

**Case Statement**  
**Abigail Perkiss**

On October 29, 2012, the New Jersey coastline was struck by a devastating storm. With echoes of Katrina swirling through the public imagination, the state braced for inevitable destruction. Hurricane Sandy bore down on the state for two days, leaving extensive and long-lasting damage in its wake. Ultimately, Sandy resulted in 159 deaths, tens of thousands displaced, and, as of 2013, an estimated \$37 billion in damage statewide.

Two months later, I received a phone call from Dr. Katherine Scott, Assistant Historian, then-secretary of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR). The organization was interested in partnering with a New Jersey oral historian to support the development of an oral history project to document the storm and its aftermath in the state. A close friend from graduate school, Scott had thought of me and wondered whether I might know of anyone who was interested in pursuing such a project. As it happens, I said, I would welcome the chance to do it myself.

This phone conversation in December 2012 gave way to a series of collaborative institutional partnerships that came together to develop, organize, and sustain a multi-year undergraduate public history project and a longitudinal oral history project documenting the impact and aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. *Staring out to Sea* has both facilitated and been facilitated by collaborative relationships between OHMAR, Kean University, the Tuckerton Seaport Museum, and Richard Stockton College. As Scott and I wrote in an article for *The Public Historian*, currently under review, these relationships have not only helped to bring public history to a wider audience; by making the cultivation of institutional partnerships an organic component of doing public history, they teach students the myriad benefits associated with expanding professional networks of practitioners.

**1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?**

In short, I think that these relationships and partnerships are best developed through personal and professional relationships and by proactively reaching out to local and state umbrella organizations that tend to be plugged into related work and activity.

The idea for *Staring Out to Sea* was born out of these personal and professional connections. Scott and I are good friends from graduate school, and she was, at the time, also the Secretary of OHMAR, an organization of which I was an active member. She knew of my prior work in oral history and thought that I might be aware of such work taking place in the New Jersey community

After determining that the best way to develop an oral history project on such time-sensitive material with limited resources would be through the classroom, I worked with administrators at Kean to put together a public history seminar that would run that spring (six weeks after the original phone call). The class would serve both as an oral history bootcamp for students and a space to collaboratively develop the framework for the project. And at semester's end, students would travel to Washington, DC to present their early findings at the 2013 OHMAR conference.

As we begun to develop the project, I reached out to the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, the state arm of the NEH, to discuss the possibility of support for the work. Though I was (at that time)

unsuccessful in applying for state grants, the NJCH did connect me with Nick Wood, then-project coordinator for the Jersey Shore Folklife Center at the Tuckerton Seaport and Baymen's Museum. Wood had been developing a list of personnel across the state working on storm-related initiatives, and he invited me to join his Stories from the Storm Advisory Committee, a group of scholars, government agencies, and public history practitioners across the state who would work to develop what Wood termed a "holistic and academically rigorous view of New Jersey's post-Sandy recovery." In the summer of 2013, I worked with Wood to oversee internships for three of the undergraduates in my oral history seminar, who worked at the Seaport to develop a public exhibition on the storm's impact. That fall, Scott and I traveled to Oklahoma City with those three students for a roundtable discussion on those institutional partnerships at the Oral History Association annual meeting.

A year later, in the summer of 2014, Dan Royles, another friend from graduate school who was working as a Visiting Assistant Professor of History at Richard Stockton College and who knew about the project, reached out to see if he might work with the students in his upcoming Digital Humanities class to develop a prototype website for the project ([www.staringouttosea.com](http://www.staringouttosea.com)). Royles and I are now applying for a new round of grants through the NJCH and the New Jersey Historical Commission, to build out the website and conduct follow-up interviews with all of the original narrators.

These evolving partnerships have been and continue to be vital to the success of the project.

- 2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?**

I think these projects can serve all of these purposes simultaneously, and can also take us in unexpected directions. My goal in approaching this project was two-fold. First, I thought it would be a great learning experience for my students, most of whom were history majors and trying to figure out what professional opportunities existed outside of teaching. Second, I thought that it would be a site of empowerment for the narrators, giving them a chance to tell their stories and to make sense of their experiences. As a corollary, I also thought that it would be good for the university, positioning Kean to have a central role in documenting the story of the storm and serving as a central clearinghouse for the stories. What I did not realize then was just how transformative the experience would be for those six students, allowing them to see themselves as scholars and offering them a way to reframe their own experience with the storm.

- 3. For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?**  
N/A
- 4. What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?**

I think that this balance is not only possible, but also critical for the success of the project. In addition to learning the practice and process of oral history, prior to diving into project development, my students and I spent several weeks studying the historical links between oral history and natural disaster; the anthropological/psychological/sociological issues that can arise in the interview process, especially when the subject matter is so sensitive; and the story of the storm itself. Without that background, I question whether my students – and I – would have been adequately prepared to go into the field and conduct these interviews with any degree of confidence and competence.

**5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?**

I think that success should be evaluated based on the original goals of the project developers. If your goal is student-directed (a great learning experience, hands-on training, etc...), then perhaps student evaluations and evaluations from project personnel are a good gauge of success. If the goal is in the end-product, then evaluation may come by way of surveying the community partners and the consumers of the project (in this case, for example, those visiting the website). If the goal is community development, then the best way to evaluate success may be through debriefing with those involved. If we're establishing criteria, I believe that the most important consideration should be what exactly is being measured.

**6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are *driven* by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?**

I think it is, yes, so long as student training remains a fundamental part of the partnership. If students are thrown into these situations without the proper understanding of context and without the appropriate skill set, the final product becomes secondary to the learning process. But if these learning laboratories are developed as true classroom-experiential partnerships, I believe that the outcomes can be as measurably beneficial to the community partners as the experience is for the students (and, by extension, the universities).

### **Courtney Tollison, Ph.D. Case Statement**

In my experience, the task of finding community partners has been rather organic. Like-minded people with similar objectives and interests tend to congregate, and many of the partnerships in which I have been involved have arisen from informal discussions. I have also engaged in a variety of other methods to develop community partners. Sometimes writing an op-ed in the local newspaper helps create connections. More often than not, community projects that wish to involve an undergraduate intern or cooperate with a university more thoroughly will frequently seek to develop that relationship by approaching the university.

1. In my opinion, the objective of these partnerships needs to focus on bringing some benefit to the community. I believe strongly that the primary focus should not be the experience for the student; too often in those instances, others who are not committed primarily to that students' education will lose focus. The student also knows the difference between a project created for his/her benefit and a project that has extensive buy in and enthusiastic support from the community. In my experiences, the student tends to give more towards a project and take more pride in the work and the outcome when he/she becomes an important, contributing member of a group working together towards a common goal, and one that will contribute to something much larger than himself/herself.  
When the purpose of a project is primarily to provide an experience for a student, without significant benefit beyond that objective, the difference between writing a paper for a traditional classroom assignment and working in a community-university project significantly decreases. In both of those instances, the primary objective is the experience for the student. Public history oriented community projects are intended to provide an engaged learning experience beyond that of a traditional classroom-based assignment. In the end, in my opinion, the focus on the project results in a deeper and more enriching learning experience for the student. When the focus is not on the student, the student benefits.
2. Partnerships between universities/university entities and the community can often suffer from clashing cultural norms. Academia is a world distinct from the "real world," with differing operating schedules and resources, and when academia mixes, misunderstandings can develop (this is also, however, why these partnerships can be so successful!). Such problems can be minimized by meetings early in the process in which common objectives, timetables for deliverables, and expectations are established. Frequent communication can also mitigate such issues.
3. Preparing a student to perform well in a community related project can be an involved process, and one that needs to be uniquely focused on that student's project. When a professor has a class full of students engaged in these projects, that can become very time consuming. I limit my public history course, which involves an internships experience, to ten students, and have a list of sources that focus on the local history of our area. I generally try to communicate with the student's community mentor regarding how the student will develop a knowledge base that will enable him/her to contribute productively, and adjust from there. Brainstorming sessions in which the professor, student, and if possible, the community mentor walk through the project can be incredibly productive, but time consuming. In class, I typically take time at the beginning to check in with the students on how their internships are progressing, and use this time to suggest further avenues of exploration that could be of benefit to the student in that internship. I like doing this in class because I like to create a setting in which the students learn to support

each other by exchanging ideas, suggesting sources to each other, etc. When most of them are focused to some extent on local history, this can be very valuable. I encourage my upper level undergraduates to function as graduate students who (in an ideal world) share information, suggest sources for each other, etc. I want the students to become part of two learning communities during the semester: one in the classroom and one at their internship site.

4. A set of criteria could be valuable in assessing objectives and the success or lack thereof of outcomes. That list could include an assessment of benefits to the community, the student, the university, the class, the individuals/families involved in the work/activities of the project and, in some cases in which the individuals whose lives and experiences are being studied/honored become involved with the project, such as a World War II oral history based documentary, the benefit to them and their families. It could also include questions such as: were project objectives met? were they achieved on a timely basis? did the university and community partner develop a mutually beneficial relationship that will yield future opportunities for other students? Success can be difficult to measure; sometimes communities do not track data on visitation, usage, etc. and in most cases, the level of personal satisfaction from involvement in a project that contributes something meaningful to the history of a community and its identity cannot be quantified.
5. The "Course Objectives" section of the syllabus for my public history course, which involves a community-based internship, states that this course involves engaged learning and service learning. My university defines engaged learning as a "a problem-solving, project-oriented, experience-based approach to the liberal arts. Engaged learning encourages students to develop creative ways to put classroom theory into practice and to take a more active role in their education through internships, service learning, study abroad, and research. "  
(<http://www.furman.edu/sites/marketing/standards/Pages/PositioningStatement.aspx>) This type of approach is based on the Chinese proverb, "'Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand.'" Like most institutions, the university also values its relations with the local community, and seeks to nurture those relationships. We have an active corps of students who volunteer their time at community centers, schools, retirement homes, and other places more traditionally associated with service learning. The university views internships in which students become actively engaged in a project in which they will contribute approximately 100 hours of time over the course of a semester as service learning. The description of service learning I use on my syllabus is taken from Indiana University:

Service learning assumes that:

- People learn best by both studying and doing.
- that universities have a responsibility to work with the communities surrounding them.
- that there are needs in the community that can be served by university students
- that the community contains a great deal of wisdom
- that students can gain that wisdom as they work in the community
- that students will only know what they have learned if they systematically reflect on what they are doing

(<http://facet.iupui.edu/events/leadership/2006%20Syllabi/ALL/Public%20History.pdf>)

I believe it is not only possible but of great benefit to develop university-community projects that emanate from ongoing partnerships. In ongoing partnerships, much of the start up tasks involved with beginning not only a new project but also a new relationship with a community partner are minimized. Furthermore, in ongoing partnerships, the university and community can be more strategic about their goals, and are able to engage in projects well beyond the semester. Although developing these partnerships can be complex and often fall prey to bureaucracy and limited budgets, when developed well they can be of great benefit for all involved.

