for defending rights on campuses and in communities and for organizing with others toward collaborative, human-rights-inspired, political, and social change. Created by college students for advocates-in-the-making, the toolkit offers

practical ideas for building more inclusive spaces and increasing access to rights within them.

2) Through the Community Partnership Program, senior research students and community partners work together to address local justice problems. They research, write, and advocate for equitable, rights-based policy practices locally.

3) The Lab promotes Human Rights Education on campus and off by creating fact sheets and educational curriculum, sponsoring events, and training peers in the best practices of human rights advocacy and social change. Advocacy Bootcamp refers to a series of workshops and digital micro-credentials (called innovation badges) that train Albion College students in the best practices of community engagement and social justice advocacy. The Albion Advocates blog augments the voices of students and their allies by promoting student research and advocacy projects, initiating dialogue about human rights problems, and challenging readers to become part of the solution.

Projects prioritize experiential learning, reciprocal and mutually beneficial community partnerships, and an empowerment approach to change that links the local with the global.

How Does Human Rights Lab Work?

Human Rights Lab is high touch and high impact but small scale, operating with a small number of student researchers (5-7) who collaborate with the faculty director and more experienced students serving as senior researchers (2-3). The project is designed to train and integrate new students into lab membership at the entry level each academic year, while simultaneously retaining existing researchers through a scaffolded mentorship and leadership model. Human rights work is interdisciplinary and lab opportunities are open to students across all disciplines. We develop collaborative teams composed of students with varying educational backgrounds and levels of experience to foster a scaffolded learning experience from

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participation (level 1) to leadership (level 2) to community partnership (level 3).

Skill Practice and Leadership Development. Students receive training throughout their Lab participation. Online training modules and in-person workshops designed by Lab researchers and the faculty director include human rights basics, effective community engagement, and essentials of advocacy. These workshops are also available to nonmembers through the SPP.

Membership in Human Rights Lab is a scaffolded experience modeled on the success of AC3. At the start of their lab experience, students join and work in collaborative teams that are directed by a more experienced student leader or the faculty director. Like in AC3, students engage in "learning by doing"—learning the basics of the projects to which they are assigned under the guidance of more advanced peers who are learning alongside them but also developing their mentoring, leadership, and program management capacities. This approach allows students to learn from successes and mistakes while developing valuable experience. It also ensures that students are effectively trained and socialized into the values and practices of the lab before leading program work or engaging with community partners. This approach also creates a leadership pathway for students who choose to continue their Lab membership across multiple academic semesters. Successful Lab researchers are invited to lead a project team. Effective team leadership is rewarded with opportunities for students to identify, curate, and develop their own priorities, including participating in the community partnership program to co-create a multi-semester project with a community partner.

Student Learning and Accountability. Although most students interact with the Lab in an employment capacity outside of the traditional academic context, student learning drives programming. Students apply the human rights framework to local rights and justice problems, identify the core elements of effective human rights advocacy campaigns, and conduct policy analyses and craft advocacy plans that contribute to the understanding and advancement of human rights on the Albion College campus and in the Albion community.

Lab students complete a student learning contract, set personal and professional goals, and participate in weekly or twice-monthly meetings with the faculty director, individually or as part of a project team. This is complemented by a twice-monthly report-out meeting with the entire Lab membership. In "all Lab check-ins," students report on work completed or in progress and share short-term goals. Lab check-ins also create opportunities for students to give and receive feedback from peers on project team priorities and products. This builds community among members and enhances participant learning through peer review. Lab students complete a self-assessment and are evaluated by the faculty director each semester.

How Does Human Rights Lab Solve Problems?

One goal of LACs is to educate citizens for the practice of democracy. The Human Rights Lab asks them to put democratic citizenship into practice. Students develop civic skills and experience but also develop a sense of efficacy; they learn that they are changemakers now and not only in the future. This fosters a long-term commitment to civic engagement (McCartney, 2017; Josephson, 2018). College students are sources of creativity and innovation. They approach persistent problems with fresh eyes and bold ideas. They offer novel interpretations of political problems and are open to new solutions and new languages of rights. The Lab has produced significant outcomes in its first four academic semesters. These include developing and launching a website (humanrights.albion.edu) that features a free, online social justice advocacy toolkit and the Albion Advocates blog; hosting a

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series of educational events; and solving local problems with community partners, including creating training modules on equity and inclusion for the Admissions Department and producing policing recommendations in consultation with the Albion Branch NAACP. See Table 2 for a sample of this student and community learning.

Table 2

Human Rights Lab Evidence of Outcomes and Final Deliverables

	Human Rights Website (4 semester project)	
Student Learning	**Community Benefit**	**Final Deliverable(s)**
~ "It gave me much-needed experience in writing about important issues in a detailed but easy-to-understand and brief manner. It is a lot different than writing a research paper."	~ "This insightful toolkit has broaden[ed] my perspective on human right advocacy and how I can bring significant change to the injustices that take place in my community."	• Advocacy toolkit • 25 Albion Advocates blogs by 15 writers
	Community Partnership Projects (3 semester collaboration)	
Student Learning	**Community Benefit**	**Final Deliverable(s)**
~ "I learned how to integrate both scholarly research and my field experience together into a cohesive narrative. I also learned effective practices for communication."	~ "The NAACP felt seen and supported and several NAACP subcommittees are using the work the students produced in their advocacy work."	• Policing policy report for NAACP • Diversity, equity, and inclusion training modules for Admissions program
	Human Rights Education Events (3 semester project)	
Student Learning	**Community Benefit**	**Final Deliverable(s)**
~ "One skill I have strengthened is teamwork. Leading a team gave me experience collaborating with others and figuring out how best to delegate tasks."	~ "I think that the human rights lab has helped to create a more open and accepting community. I also think that it helps people	• Human Rights Basics training workshop • Community Engagement Innovation Badge • Advocacy Workshop • Voting toolkit

	discover passions that they did not realize they have."	• Buy Local guide • 4 advocacy events • Fact sheets

In sum, through Human Rights Lab students translate their liberal arts training into practice. By leveraging research to advance social, political, and economic change, students become engaged citizens and strengthen community-driven decision-making.

