

The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley

What Does Deep
Collaboration With The
Community Mean in Practice?

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Surprised by Deep Collaboration

- *A Time To Get It Right* – Kansas City’s plan for higher education that included UMKC
- Commissioned by civic leadership, funded by the Greater Kansas City Foundation, and authored by some of the most distinguished leaders of higher education in the United States
- Assessed higher education in Kansas City and the status of its public universities
- Included a vision for the University of Missouri Kansas City’s role in higher education in Kansas City

The Assessment

- “KUMC and UMKC ... fall well short of the quality and range of research university capacity Kansas City urgently needs. These institutions also are not as deeply engaged in the city and effective as they might be in addressing the city’s most pressing educational needs”
- “All elements of the community agree that Kansas City needs much greater higher education research capacity, as well as an urban university deeply engaged in all the city’s opportunities and challenges.”

More Assessment

- “UMKC’s relationships with major elements of the Kansas City community are in disarray. The business community, the philanthropic community, the African-American community, the Latino community, and the city’s K-12 public education leaders all believe that UMKC has lacked leadership and strategic direction to engage effectively with the city’s problems and opportunities.”
- “Considerable segments of the UMKC faculty view the business and philanthropic leadership of Kansas City with mistrust.”

Figuring Out Deep Collaboration

- Who do you collaborate with?
 - USU's serve multiple communities, some of which have conflicting interests
 - Business and civic community
 - Public education
 - Underserved communities
 - Surrounding neighborhood(s)
 - Some communities have competing leaders
 - Look for projects that multiple constituents can agree upon
- How do you engage your faculty?
 - In the enterprise of community engagement
 - With the communities themselves

Figuring Out Deep Collaboration

- What projects do you collaborate on?
 - Communities need to help you decide
 - Ex. Institute for Urban Education at UMKC
 - Ex. Joint ACT/SAT preparation courses
 - Ex. Sí (Social Innovation) – a primary care behavioral health program at UTRGV for the Colonias
 - Ex. UTRGV's South TX Institute for Diabetes and Obesity
 - Ex. Neighborhood projects in many places
 - Collaboration is cumulative – one success leads to another
- How do you measure collaboration?
 - Need some mutually agreed upon metric

Lessons Learned about Collaboration

- You will hear much about your institution that you don't want to hear
 - The tendency is to defend your institution, but listen instead
 - USU's rarely get the credit they are due
- Early successes are crucial
- Deep collaboration is cumulative – one-time efforts with no follow-up will raise expectations, but these efforts do not deliver on-going results
- Deep collaboration requires mutual trust
- **Deep collaboration means giving up some control to external constituents**

UTRGV: An Example of Deep Collaboration with the Community

- UTRGV was formed in response to community demands for
 - Enhanced educational opportunity in the fastest growing and most educationally underserved part of the state
 - A university of the first order
 - A medical school for the most underserved part of the state in health care
 - Access to the UT System's Permanent University Fund
- The creation of UTRGV is the result of a unique alignment
 - A Board Chair from the Rio Grande Valley
 - A Chancellor from South Texas
 - An Executive Vice Chancellor from the Valley

Some Context

- The Rio Grande Valley has a population of 1.2 million
 - Hidalgo Co. is the 8th largest county in TX (pop. 815,996)
 - Cameron Co. is the 13th largest (pop. 417,278)
 - Together they comprise the 5th largest metro in Texas
- RGV includes an urbanized, linear configuration that stretches for 65 miles along rail lines established early in the 20th century – it is a metro with no urban core
- RGV also includes two rural counties, and large parts of Cameron and Hidalgo counties are rural as well
- The population is growing very fast – from 2000-2010 it grew by 30.53% (U.S. = 9.7%; TX = 20.8%)

More Context

- Much of the growth is natural increase, not immigration
- RGV has the youngest age structure in the state that has the second youngest age structure in the U.S.
- The vast majority of the population is Latino (89.87%)
- Poverty rates in the Valley are extremely high
- People outside the region often have negative perceptions of the Rio Grande Valley
 - It is often seen as an area with “uncontrolled borders”
 - It is often seen as an area of violent crime because of violence in Mexico
 - Both of these perceptions are demonstrably false
- Internal conflicts within RGV inhibit regional cooperation
 - “Every day is Friday night”

The Results of the Initial Collaboration

- A new university formed from the assets of two legacy institutions, a regional academic health center, and the Permanent University Fund (PUF)
 - The University of Texas at Brownsville
 - The University of Texas Pan American
 - UTHSCSA Regional Academic Health Center
 - A \$500 million PUF/UT System investment
- With UT Austin, the first Texas university to combine a medical school with a general academic institution
- A “distributed” university, one that belongs to the entire region rather than to any one community

Community Expectations: A University

- That unites the entire Valley
 - The issue of the administration building
 - The issue of the mascot
- That enhances student success
- That provides educational opportunities that will keep students in RGV
- That leads to expanded health care in the region
- That is an engine for economic development
- That does research on problems confronting RGV
- That is affordable and accessible

Challenges

- External
 - “Every night is still Friday night”
 - No culture of philanthropy
 - The value of education is not universally understood
- Internal
 - Distances between campuses
 - Ensuring equity in course offerings/program development
 - Athletics
 - Many of the same faculty and staff are the same but are being asked to do things in entirely different ways

Opportunities

- External
 - A rapidly growing, very young population
 - An emerging leadership that has a Valley-wide perspective
 - Growing wealth in the Rio Grande Valley
 - Much enthusiasm for the new venture
- Internal
 - Faculty and staff are willing to try new things (ex.: competency-based education)
 - The capacity for a significant amount of faculty hiring
 - The support of the UT System and PUF (\$500 million)

WE WILL **BUILD** OUR FUTURE

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS **RIO GRANDE VALLEY**