### **Case Statement – Daniel Vivian**

I have served as director of the public history program at the University of Louisville since 2010. I participated in a class project that involved collaboration with a community partner as a graduate student at the University of South Carolina and have since undertaken several such projects with my own classes. I see relationships with community partners as valuable but believe that public history faculty and staff at partner organizations/institutions would benefit from guidelines concerning their development, maintenance, and use. Relationships with community partners take time and effort to develop. Staff at museums, historical societies, and other institutions are generally enthusiastic about working with academic programs, but the goals of such collaborations are often left vague and ill defined. These circumstances limit their utility and create conditions conducive to conflict. Class projects undertaken in collaboration with outside organizations and institutions are pedagogically useful but can be challenging to manage, are often of questionable value to partners, and may require post-semester labor to make acceptable. Determining how students should be evaluated, especially where group work concerned, is another concern.

Put simply, partnerships beg for closer scrutiny and refinement. Although a standard part of public history teaching and practice, they merit critical attention commensurate with their role in the field. I am particularly interested in seeing this group explore several questions. First, how do staff at partner organizations/institutions view interaction with public history programs? Their perspectives are generally missing from discussions among public history educators, yet they are obviously central to questions about the purpose and utility of collaborative endeavors. Second, what examples of particularly successful collaborations can be identified, and what underlying factors explain them? Is it possible to develop a set of best practices that can be disseminated for general use? Third, what methods hold potential for giving class projects involving work with community partners greater rigor and outcomes that consistently benefit partners? How can such projects be made easier to manage and more useful to students and partners?

1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?

Most partnerships, in my experience, grow out of informal interaction between faculty and professionals. They can certainly be initiated through direct contact. Maintenance requires clear and forthright communication, with discussion of expectations, goals, and concerns. Scope should be considered in deciding whether the responsibilities of each party can be managed informally or if something akin to a memorandum of agreement may be advisable. When problems arise, clear and direct communication should be the rule. Each party should recognize the goals of the collaboration in defining responsibilities, discussing prospective projects, and addressing problems.

2. What is and should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, useable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?

Introducing students to the conditions of professional practice and providing training that cannot be supplied through traditional assignments are key goals. Providing useful products and services for partners should also be an aim. “Civic engagement” and “service” seem too nebulous to be of value. Although these terms are in vogue within and without the academy, the organizational and pedagogical goals of academic programs and community partners require greater specificity.

3. N/A

4. What is the best way to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?

This is a challenging question. In general, the amount of background reading and instruction will vary depending on the project involved and what it is expected to yield. General study of public history practice and theory will be useful, but literature and discussions relevant to the major assignments will be essential. A class developing an interpretive plan for a historic site, for example, will benefit from readings on interpretation, audiences, and the histories to be interpreted.

5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can we establish some criteria to evaluate this?

Students, faculty, and staff with partner organizations should all participate in evaluating collaborations. Criteria should be set at the outset, at least generally, and referred to in conducting final evaluations. Reflective papers tend to be useful for students and illuminating for instructors. Partners should speak frankly and honestly about whether the collaboration fulfilled their aims.

6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are *driven* by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?

I am skeptical about making partnerships a major focus of any curriculum. The obligations that would be expected of partners and the university's responsibility toward students make it difficult to envision how such a program would work. Moreover, what would partners gain? Why would they want to rely heavily on class projects for programing, exhibits, and the like?



## **Debra Brookhart**

As a student in a public history master's program, I enjoyed the benefits offered by a variety of internships and community partnership opportunities. Though I gave little thought to how these partnerships came about, I understood the necessity of cultivating these relationships and using them to gain practical experience while building a resume. The internships provided me with a direction, several mentors, and ultimately, my first job in the field. I was not alone – nearly half of the students I entered the program with accepted full-time positions from one of their internship sponsors before, or shortly after, graduation. While I don't consider that a normal occurrence, it does suggest that community partnerships offer lasting benefits for both the student and the sponsor. It also reinforces the idea that these partnerships offer benefits to students that cannot necessarily be obtained through classroom instruction.

Four years ago, I became my organization's first archivist and found myself in a position to partner with the same public history program I graduated from. My primary thoughts were probably a bit mercenary – I have a small staff and wanted a graduate intern to help move projects forward. Having been an intern, I also wanted to offer someone else the same opportunities given to me while providing a service to my company. In order to do that, however, I needed to convince my organization of the value of the partnership. That meant suggesting tangible ways an internship program would directly benefit the company (a veterans service organization, not an archival institution). Because of my prior experience with an internship program, I was able to offer a convincing argument for the partnership. We are now in our second year of a partnership that has worked well for both us and our students.

## **Key Themes and Questions**

1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?

I find the historical community within Indianapolis relatively small and the public history program is very active in the community. The partnerships have developed from long-standing relationships between the professors and organizations/individuals within the history community. I think this kind of involvement is crucial to developing and maintaining partnerships. Word of mouth is a powerful tool.

Ongoing communication is necessary for a partnership to be successful. Each party should have a clear understanding of the expectations and the desired outcomes. While I came into the partnership with an idea of how it worked, I had never been on the sponsor end of the program and think some clear best practices might have helped me early in the process. The community partner should have an understanding of their role in the student's education. It not only helps them provide a better experience, but it also offers some direction as to the kinds of projects/opportunities they can make available.

2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our community?

I think the purpose of projects and partnership like this should encompass all of the mentioned components. I can honestly say that my first job in the field is a direct result of my public history internship. The hands-on experience obtained is valuable, legitimate experience that can and should enhance a resume. My public history professors guided me academically and provided a solid foundation, but my internship mentors guided me to my chosen specialty.

As a client, I need a usable end product. I cannot justify the training and cost of sponsoring student (or group or students) to my company without providing clear benefits for the company. For me, partnering with the local university satisfies several goals. 1) I get the opportunity to mentor a student as I was mentored. 2) My company obtains graduate-level experience at a lower cost while providing a service within the local community. 3) I get a usable end product that benefits my staff, volunteers, and researchers. In the best of circumstances, the needs of all parties are considered and satisfied.

One problem I have seen is an over reliance on these partnerships. While not ideal and problematic in a lot of ways, I've known institutions that relied on interns to keep their doors open. I think there needs to be some caution exhibited when choosing partners and some guidelines to prevent them from becoming over reliant.

3. For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?

As an employee of a non-profit community organization, I am looking to satisfy the needs of my organization. Although I have ulterior motives of providing guidance to students and supporting the growth of my field, my first priority is my organization and its goals. I'm looking for a relationship that can help me promote those goals. Because I have prior experience with the program I partner with, I contacted my former professor about creating a partnership without much concern that I, as well as the student, would reap the benefits. I'm not sure I could have been a successful advocate within my company had it not been for my previous experience. Ultimately, what I look for in a partnership is a usable end product, whether it's the creation of a finding aid or the installation of an exhibit.

4. What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?

5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?

It is valid to attempt to establish criteria for evaluating the success of a program. Follow up at the end of the project may be the most valuable way to judge the success and I think there are some very broad ways this might be measured:

- What were the students' reactions to the end product as well as the exercise itself? Did they feel they contributed to something worthwhile or was it busywork to get a grade?
  - Was the project successful and completed on time?
  - Did a community partner benefit and are they willing to do it again?
6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are driven by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?

I think community partners can be successful learning laboratories. They are in the best position to provide instruction that students can never receive in the classroom. Students receive instruction and support as well as training in a variety of specialized fields under the umbrella of Public History. Community partners may not need this kind of arrangement to operate, but they can and do benefit from the experience, ideas, and insights of students in the field. There is a time commitment, but I find the support I've received from my students has outweighed the time I've spent training them.

## **What happens when you are too successful? Developing a new model of community involvement at Arkansas State University.**

By Edward Salo, PhD.

Assistant Professor of History, Arkansas State University  
Historic Preservationist

In 1999, Arkansas State University established the Arkansas Heritage Sites Office to work through the National Scenic Byways program, and assist in preserving and promoting the natural and cultural heritage in the region. The University leadership saw this as a means to provide economic growth for the region, and an educational laboratory for students at ASU and throughout the region. That year, the Office acquired the Hemingway-Pfeiffer Museum and Educational and two years later the city of Tyrone donated the historic property that became the Southern Tenant Farmers Museum (opened 2006). The Office also received the Lakeport Plantation in Lake Village (opened in 2007) and the Johnny Cash Boyhood home in Dyess, Arkansas (opened 2014). For each of these properties, the pattern was the same: the university acquired the property, oversaw its restoration and development of the interpretation plan, and continued to manage the site.