LESSONS LEARNED AND CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR COMMUNITY-ENGAGED LEARNING

Reflecting on our programs and experiences to date, we highlight lessons learned and critical considerations to support others currently engaged in this work, those seeking to participate, and those interested in fostering community-engaged partnerships.

Lesson 1 – Humility

Everyone who enters or seeks to support a community-engaged partnership needs to acknowledge their privilege, and this starts at the leadership level (Gregory, 2020). We encourage a focus on and the need to exhibit humility. By engaging in these programs, students heard stories about the challenges community partners faced, which included overt racism and discrimination and near business bankruptcy due to the pandemic, thus making their engagement with community partners life-changing for all involved. One of the foundational tenets of a liberal arts college education is lifelong learning. No matter how experienced or credentialed one may be, we all are novices when it comes to the lived experiences and needs of others. Work to share those lived experiences from a place of educating others, free from judgment; work to understand those lived experiences from a place of care and compassion.

The second author, along with SPP staff, created a series of workshops to prepare students to engage with diverse communities through reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships. Incorporated into an asynchronous, online training, students learn to identify and respond to injustice, the difference between charitable and justice responses to community problems, the principles of asset-based thinking, best practices of effective community engagement, and core principles of allyship. Participation is open to all students at [college].

Lesson 2 – Listen

We cannot overstate the importance of active listening to learn, not to simply respond. Thoughtful focused interactions are central to building empathy, trust, and relationships—all of which lead to more culturally responsive decision-making. In short, listening helps to build community. When you build a community where people can truly hear each other, respect and rigorous debate can coincide, leading to productive solutions to challenging problems. Partnerships with Albion Public Safety, the Albion Branch NAACP, and the Economic Development Center were successful because students listened to and learned with community partners, even as they shared their own ideas, training, and values. Trying to solve community problems *for* community stakeholders rather than *with* them is not partnership, can lead to ineffective solutions, and can exacerbate rather than bridge difference.

Lesson 3 – Value Local Knowledge and Varied Experiences

Our programs are part of what Josephson (2018) describes as the "outside-in university," where work is co-created with community partners and mutually beneficial for student learning and community priorities (p. 493). We value this model where communities are not simply laboratories for

campus-based experts to design solutions to local problems. Rather, community members are valued as sources of practical knowledge and experience and engaged as co-creators of solutions to shared problems (Josephson, 2018). When joined with the innovation and creativity of our students, program outcomes strengthen student learning and community benefit alike. For example, AC3 students worked collaboratively with Albion Public Safety (APS) to develop a crisis management plan in the event of a train derailment resulting in a chemical spill. Building on the practical knowledge and experience of APS, the AC3 team was able to create a model for response in the rare event that a similar crisis should occur in the City of Albion.

In another example, a Human Rights Lab researcher compared United Nations human rights standards for policing practices with the State of Michigan's training curriculum, identifying discrepancies. The student consulted APS and worked alongside the Political Action Committee of the Albion Branch NAACP to produce a policy proposal for additional training and increased socialization between the community and police. The student gained valuable research, policy, and advocacy skills while producing a direct community benefit—a training proposal that would better align APS with international human rights standards on policing than existing Michigan police academy training requires.

Critical Consideration 1 – Get Comfortable with Uncertainty

Community-based learning requires getting comfortable with being uncomfortable. This means loosening control over the learning environment and taking on the role of a facilitator or coach rather than directing from center stage. Programs that engage real-world problems are complex and require adaptation. Community engagement may require trading efficiency for inclusion, teamwork, and the development of higher-order cognitive skills. You need to trust the process so that your students will too. This means being honest about the uncertainty, clear about the processes you are adopting, and transparent about why—the value of adopting this approach. Students and community partners need to understand the values that motivate community-based work and why they are worth pursuing. This means instructors must incorporate learning about the process itself into the curriculum and consistently revisit this lesson.

Critical Consideration 2 – Build Structure and Enlist Partners

While retaining flexibility, it is important to impose structure and build accountability for experiential learning. Students need learning contracts, SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timebound), timelines, and consistent opportunities for consultation and feedback. These tools help students maintain focus and steadily progress toward their goals. Consistent engagement with student teams helps problem-solving and redirection as needed to prevent harming client or community relationships. Enlist campus and community partners to assist with mentoring and monitoring and use the project to build and strengthen ongoing partnerships that will last beyond the project period.

Further, working with other academic units and departments on campus allowed us to think through how student engagement could also fulfill academic and programmatic requirements (e.g., senior capstone experience, major elective) and to support undergraduate research requirements (e.g., foundation of senior thesis work). Find common cause with existing campus programs and leverage their experience, skills, and resources to supplement your own. The second author modeled Human Rights Lab operating procedures on the best practices of Americorps and AC3 and applied to an existing student research assistantship program to fund Lab researchers. Creativity and capacity building is invaluable to the success of such programmatic initiatives and

to advancing critical work with limited resources.

In closing, we adopt community-engaged learning because we seek to engage the whole student by developing their habits of heart and mind. We believe in the power that can be harnessed through college-community partnerships. Our students possess the passion, boldness, skills, and ideas needed to change our communities for the better. Indeed, through AC3 and Human Rights Lab, they have already started.

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We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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