Because of the success of the Arkansas Heritage Sites Office in taking these historic sites, obtaining funding to rehabilitate them, and then operating them as historic sites, the Arkansas Heritage Sites Office has become the “go to” person when anyone in the state has a historic site that needs to be preserved. However, because of budgetary and staffing restrictions, the Arkansas Heritage Sites Office has reached its capacity to manage sites. Yet, we still get requests for help and are charged with assisting the community. To continue to serve the needs of the region, we have to rethink how we conduct partnerships.

The question is how do we change our *Modus operandi* from taking ownership of sites and operating them to one that is more about empowering the communities to operate the sites. We need to change our strategy from managing the sites to teaching the community how to manage their sites. In the Spring 2015, I am using one of the Heritage Studies PhD seminar to develop a management plan for the Wolf House, a 1820s-era courthouse, that has been restored, but needs a management and interpretation plan.

### **1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?**

I am lucky enough not to have to search for partnerships, because of the success of our Arkansas Heritage Sites program; we have communities coming to us for help. While it is easy to find the partners, I think the most important aspect of creating the relationships is developing the network and the trust. While finding the relationships is not difficult, we have to foster them. I think that we should be training out students to become imbedded into the communities they are working with so that they can better understand the needs of the community.

While we have many groups asking for our help, we also need to also be on the outlook for opportunities to make contact and develop relationships that can develop into partnerships and projects. For example, on the way to our local public library I saw the local Jewish Temple that happens to be an excellent example of mid-century modern architecture. I decided to contact them about using the building as for a historic preservation field school. They agreed and also asked our class to assist them in preparing information for an online project overseen by the public library. This opened the door for us to partner with the library for other projects.

2. **What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?**

I think that while the projects provide students with hands on experience, the real importance of the projects is civic engagement and providing usable products for the community. Most of the hands-on skills that the projects provide the students can be done with “dummy projects” or simulations in class. However, the students and the community both grow from real projects. The students can see how it is to interact with real people with real concerns. The students have to develop the diplomatic skills that are necessary to navigate the rough parts of Public History. Also, using the real life projects allows for the communities to understand how the university can help them in other ways. To me, one of the most important aspects of a university is civic engagement, Public History projects are just one of the many ways that we can help the community. Furthermore, our projects show how other parts of the University can help. For example, for our plan for the Wolf House, we are suggesting that the Arkansas State University’s Disaster Preparedness Program conduct a Threat Assessment of the property as part of the planning.

3. **For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?**

N/A

4. **What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?**

Gaining a balance providing students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience is always difficult especially when dealing with groups that have political agendas. Many times the groups that are in need of assistance are viewing the public history project as a means to gain some political capital, and the students might not realize all of the things that are occurring. It is important for the professor to use more senior students (i.e., PhD students or second year MA students) as

team leaders so that they have some degree of responsibility, but the professor must serve as the barrier between the students and the parties. The students might show some desire to help on a personal level, but they should never feel undue pressure in deciding on the local politics of a project.

**5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?**

I think every project will have its own measure of success and failure. Some projects will have criteria for success. If a community wants to restore an old building to be used a community center, then the restoration and opening of the building can be viewed as a success. However, many times our collaboration with community partners goes further than that. Just because a project produces a NRHP nomination does not make it a success if the community feels no closer to the project. It is my opinion that projects with community partners are successful when they engage the community in a new way. If a survey does not identify any NRHP eligible buildings, but does get older people in the community to share their stories then it is a success. I do not think we can set up criteria to evaluate this, as much as just

**6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are driven by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?**

I think that position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance as long as both partners are part of the planning and execution process. Furthermore, that all of the community partners are equal partners with the university and recognize their role as leaning laboratories. I think about how small hospitals and medical schools to train doctors and provide rural health care have used clinics in rural areas of the South. Our role is no different. We as public historians are not exploiting these communities as learning laboratories. I think we are providing services they need/want and they are providing opportunities for our students. To me it is a perfect mix as long as the relationship between the partners and the university stays at an equal level.

**Elizabeth Fraterrigo**

Associate Professor of History, Loyola University Chicago

Graduate Public History Programs at Loyola: MA in Public History; combined MA in Public History/ MLS with Dominican University; Joint Doctoral Program in American History and Public History

NCPH Working Group Case Statement

Balance. Tension. Trade-offs. These are the words that resound in my ears as I plan courses around projects with community partners. What's best for the community partner, given the needs of the organization and the nature of the project? What's best for the course, given its objectives—project A or B? Can we realistically undertake all the phases of a project in a semester, or just one part? What, if anything, am I willing to compromise in order to make room for the specific knowledge and time needed to execute the project? If we undertake X, we can't do Y. (*In what other ways can I teach students about Y?! It's so hard to give something up!*) What's best for the students as a group? For each individual, given that each person brings a unique blend of ability, expertise, interest, and career goals? The answers to these questions for one semester, one group of students, or one project are never quite the same the next time around. Thus the constant set of choices to be made.

Not only must one engage in this situational decision-making, it also seems clear when thinking about teaching, that the best way to undertake a project if one were to do so away from the classroom is not necessarily the most useful way to proceed when trying to use it as a teaching tool. Public history pedagogy adds another layer to every project. I look forward to engaging with my peers in a productive dialogue about that added layer: how we go about striking a balance among the needs of partners, projects, and students; managing the tension between pedagogy and practice; and figuring out what trade-offs we are willing to make in the process.

1. *How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?*

In my experience there is no single best scenario for forging partnerships. In some instances, I have developed class projects in response to requests for assistance from potential community partners. In other cases, I have approached potential partners and identified possible tasks that students might undertake as a class project, and then worked with those partners to identify a scope of work that serves course-needs while producing a worthwhile outcome that justifies the community partner's investment of time and resources in facilitating the project. Comparing these two scenarios, the first partner has a more immediate need in terms of the desired outcome or product. But both have similar needs in terms of the elements necessary for a productive relationship with our public history program. Hallmarks of a healthy partnership include mutual respect and open communication between academic and community partners; the opportunity for both partners to have a voice in framing the project; and a clear understanding on the part of the community partner that the joint endeavor is meant to serve the dual purpose of graduate training and the creation of a useful product. One thing (among others) that

strikes me as the potential for an unhealthy partnership—struggling organizations that rely on such partnerships for survival.

*2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?*

It seems to me that the purpose is definitely all three, but each of these goals does not receive equal weight, even if all are in play, in every project or partnership. What constitutes a useful, hands-on experience for students in one semester might not always translate into a completed, finished product for a partner/client. It is important to be realistic at the beginning of a partnership about what can and cannot be accomplished in the confines of one semester. It is also important to convey to students how their work, if only a part or a phase of a project, fits into the larger project as well as the overall mission of the community partner.

*3. For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?*

n/a

*4. What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project?*

This is the perennial challenge. One possible approach, if room exists in the curriculum for students to take elective courses, is to develop a special “advanced” course designed around a project that builds on what students learn in more broadly-focused, required courses. Otherwise, course readings and discussions will by necessity be somewhat tailored to the needs of the project. Whenever possible, I try to make the partner institution a centerpiece for instruction, so that even if students are focused in their project work on one aspect of its operations or programs, we can use the organization as a case study that links to other course themes as well.

*Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?*

This becomes a question of managing human resources as much as managing expectations. In our program, new students are often intermixed with second-year students. New students typically enter with a range of public history experiences and gain more practice through internships, volunteer work, or paid employment. Taking into consideration past volunteer, internship, and work experiences can help in structuring groups for project-based coursework. This of course raises the issue of how best to capitalize on students’ strengths while enabling other students to rise to the occasion and develop new capacities. At the same time, managing community partners’ expectations about what constitutes the end-of-semester product is equally important. Many projects, because of the compressed schedule of a



semester, invariably require post-semester polishing, an additional team of students to work on implementation, etc.. Being clear upfront about what phases of work can be undertaken in the space of one semester and planning together for subsequent phases—e.g. through internships, a second semester-long course, a supervised team of graduate students continuing after semester's end, or work to be undertaken by personnel at the partnering institution—can help community partners take the steps they need to take ownership and make use of the outcome of a class project.

*5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?*

This is a good question, and while I don't have a definitive answer to the first part, a few points seem worth considering. First, how would we define failure? What I mean is that even if best-laid plans go awry, a project may still have much pedagogical value. Public history education involves more than facilitating students' acquisition of skills necessary to generate a particular product or outcome; it also means preparing them to engage with integrity and dexterity in an often difficult, contested process. In that regard, a project that encounters pitfalls, from conflicts among stakeholders about desired outcomes, to interpersonal conflicts among students in a teamwork environment, to any other number of potential challenges, may still provide students with valuable "lessons learned" for future projects and collaborations. Second, when is success best measured? I often hear anecdotally from former students now employed in the field that they find themselves drawing on knowledge or experience gleaned from a class project, but that value is not always immediately apparent to them at the end of a semester. I wonder, too, if partners might evaluate the utility of a partnership or its outcome differently after some time has elapsed. Perhaps the initial phase of a project completed by students helped inform subsequent decisions, thus having a positive impact that becomes more pronounced with the passage of time. Third, might "success" look different to different players—students, public history educators, community partners, their constituents?

All that said, while success might be difficult to measure, I do think it would be useful to identify the elements of effective partnerships and applied projects that we agree are worth striving to achieve. Students have an opportunity to provide feedback about projects in an end-of-semester evaluation. Community partners typically provide feedback less formally, in follow-up conversations or communications. It would be useful to think more systematically about evaluation from the perspective of the community partner, which would certainly inform planning and development of subsequent projects.

*And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are driven by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?*

Yes, but the issue raises many questions. On what basis would one community organization be selected for partnership over another? In today's world of diminished resources, many organizations would benefit from the support and assistance such a relationship could provide. What sort of power dynamics might arise, depending on the size and composition of the community partner? A large metropolitan museum may stand on equal footing in a partnership with a university program in ways that a small,

cash-strapped historical society might not. How would roles and responsibilities in such a partnership be arranged so that the relationship remained a true collaboration? It strikes me as quite probable that well-intended actions might be misperceived in a relationship where the balance of power is skewed from the outset. Open dialogue and a careful planning process would be critical to a mutually-beneficial partnership. An MOU or other document that outlined roles and responsibilities, desired outcomes, and benchmarks for success would be essential, as well as a clear timeline for revisiting the nature and structure of the relationship in order to undertake course-correction as needed.

## **Elyssa Ford**

As the director of a public history program at Northwest Missouri State University and as a graduate student in the PH program at Arizona State University from 2005-2009, I have experience on both the student and the professorial end of this equation, though these are both on the academic side and not from the community partner standpoint. I also am on the board of a “trying to be developed” museum in my hometown and have been thinking about how to establish a relationship between that group and a PH Master’s program at a nearby university. Because of this, I do have interests in coming at this question from both sides – the academic program and the community partner. However, most of my experience and my most frequent interactions are and will be as a teacher in the classroom trying to arrange projects and experiences for my students.

NWMSU is in a very small town, and the program I direct is a minor program for undergraduate students. Both of these present a number of challenges. In a small town, for instance, there are few potential community partners. In fact, there is only one museum in town, and it is quite small and without professional or even full-time staff. In addition, there is little division at times between the school and the museum; two board members (three including myself) serve on the museum board, two other board members used to or currently work at the university, etc. I also work with a different group of students than many PH programs because I work with undergrads who only take two dedicated PH classes, and the one class that often involves an exhibit in the local museum usually includes half PH minors and half non-minors who don’t even know what PH or museum work is. While I say this is a different group of students, it is something that faculty (and community partners) will encounter increasingly in future years as schools have been expanding their PH programs from primarily just graduate programs. In case anyone wants or needs to see how I approach this in my class, I have attached my course syllabus and schedule.

## **Key Themes and Questions**

### **1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?**

Use your networks! But this also has to be a personal, individual relationship that is forged between the program and community partner. What I mean is that, just because a relationship is established, that doesn’t mean that it automatically will carry over when there is a change in personal. Both sides need to go out, connect, and discuss to make sure that relationship will still meet the needs of each. Also, don’t forget to use the networks you have within your own field. If you are at a university, what do colleagues know about local institutions to partner with (and vice versa)? What places/individuals might be good potential partners and which may be problematic?

### **2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for**

**a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?**

This may be because I am coming from the academic side, but I think that the central purpose here is to provide experience to the students. My students have used the experiences in the course American Folklife, which I lead essentially as a museum exhibit practicum, to identify future career goals, attain more prestigious summer internships, gain post-graduation jobs, and get into graduate school. Even for those students not in PH, almost all of them enjoyed the experience – whether it was getting to be more involved in a museum or accessing library/collections materials for real, hands-on research.

That being said, I hope that the best partnerships really end up having, if not the purpose, then the outcome, of being all three of these things.

**3. For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?**

I think the value of these relationships can depend on the institution, its size, and its location. For instance, a small museum in a small town with little staff often welcomes and sometimes needs additional assistance and has a lot of projects to offer for students, both individually and as a class. However, smaller institutions also may not have the staff to direct or help guide students, which means that these relationships can be a lot more involved for the academic program (specifically the faculty member instructing the course/internship/program). Regardless, though, I think that most community partners also see these relationships as valuable because they are helping develop the next generations of workers – of museum lovers in my case – people who will work at these institutions, visit them, acknowledge their importance, and fight for their continued presence. For better communication streams, I think it simply needs to be just that – communicate with each other! And, even though it can be hard, it is important to have regular discussions about the projects, how they are progressing, and if the needs and expectations of all three sides (program, institution, students) are being met. Of course the last point is easier said than done, so how do you do this, especially when there are problems, while still maintaining that relationship?

**4. What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?**

I think the theory absolutely is necessary, even for undergraduates, because students will have to engage in that theory to become working professionals, and that material also is essential in informing their work – whether that is for oral histories, historic preservation, or museums. However, faculty also must be cognizant of the student audience and tailor the reading and theoretical level for the level of the students – undergraduate minors need much more direction! There can be a balance, but it is hard to attain during a single semester. It is hard to reach that balance at first, so I think it would be great to

identify some good models and readings that work for others to use as a guide.

**5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?**

In order to measure the success of the project, there has to be established criteria before the project begins, which means open communication between the academic program and the community partner. I am not sure if an exact set of evaluation criteria would work across projects types or classes, but we might be able create some broad, guiding questions (maybe a different set for each group: student, instructor, partner??). In our continued discussion before the conference, I'd like to start creating a set of potential evaluation questions just to see what something like that would like like.

**6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are *driven* by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?**

This definitely can be true, and I think that universities focused on lab schools and hands-on education have a great opportunity to take this more intentional approach. And, this is not really a new idea because there are any number of schools that run their own museums and use them as centers for their students. This great, but it isn't really the perfect model for what we are looking at because it pretty much voids the entire partnership idea. I do think this model is possible with community partners, but it would need a very, very clear discussion at the start of building that relationship, and I think it is something that could not just be born overnight. Likewise, both the academic and community sides would need to think about contingency plans in case the partnership dissolves (for any number of reasons). What would the program do and how would it function with that close tie, and what impact would that have on the partner?

**Emily McEwen**

In September 2014 I began work as a Historic Resource Specialist with Orange County Parks, an expansive public park system featuring over 60,000 acres of regional parks, wilderness preserves, beaches, and historic sites in Orange County, California. I recently completed my Ph.D. in History (research emphasis on Public History) at the University of California, Riverside. Throughout my graduate career, my professional development was greatly enriched from a variety of internships and practicums that were the result of partnerships between the university and history organizations in the greater Riverside community. In my former position as Curator of History at the Mission Inn Foundation & Museum in Riverside, my dual role as a graduate student who was also employed at a local museum naturally led to an informal partnership between the UCR Public History Program and the Mission Inn Foundation, resulting in co-sponsored history programming and internship opportunities for UCR students.

I am eager in my new position with OC Parks to act as a community partner to provide undergraduate and graduate students with work experience in the professional public history arena. As a new professional in the field I do not know exactly where to begin in crafting these partnerships— I have more questions than answers. Currently, the two historical parks where I work utilize few interns and do not have a formal internship arrangement with any area universities, although there are numerous institutions to draw from, many with public history degree tracks. With limited staff, interns are a necessity to complete the backlog of projects. However, I know that as an intern supervisor my time will be greatly constrained and I fear I will not be able to dedicate as much time as I should to student training and discussion.

**How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?**

As a potential community partner, the first step is to clearly define what projects you need interns to assist you with at your site and the specific parameters of the internship. Having experienced this as both an intern and intern supervisor, there is nothing worse than accepting an intern and not having a defined project or goal for her/him to complete. After projects are identified, the community partner should contact regional colleges and universities to initially investigate whether any of the identified projects would work well with the undergraduate/graduate curriculum or if the project could potentially fill a curriculum gap. Being open about expectations on both sides from the beginning is essential, as is maintaining honest communication throughout the project.

Working in the sprawling Southern California region, making those initial university contacts is a bit daunting because there are so many programs to potentially draw from. In others' experiences, is it best to place an open call for interns or work directly with one or two university programs? As someone new to Orange County, I am trying to remind myself that professional networks are built over time and that an essential element of my position is to connect with the region's various educational institutions to brainstorm how we can work together.

**What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?**

Ideally, the purpose of collaborations between academic programs and community partnerships should incorporate elements of each goal listed above. The academic program or community partner, however, will weight some goals more heavily than others and, once again, expectations should be clear from the start. Working within a publically funded park system, I feel strongly that the parks should be utilized as places where students can learn and gain experience. With limited staff, hiring interns in the historical division of OC Parks is being increasingly discussed as the way to complete backlog work. While more robust internship programs will help accomplish many of these projects, the purpose of the program should also fall in line with the core values of education, teamwork, cooperation, and community service outlined in the OC Parks mission statement. To this end, the evaluation of intern projects should not just be based on the quality of the final project and what the intern accomplished for OC Parks. The measure of success should also examine what the student gained from her/his experience and how it aided OC Parks achieve its vision of providing “recreation, education, and inspiration” to the public.

**For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?**

I am looking for motivated, passionate, and independent workers! Yet, realistically, I understand that some students will require more oversight, training, and/or supervision. I want to provide a rewarding public history experience that will hopefully encourage students to continue in the field. Working directly with professors to get a better understanding of student abilities and areas in which each student excels or perhaps might need assistance would go a long way in the planning process. It is important that the community partner outlines their needs and limitations. For example, my position requires me to split my time between two parks, which is part of my weekly routine, but problematic if a student intern is not particularly self-motivated or in need of regular assistance.

Communication is a key component not only at the front end of the collaboration, but throughout the project. Informal weekly updates and debriefs between each party to ensure needs are being met would go a long way to correct issues before they potentially derail the professional relationship or project.

**What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?**

An understanding of the theoretical underpinnings and background literature is essential, especially when engaging in oral history projects or site interpretation. Once again, community partners should outline expectations and craft a defined project in conjunction with the academic program to ensure incoming student interns have the appropriate theoretical or historiographical base before they begin. When I was a new M.A. Public History student beginning a summer internship at the Mission Inn Foundation & Museum, which, at the time, I knew very little about, a central part of my internship requirements was to familiarize myself with the site's historiography. I worked on object/document cataloguing and re-housing, but it was not until later in my internship when I had a better handle on the site's complex history that I was given more interpretive projects to undertake. If the student does not have the necessary background/theoretical understanding before beginning an internship, is it appropriate for the intern supervisor to work with academic coordinator to provide this base as part of the internship?

**How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?**

A loose set of criteria for evaluation could potentially be helpful, but will need to be tailored depending on the organization. For me within the park system, a set of specific criteria and best practices would aid in potentially broadening the scope of what our intern program should be, potentially moving it away from the view that the main purpose of student interns will be to undertake projects that staff do not have time to complete. These criteria could better prioritize the internship program's role within the park system's public service mandate.

**And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are *driven* by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?**

Idealistically, I would love to see the historical division of OC Parks become a learning laboratory for the regional public history programs. In a perfect world this could fuel innovative exhibitions and programs, continually bringing in new perspectives and ideas. However, the flip side to this is that as a learning laboratory, some experiments would inevitably fail or be left unfinished, and there would be a constant stream of new students to train. The potential benefits of creating a "learning laboratory" need to be weighed against my duty to responsibly steward OC Parks' historic resources. Before of this, each project undertaken with an academic program needs to be carefully defined and supervised.



## **Jane Becker**

At UMass Boston, graduate students may elect a concentration in public history as part of the History MA. The requirements specific to the public history track include the two public history core courses, and an internship. I teach the second of the core courses in the public history sequence; this class focuses on the wide variety of interpretive venues, methods and practices of public history. Our topics include the challenges and promise of non-documentary sources that provide important historical evidence for public historians; the venues where public historians do history in public; the wide range of public history's interpretive media; and finally, the relationships between the public and history and historians—the meanings and controversies, and rewards that collaboration inspires and provokes. We pursue this broad agenda through critical review of the literature and best practices; conversations with professionals from the field ; site visits; and experiential learning projects.

In these projects, we ask our students to be historians—to research, analyze and interpret; to collaborate—to listen and respond to the needs of their community partners; and to pursue and reflect on their work in the context of the best practices that we consider in our coursework. Balancing all these demands, without sacrificing fundamental historical research and analysis is quite a challenge for students who may also face mastering a process or medium and learning to work with community partners and fellow students. As instructor, I struggle with questions of pedagogy: how to incorporate a semester-long community-based practicum project into the course as a whole, and create useful deliverables even as students are just learning necessary foundational skills.

### **How should academic partners and instructors find community partners?**

In my earliest experiments with these practicums, I assigned small teams of students to several projects established by local historical organizations, who were eager for assistance. Initially, I pledged that I would partner with “known” professionals and organizations—people with whom I had worked in some professional capacity so that I already had an established working relationship with them, and we could talk openly about expectations and frustrations, and solve problems together. I broke my rule almost immediately, enticed by projects tantalizingly rich in content and application, and desirable partnerships. Although I worked closely with each community partner to structure the project, and define scope and deliverables, some of us had never worked together before, and we had no experience in common as a foundation for our shared expectations and standards. No doubt students experienced this as inconsistent feedback from partners and instructor. The most successful outcomes—for both students and partners—resulted from partnerships with organizations and professionals with whom I had worked collaboratively on prior projects and in several capacities. We shared expectations and standards, and were able to troubleshoot productively.

**What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and service to our communities?**

This is my biggest challenge. I see these practicums as a way to build strong community relationships

that may also offer a platform for the transformative experience of shared historical endeavor. They give our students valuable hands-on experience and practice under the supervision of faculty and sometimes professionals in the field, and ideally, offer historical organizations and community groups the services and expertise of emerging public historians.

Although our partners in these ventures expressed gratitude for work that helped them, at the very least, move some projects along, I was disappointed in the outcomes for our partners, and for our students; I felt they had too many agendas to be successful, and perhaps lacked adequate preparation. How can we balance the needs to train a class of relatively new public history students, while achieving the kind of work that serves the needs of a partnering organization? Do answers to this question lie in pedagogy, project design and goals, or a mutual understanding between the instructor and community partners that identifies specific expectations? Or all three?

Our most successful projects were those where personnel could support at least some aspects of student learning. This support took various forms, ranging from facilitating access to important research materials, offering site and interpretive goal orientations, to providing some necessary technical-skills training to the students in these areas.

**What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important preparation with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner?**

Partnering with an historical organization with professionals who can communicate a clear sense of professional standards and expectations, and respect project schedules provides distinct advantages for both the success of the project and student learning. But some of the most promising endeavors partner students with community members who have no such professional knowledge or expertise. These are the partners who rely on us to scaffold community history projects so that community members and public historians can work together. Moreover, such collaborations offer opportunities to experience the excitement and promise of public history in the community – how can we develop these relationships and projects for the benefit of our community partners, and our students?

One option is to use a model that gives more oversight and involvement to the instructor. I am employing this model in the current semester, leading the entire class as a team to work together on a single project that I have developed with a community partner. I have more supervision of student research, and students have less independence in working with the community partners. But I now have multiple roles—instructor, public history consultant, facilitator, and project manager. The semester isn't over yet, but for obvious reasons I have some concerns that this can be a sustainable model.

A second option lies in reconceiving the placement of practicum projects in the program curriculum. In our curriculum, these practicum projects come in the second course of the public history sequence. Thus, some of the students have only an introductory understanding of public history, and we cannot presume that students come to the class with prior work or volunteer experience. They may take the class in their first year of graduate study, when they have little preparation in research methodology,

historiography, or content area courses. We ask a lot of them in these practicum projects embedded in a core class.

Perhaps we should provide a different kind of practical experience within the core curriculum classes—small, tightly defined tasks that contribute to a larger endeavor may offer the most promise for the newer students of public history and our community partners. Partnering with known organizations and colleagues with whom we have proven experience might establish a “learning laboratory” kind of relationship, where the public history track and the partner build a collegial and supportive partnership over multiple years and projects.

Prepared with the core public history classes and this modest and structured practicum experience, advanced students could enroll in an elective class devoted entirely to a rich field experience with a community partner. This kind of preparation would allow students to devote more to the non-history tasks of the public historian—negotiating and working with teams and community partners, as well as civic engagement, in a field-based elective that also helps them transition from public history students into the role of practicing public historians.

### **Case Statement – Jennifer Dickey**

My first community project upon my arrival at Kennesaw State University in 2008 began because we did not have enough students to fill a class. When only five students signed up for a Museum Education elective course, the course was cancelled, which left those five students in a difficult position. All of them were in their final semester, and they needed one more public history course in order to graduate. Fresh off developing a historic bike tour in another community where I had previously worked, I suggested that we have the students enroll in the internship course and work as a team to develop a historic bike tour for a nearby city, Acworth, which had a vibrant Main Street program. I had worked with some of the city leaders a decade earlier on several preservation projects, so I knew something about Acworth and some of the important people who I knew could help facilitate the project. City leaders were immediately enthusiastic about the project, recognizing that this would supplement their existing driving tour and other interpretive efforts.

The bike tour was a big success. The students conducted research, mapped a route, wrote a script, and delivered the tour to an enthusiastic crowd of more than two dozen cyclists. Along the way they had to present their plan to the city council, which offered unanimous approval and even agreed to provide police support for the tour. The project offered my students a chance to put their research and public speaking skills to good use for a public project and to get a little exercise along the way.

The success of the historic bike tour led to a request from city leaders for our program to conduct an oral history project and to curate exhibitions for a Rosenwald school building and for a downtown rail car museum.

### **Key Themes and Questions**

- 1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?**

It's all about the network. The most successful community partnerships for our program at Kennesaw State University have been those based on personal relationships with local community leaders who have a vested interest in public history and historic preservation. The first project undertaken by my students was initiated by me through a relationship that I had established while working on a National Register nomination in graduate school. The success of our first project, a historic bike tour, led community leaders to contact me for help with future projects, including an oral history project and multiple exhibits. The close connection between this community and the county-wide historical society has led to other projects in the area with other communities.

The relationship should be mutually beneficial—a laboratory for students, but also deliver something of value to the community. As much as it sounds like a prenuptial agreement, it is important to craft a written document that spells out the scope of the project and what the end results should be. A written schedule, budget, and the deliverables should be agreed upon by all parties before the project begins. This helps avert problems of unfulfilled expectations on the part of both parties.

- 2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end**

**product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?**

The projects that my students and I have done in the local community have provided invaluable experience for my students. They have curated exhibits, developed historic tour programs, and conducted oral histories, all of which have added lines to their résumés and helped prepare them to work in the field. Equally important is the service that our program is providing for the communities in which we work—communities that do not have the necessary resources, financial and otherwise, to do the work themselves. An added bonus has been the publicity, both print and television, that our projects have been able to generate. This has been great for the communities and for Kennesaw State University. It has also been useful for my T&P portfolio!

- 3. For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?**

To this I would respond that our program at Kennesaw State University was recently presented with the Preservation Award by Cobb Landmarks and Historical Society, our countywide historical society, so someone thinks that what we are doing is worthwhile.

- 4. What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?**

This is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of doing community-based work, especially at the undergraduate level. I am constantly challenged to “pack in” the necessary theoretical material while making sure that the students get the project completed during a 15-week semester. I try to ensure that the projects that we take on are small and discrete enough that they can be completed within the timeframe allotted. I also make sure that the community partner understands the timetable within which we must work. A goal of our program is that every student who completes it will have had at least one hands-on experience. Most of the students take our “Documentation & Interpretation” class, during which the entire semester is devoted to working on a project. However, the Doc & Interp class is one of several electives, so not all of our students take it. Consequently, I try to embed smaller projects into some of my other classes. For example, students in the museum studies class might work on curriculum to support the traveling exhibit program or help process part of a collection for our in-house history museum.

- 5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?**

In order to assess the success, it is important that all parties understand what the expectations are for the project. This is why it is important to put things in writing so that everyone understands the scope, the budget, and the deliverables. Given that, some basic questions that should be asked are as follows:

Is the community partner happy with the outcome? Has the project fulfilled the original objectives? Have the students learned how to do something related to practice in the field—something that

they can build upon and that will, hopefully, help them get a job?

6. **And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are *driven* by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?**

Absolutely!

### **Jinny Turman Case Statement:**

I have two problems and/or questions that I'd like to raise about the development of best practices for community projects. The first is how to manage overwhelming community interest. Our public history program, still in its infancy, could eventually be in an excellent position to meet the needs of area institutions suffering from a lack of funding and manpower. I wonder, however, whether it is practical or even desirable to serve all of those institutions. I fear that stretching our resources (and myself) too thin might compromise project quality and limit the time I could spend cultivating strong relationships with one or two key community partners in my community.

My second question similarly relates to quality. While teaching a course titled "Community History and Preservation" in Spring 2014 I struggled to balance theory and application. Students in the course worked to provide our local Main Street organization with a body of research that would eventually contribute to a NRHP nomination. They did this by researching the local newspaper, City Data books, and titles/deeds at the county courthouse. In addition, students also organized and hosted a local digital history drive, or "History Harvest," that focused on gathering information about downtown Kearney. (<http://historyharvest.unl.edu/>) Students also worked with the county historical society albeit to a lesser extent. Students and partners generally viewed the event as a success, but because the course demanded extensive research, we pushed the harvest to the final weeks of the semester. Curatorial work thus remained incomplete. The lack of detailed descriptions on individual entries upset some local residents, so I have committed student time in this semester's Museums and Archives class to document curation. I am learning from these experiences and welcome the opportunity to exchange ideas with others about how to properly plan such projects by collaborating with community partners to establish clear goals—and timelines—and to find that balance between theory and application.

### **Key Themes and Questions**

1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?
  - a. Finding partners was easy for me, although I recognize that other institutions may have difficulty with this. Ideally the organizations would approach the university, but some level of outreach may be necessary. Although UNK does not do this, I know of one regional studies program that has online portals through which community organizations can place requests for student projects. Leaving it up to the community groups to approach the university may have certain benefits, including the likelihood that the organization is truly motivated to work with students. As part of my responsibility is to build our public history program, last year I had engaged in some outreach to raise awareness among area institutions. Due to time and money constraints, I've done less of this kind of activity this year. But institutions may find this two-pronged approach useful, particularly if they are just getting started.
  - b. Maintenance is the issue I struggle with most, particularly with organizations in outlying rural areas. I am considering creating a rotating schedule for student projects with area

organizations, but I fear doing so may come at the expense of stronger relationships the history department has built with the organizations in Kearney.

- c. Thankfully I've only had minor issues stemming from student projects. Hence my approach to solving problems involves communication and using those issues as teaching tools. As mentioned above, my students were not allotted enough time to properly curate History Harvest material, and this upset one woman who felt that her items deserved more detailed descriptions. I agreed and explained to her that I would use the error to teach students in the Museum and Archives class about data curation. She seemed satisfied with the response, and hopefully she will remain so once students revisit the collection this March.
2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?
    - a. When I talk to community groups and students about the public history program I typically emphasize all three components. Students need the practical experience to be employable, and most enjoy applying classroom lessons to real-life problems or questions. Community projects fill a need for cash-strapped institutions. Our university and department like the civic engagement aspect of PH, the university because it embodies the essence of "experiential learning" that has been infused into the strategic plan and the department because it makes history seem relevant and fresh. Projects can and should serve all of these needs.
  3. For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?
    - a. I decided to devote significant time to two community partners this year, the Buffalo County Historical Society and Main Street Kearney (now defunct). Both consistently demonstrated openness to partnerships by allowing students to visit their institutions, providing in-class presentations, making recommendations for ways that I can build relationships in the community, and/or hosting interns. Beyond that, I also found people working at those places to be open to fresh ideas. They're not intimidated when classes raise questions about interpretation, exhibitions, or representation. They genuinely enjoy collaboration.
    - b. Having a professor who maintains a presence with the organization can go a long way to build relationships. I have read accounts of community partners who felt abandoned or felt as if projects were left unfinished, as this panel's organizers indicated in the working



group description. Taking the time to meet regularly with community partners and perhaps volunteering, serving on the board, or making regular appearances at events can help to build trust over time. I have regular meetings with the BCHS director to talk about projects and interns. I'm also friends with her on facebook, which helps us to stay connected.

4. What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?
  - a. This is a challenging question! I struggled to find balance during the Community History and Preservation course last spring. I basically created three "modules": one on the dynamics of implementing history projects in small communities (we studied issues related to power, memory, identity, etc); another on historic preservation; and the last one on the History Harvest. The course title reflects the grant that funded my position, so I had to work within those parameters. It felt like an odd mix of concepts although I enjoyed teaching each module. Still, it's not surprising that I ran into the issue of balance between theory and application.
5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?
  - a. History Harvest organizers at UNL and Chadron State (another set of partnerships from last spring) developed a survey to assess student learning outcomes. Still, I have not created any type of evaluation form or survey procedure that could assess the effectiveness of the project from the partner's point of view. A basic questionnaire asking questions related to initial expectations, satisfaction with outcomes, suggestions for future projects, etc would definitely be useful.
6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are *driven* by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?
  - a. Yes, this is possible, and it goes back to cultivating strong and lasting partnerships. Part of that comes with having faculty who are secure and stable, but beyond that, there are certain institutions (Smithsonian, etc) that have partnerships with universities and serve as working "labs." I don't see why this can't be done on a smaller scale. This kind of partnership might warrant the creation of a "strategic plan" that blends specific institutional goals with PH program or course learning outcomes that could remain relevant for five to seven years. Basically it could provide a roadmap or framework for class projects.

### **Kathryn Brunetta**

Over the past year and a half, I have participated in a community/local government partnership between West Virginia University's Masters in Public History Program and the Monongalia County Clerk's Office in Morgantown, West Virginia. As a student working with a new partnership, I have experienced firsthand issues found in academic and community partnerships. Carye Blaney, the Monongalia County Clerk, another intern and I have been trying to find the balance between projects that are useful to the institution as well as to our professional development. The majority of the projects I have worked on are large multi-year projects that cannot get completed within a year only working twenty hours a week. These large projects are also projects that are mainly beneficial to the institution and not our professional development. Since the projects are multi-year, it can be hard to show your skill set to another institution if the project is not completed. I have gained new skills and experiences that will be valuable in future careers in the Public History field as well as the perspective of a student in a community partnership that can be used in the formation or evaluation of future academic and community partnerships. I hope to bring my unique prospective of being a student within a community/local government partnership to this working group.

### **Key Themes and Questions**

1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?

While I was not involved in the initiation of the partnership, I have been actively involved in maintaining the partnership between WVU and the County Clerk's Office. I think in order for the partnership to be beneficial to both parties, the directors of both partnerships should be actively engaged in the projects the students are involved with. While there may be some minor projects that directly benefit the institution and not the students, the majority of the students time should be spent furthering their education and future careers. I think a review at the end of each year between the student and the academic partner should then prompt a discussion between the academic partner and the community partner to ensure that the students are gaining as much as they can academically and professionally from the partnership. If expectations are not maintained a termination of the partnership should be considered.

While working at the Monongalia County Clerk's Office, a majority of my 20 hours a week were taken up by doing what another intern and I called "daily work." This daily work consisted of scanning original documents into the computer, proofing the printed scanned pages, filing the printed pages, mailing back the original documents, filing of fiduciary papers and filing copy requests from fragile books and microfilm. This daily work takes up approximately 15 of our 20 hours a week. With the majority of our time taken up, there does not leave much time to complete the projects we were hired to do. While the scanning of the documents as they come in is a part of the digitization project, it is only a minor part. The county clerk's office holds more than 10,000 records and only everything from 1987 to present is indexed on the computer with the majority of it scanned. This leaves very little time for us to complete projects relevant to both the institution and our academic progress.

When problems arise both the academic partner and community partner should be able to have an open discussion about what is wrong and what is the best way to fix it. The student and their professional and academic development should be put first with the then the benefit to the university and the community. While working we had an issue with an intern. He was not a good fit for the county clerk's office and instead of the county clerk just discussing the problem directly with the director of the program she had me playing interference between them. The majority of the problems that arose from this situation would have been solved if they would have talked directly and openly about the issue instead of relying on messages.

2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?

I believe that the purpose of these types of projects should be mainly focused on the students and what they will gain from it and secondly the idea of civic engagement and offering services to our community. If a student is spending their "extra" time working with a community institution they should be gaining as much academic and professional experience they can from it while also being able to provide their knowledge and services to the community. Students work full time on their studies and for a lot of people they also need a job too. Some students are lucky enough to be paid for their work with these community partners but not all are. If a student is giving their time, they should be able to further both their academic and professional careers as much as possible.

3. For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?

N/A

4. What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?

I think that it is important for students to be informed on the institution they will be working with but they do not have to become an expert before beginning the project. I think that this balance can definitely be done with a class of new public history students. A professor could match a new student with a project based on the work they have done previous. Students can also have a say in what they want to do. This does not have to be a one sided conversation.

5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?

I think that the success and effectiveness of community partner collaborations can be measured by if the objectives of the project were completed. Before a project happens, there should be set expectations by all involved and after if it is completed the effectiveness of the project can be judged by the preset goals. I think that every project has its own criteria for evaluation and success and there cannot be set standard for evaluating them.

6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are driven by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?

My experience at the county clerk's office has shown me that this is possible. This partnership has been driven by the needs of the county clerk's office. The current county clerk, Carye Blaney, has seen the benefit to having public historians working in her office and the special set of skill we bring with us. There is a benefit for both the county clerk's office as well as the students. The only issue that has arisen is finding the balance between helping the county clerk's office and helping the students grow academically and professionally. Since I was a part of the first year this partnership was created it is understandable that there would be some issues. Community and academic partnerships can be community driven while still providing what it should to the students involved, it will just take some planning and may take a few years to figure out.

**Leslie Lindenauer, Western Connecticut State University**

I am in my eighth year of teaching at a comprehensive public university. For a number of years prior to my university career, I worked as a history museum educator and administrator at several museums. I bring to my teaching and scholarship an abiding commitment to and love of public history. For the past couple of years, I have been exploring the potential for an undergraduate concentration and graduate certificate in public history, a function of my curricular goals and student interest. I have had the assistance of two able graduate students who have prepared “environmental scans” and needs assessments. I think I have the support of my Dean. All of this unfolds, however, in the midst of economic and cultural pressures being brought to bear on higher education in general, and on the humanities specifically. The challenges are myriad; I need to articulate my programmatic goals with increased clarity and confidence.

A sizeable percentage of students at my public university must work to offset their education costs, and most of our graduate students are already employed full time; it can be difficult for them to commit to significant fieldwork requirements. Community partners, many of which have only small professional or all volunteer staffs, are concerned about their ability to supervise students, and worry that projects that students begin will never be completed. In addition, I struggle with questions about how can we provide students with the academic training needed to work with partners as wide ranging as immigrant cultural organizations (Danbury, Connecticut is home to a significant Brazilian and Salvadoran population, for example), urban museums, and local historical societies located in homogeneous suburbs. Most recently, I’ve also grappled with units on my campus that feel threatened by another program intent on forming community partnerships; what can we do to effectively articulate the difference between or relationship to career services departments, service learning, community engagement, and professional placement opportunities and internships?

1. Academic and community partners finding each other. The relationship, I think, is as likely to go in one direction as it is in the other; that is, in my experience, community partners have been as likely to approach me as I have been to approach them. Increasingly, it’s clear that the most productive relationships for both parties entails a genuine partnership between professionals, driven by equally balanced curricular goals, student interests, and institutional needs. It may be that partnerships have to be fostered and managed on several fronts, departmentally and across the university to avoid “competition” between campus units and confusion among community partners approached by more than one university faculty member or administrator.

2. Purpose? Multipurposed. Hands-on experience and practice is not only valuable with regard to career development, it’s also at the heart of effective pedagogical strategies and recognizes diverse learning styles. In addition, as universities increasingly recognize their role as a part of a larger community (particularly important for institutions like mine, located in a small city), partnerships can also reflect a commitment to both civic engagement and community service. Moreover, those relationships speak to the university’s responsibility for civic/citizenship education, the link to which is especially strong in public history partnerships. With regard to a useable end product for a client, I suppose that depends on the definition of end product. In addition to assistance with specific on-site projects, partnerships can make collaborative grant applications possible; community organizations have an opportunity to capitalize on academic resources including cross-marketing; long term partnerships can enhance the stature and value of both partners in the public sphere. Regardless of the variety of

definitions, community partners must reap some tangible benefit.

3. Community Partner Goals: As the Executive Director of a small state-wide women's history organization (the only element of my public history experience through which I feel qualified to comment on the question), I looked for students who were excited about field study and recognized its pedagogical assets, enthusiastic about and committed to the subject matter/discipline (in this case women's history), and eager to engage in professional activity that related directly to their academic studies. (Note: It helped that I knew students; I taught on part-time faculty at a local woman's college that ultimately offered my organization office space as well.) Adept, bright, and dedicated students participated in a number of projects central to the organization's mission, including an oral history project, exhibit research, and interpretation for groups.

4. Balancing student needs with partner needs: The more fully integrated the field/community project is in the course curriculum and overall pedagogy, the better, more productive the outcome, I think. The challenge is most acute when students have had little experience with both the subject matter and public history practice. One of the links I've found most engaging (and sometimes most provocative), is to anchor history theory and methodology in discussions of collective identity, memory, and mythology. No matter what the community project entails, what students learn in the field can be applied in the classroom, and vice versa. One hurdle is that faculty (myself included) often have a difficult time ceding control and authority in the learning process; it seems to me that's mandatory in a productive academic/community partnership. Students may have multiple instructors in a course that involves field projects, instructors who need to feel comfortable working collaboratively. I'd argue that it's also important that students reflect on their experience regularly, a recognized facet of service learning. Secondary literature that bridges the gap between academic subject and public articulation helps... The closer the relationship between the instructor and the community partner is, the better able they will be able to identify projects that reflect all of the stakeholders' needs.

5. Measuring success/effectiveness: I suppose that depends on who you ask. The more fully embedded these partnerships are in institutional goals, the more carefully partners will have to develop an assessment tool that reflects diverse objectives. Do we measure academic success using a metric different from the way the community partner measures success? Do the projects reflect and fulfill accreditation goals? Can the partners effectively fundraise based on the outcome of projects? Do projects contribute to enrollment and retention for universities, and enhance user experiences for the community partner? More questions than answers for this and all responses, I'm afraid!

6. I am very interested in the question of partnerships that positions community organizations as learning laboratories for students. (To that end, I am in the process of working with the ED of a local history museum to craft the syllabus for a course on local history that would take place wholly at the museum.) I remain concerned, however, that all the stakeholders gain what they need from the partnership. This requires innovation, collaboration, and commitment to process. If academics and community organizations are collaborative partners, there is a greater chance that projects will serve community needs, and that students will thrive. I worry, however, that on the academic side, P&T committees are not inclined to weigh this sort of innovation and collaboration in their decisions, leaving only tenured faculty with the opportunity and inclination to make the necessary commitment and privilege academic innovation.

**Marla Miller, UMass Amherst**

*Our curriculum at UMass Amherst embeds what we call “field service” in almost every class. Students take the foundation “Intro to PH” course in their first semester, where they get their first taste of working in teams, and working for/with a community partner, in a project scoped to require roughly 2-3 hrs/week from each student, and able to be completed by a team of 2-4 students over the course of about 10 weeks. Projects undertaken by later classes tend to be increasingly substantive, so that the balance shifts from theory toward practice over the course of their 2-year program.*

*I think most of us have found that such projects have an uneven success rate—some work beautifully, but others can go off the rails when mismatched expectations or scheduling problems and delays makes the completion of a solid project on the inflexible timeline of a semester challenging. I believe firmly in the need for PH students to get outside the classroom immediately (and am also invested in the civic engagement goals and other benefits these projects bring to the institution), so I come to this WG hoping to work out specific ways to improve our chances for success (best practices docs?). For instance, I was struck by some astute comments from a graduate student a couple of years ago during an NCPH panel on the fiction of the “client” relationship upon which such projects are built: like many places, we tend to frame these student projects as mini-consultancies, and talk about the community “client,” but the students have very little control over most of the parameters of such collaborations, and are acutely aware of that fact. Among other things, we need to rethink that metaphor.*

1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?

*On one hand, programs are at times under pressure from an array of neighboring community groups eager to use student projects to advance their missions; program directors can be inclined to “share the wealth,” and rotate among these community partners, thus spreading the resources of the university and its students among the (usually many) under-resourced partners in the vicinity. But I’m increasingly wondering whether makes more sense to identify organizations best able to partner well—that is, with enough staff in place to ensure that the partnership is attended to, with sound planning processes in place so that everyone comes to a given enterprise with full in-house consensus around a vision. Working with a smaller number of partners on multi-year efforts might have other rewards as well. In the “spread-the-wealth” model, both students and faculty are sometimes working with people whose habits and personalities aren’t especially well known until the project is under way; likewise community partners might not be entirely familiar with the program’s structure, the (firm) limits of the academic calendar, etc. Thorough familiarity in both directions seems key.*

*Leslie’s comments about potential competition b/w campus units are also well taken, and something we should keep on our collective radar.*

2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?



*Yes, all three, which creates challenges. How are these goals in tension? One of my main aims is fairly intangible—the “hands-on experience and practice” for students (and attendant benefit to their resumes) is of course in part drafting exhibit labels or other practical work, but I am equally interested in seeing what they can learn about the “soft skills” of collaboration: how to plan and run a good meeting, how to respond when someone fails to deliver needed work on time, just how much time really is involved in the relationship-building work necessary in a solid collaboration, etc. That’s not the sort of thing you can really put on a syllabus, but it’s important, and I think especially so in a first-year course where students need to discover whether working with/for public constituencies, and working in teams, is really for them. In many ways, for instructors, it’s more about process than outcome.*

*That said, final product needs to be a real contribution, but I’d hesitate to say “professional,” since these are students early in their training. I try to make sure that partners understand that these are students, not professionals; expectations should be scaled accordingly.*

4. What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?

*There is a big difference between even 1<sup>st</sup>-year and 2nd-year students in terms of skills and sophistication, something I’m not sure we account for well as we plan projects. In the intro course, they are necessarily starting in on field service projects with only a few readings and class meetings under their belts.*

5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?

*I concur with Jennifer Dickey about the value of some sort of “pre-nup,” or MOA. A document that articulates the goals the faculty member, the partner, and the students bring at the outset can also help guide post-project reflection. I’m not sure universal criteria would be possible—seems like these would be very much tied to individual partnerships, but this WG could usefully draft a template for such an MOA.*

6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are *driven* by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?

*Definitely. A seminar I taught last year spent a month “in residence” at a local historical society; each week we looked at some aspect of the collections (it was a material culture course). Along the way, students learned about the administrative, curatorial and conservation challenges faced by the museum staff. The assignment that capped this section of the course asked students, working in teams, to create microexhibits around constellations of their choosing, which gave them some practice at conceptualizing*



*exhibits around themes and drafting label text; the museum is now free to use these as microexhibits on their website. I could see developing a partnership with a local partner that made the institution an ongoing lab for instruction. Students could encounter the same institution in multiple ways, in the course of seminars on different topics—e.g. in “Material Culture” one semester, “Museum and Historic Site Interpretation” the next, and “Historic Preservation” the next.*

Patricia Mooney-Melvin  
Associate Professor of History, Loyola University Chicago

Public history programs have long engaged in community partnerships. These partnerships offer opportunities for students to gain experience in projects that combine their knowledge with community needs and advance the interests of community partners. In the best of projects, the interaction creates new knowledge that advances the discipline, sharpens students' applied abilities, and enhances community partners' agendas. The emphasis on engaged learning when combined with this traditional element of public history training has meant that the dynamics of student engagement has changed as faculty unprepared for the commitment necessary to run projects may have raised false hopes on the part of partner organizations and have sent students relatively unprepared for projects. Additionally, universities have been slow to recognize engaged scholarship as scholarship and remain unclear about the amount of time these projects take to bring to fruition. Both of these aspects of partnership – less experienced faculty and issues related to project time and evaluation – represent challenges that affect community engagement and public history training. Even when faculty are committed to see the process through, other types of balancing acts can ensue. At what point do the students foster a dependent situation in a struggling organization? How are the expectations of the partner organizations managed? Issues such as these are all important pieces of any discussion of pedagogy in public and are ones I am interested in exploring.

1. *How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?*

I have found that there is no direct path to community connections. My most sustained community connection came as a result of being “offered up” by the university to work with a community organization engaged in planning for the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the community's annexation to Chicago. I represented a significant part of the university's contribution to the local historical society. Other times, I made a point of getting to know the major history players in the city (a relatively small urban center when I lived there) because I knew that there was always some suspicion about outsiders moving into the community, especially if from the North. As a result, before I began any community based project, I spent time getting to know the people, joined the organizations, participated in annual meetings, making sure their insights about community engagement were taken into account, etc. so that when potential projects emerged they contacted me as a member of the history community. This tactic broke down barriers and benefitted my students – both in terms of internships and class based projects. Other times, an interested group contacted me and we negotiated a project that would benefit them and the students. And finally, there are times I wished to have my students learn a particular skill and contacted the institution directly.

Regardless of the route taken, there are always going to be challenges because while all parties want the experience to work, as the projects play out, the dynamics of student interaction, shifting needs of the partner organization, partner staff willingness to play cooperative roles, for example, always shape the process. For example, I wanted my students in a museum class to have the experience of exhibition evaluation. I contacted the director of the city's historical museum and asked if this would be possible, i.e., would this project benefit both my students and the institution. The director signed on to the project, selected the exhibit, and then told the staff to be cooperative. One staff member was and the other saw it as a challenge to his professional status. The students completed the evaluation, learned quite a bit, and the institution gathered useful information as this was the first summative evaluation ever undertaken at that institution. My time was spent smoothing the feathers of the agitated staff

member and soothing students' interactions with him, i.e., keeping the process working. While the staff member in question ultimately found the project useful, the more top down approach to staff involvement created as many tensions as opportunities for learning.

2. *What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?*

All three of the elements are important but in any particular project one aspect may outweigh the others. Central to all three, however, is the importance of providing an applied experience for students in the context of a structure that allows them to reflect on the nature of what they have learned in the classroom and on the ground. Such reflection allows them to understand the nature of practice-in-action and how the different aspects of their training come into play. Depending on the arrangement with the group or client, the usable end product may or may not accompany the experience – sometimes by design and other times because the process has not allowed this to happen. Service to community, depending on the group involved, at times, may emerge as the more weighty elements. Regardless, of which element is primary, it is important for all parties – students and the group/client – to understand the nature of the project and its strengths or limitations within the confines of a course cycle if that is the context in which the project is undertaken. If the project will be longer than a semester, then care must be taken to have a plan for completion outside of the confines of the class and that plan should be transparent to all parties.

3. *For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?*
4. *What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?*

The need to provide context and background for the students is important for otherwise the learning takes place in a vacuum. If the project is going to be advanced through a class, I build the instruction, in part, around it so that the structure for learning and its relationship to action is clear. In cases where the project takes place outside of a class setting, the provision of contextual material is still importance because in the end the students need it for a baseline and for the reflective piece at the end.

5. *How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?*

If the project is a class project, I build in both individual and group evaluations into the project and have the students write a reflective practice essay. In this way, I can get a better feel for the dynamics of groups in action and the students have the opportunity to review and assess what they learn. On the community side, the evaluative markers can be less clear. For example, one class project was a PastPerfect project. I arranged with a local historical society to have a volunteer with this background train the students and then the students spent a specific amount of time during the semester entering items into the system. The outcome, i.e. number of hours over the course of the semester entering items into the system, was very clear. The organization had more items entered than it would have had otherwise. In another situation, a grant writing project, the grant proposal was set aside once the

students had completed it because the organization decided not to pursue it. The students learned but the organization had invested a fair amount of time in the process without closure. Other times, organizational expectations can exceed what is possible and this complicates any post-action evaluation. If we do develop criteria for partner evaluation, a certain degree of flexibility should be built in to be responsive to the wide range of potential outcomes.

6. *And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are driven by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?*

While I think this is possible, it raises at least two potential sets of issues. Certainly at the most basic level, Memorandums of Agreement can provide an appropriate structure for the process. However, there are issues that should be address. Here are two that come to mind. First, what is the balance between cooperation and dependence? While this example is not a class project but a student organization driven activity, this example raises important issues. In 2013, Loyola University Chicago public history students entered into a partnership with the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society (RPWRHS). Students wanted to sharpen their professional skills as well as contribute to the larger community and selected RPWRHS as the focus for their activities. This collaborative endeavor represents an opportunity for students to gain valuable professional experience working with a local historical society as it struggles with a variety of organizational challenges that limit its opportunity to fulfill its mission to the community. At the same time, the Society can draw on student resources to think broadly about its mission and approach to history so that it can better serve its community and sustain itself. In the process, students have the opportunity to demonstrate stewardship, drawing from as well as giving back to the community.

The process, however beneficial to both sides, is not without its challenges. These types of engagement are a balancing act. At what point do the “helpers” assume too much control and foster a dependent situation? How will the students’ knowledge/experience limitations limit what can be done? What type of professional development does the process ultimately provide? In what ways does reflective practice serve as a method to transform learning into action while at the same time empower the organization to move forward in a stronger position than when the partnership began? What responsibility do public history programs possess to work with their communities to advance the larger historical project – i.e., how to collaborate in insuring (a) that the “stuff” of the past gets collected and preserved responsibly, (b) the enhancement of its availability to multiple audiences, and (c) the broadening of the understanding of the way that the past works in the world?

Second, partnerships – large or small – take a great deal of time and effort to plan and execute well. Many universities, however, want engaged, community based learning but do not fully recognize the time, both instructional and actual time, involved in creating a project and working with the students and partner organization during its execution. Products that emerge, especially those that involve a faculty member’s time and expertise and that may take the form of an article, exhibit, report, etc., are often discounted as application – not new knowledge or scholarship. Hence, the experience does not adequately get factored into the faculty member’s evaluation.

## Robert Olguin

As a graduate student at the University of South Carolina, I believe that inadequate relationships between public history programs and community partners provide a disservice to students. The opportunities and resources outside partnerships afford, are invaluable and offer students practical public history experience. In fact, my own experience working on [Digitizing Bull Street](#), a digital humanities project that documented the built environment of South Carolina's former state hospital, demonstrated the role student's play in building community partnerships. Even though our professor had contacts – an archivist who created personalized finding aids or a former state hospital employee willing to share his experiences – the students maintained and preserved the indispensable partnerships.

I have also seen first hand the degree in which citywide partnerships need to communicate with one another for a successful event. Presently, Columbia, South Carolina is commemorating the [burning of Columbia](#) with various events, such as academic lectures or performing arts pieces, which includes events at almost every cultural organization in town. Working with one of these organizations has shown me the effort and labor needed for an event of this caliber.

I am particularly interested in discussing the expectations and roles of students in collaborative and community based projects. From my experience, students arrive with varying levels of expertise in communicating and interacting with partner organizations. Since public history programs largely support collaborative work in partner organizations, both through student internships or semester long projects, how should students best prepare themselves to work in these environments? Should the preparation fall to the faculty, student, or partner organization to ensure students are properly educated about professional development and social interactions? And in what capacity should the faculty supervise the contact between the students and community partners? Further, how should students respond to community partners when they feel mistreated or undervalued?

## Key Themes and Questions

1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?

It all begins with community involvement. Whether that is involvement at a citywide historical event or advocating for the preservation of a historical site, relationships are developed through active participation. Academic partners need to express an interest in community events led by community partners, and vice versa. I think the bigger challenge, particularly in larger cities, is finding ways to make sure everyone is connected to the network and is aware of whom to contact when one has an idea of a collaborative partnership.

2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?

I do think all three are equally important, but as a current student, I would argue that the purpose of these projects should be hands-on experience for students. These partnerships are a practical and teachable tool for individuals soon to hit the job market and they provide an opportunity to gain real world experience. What I have gained from various internships and assistantships with partner organizations has challenged, pushed, and alerted me to numerous opportunities in the field. The contacts that I have made throughout these experiences have shaped my understanding of the field equally, if not more, than my graduate level public history courses. Further, the experience students receive will later be paid forward as they progress in their public history careers.

3. For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?

N/A

4. What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?

I believe it all depends on the level of the graduate students. This cannot be done as effectively with a class full of first semester graduate students without a significant level of oversight from the instructor. First year students are still adapting to a new city, new workload, new environment, and they most likely are all still developing their theoretical understanding or approach to public history.

It also depends on the project involved as the skills required for writing a National Register nomination are vastly different than writing exhibit levels. While I do think group projects mitigate some concerns, particularly if a second year student can serve as a group leader, nevertheless it is difficult to ascertain what can be accomplished within a semester. What I have experienced in my own course work is professors front-loading theoretical and contextual reading so that as the projects develop a foundation has already been laid.

5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?

I believe everyone would agree that there needs to be a general outline with periodic evaluations, both by the community partner and those working on the applied project. This is essential for a project to not only be completed on time, but to make sure the end result is successful for all those involved. I like the idea of anonymous surveys that evaluate all three equally. This way each group has an opportunity to say how they felt openly and honestly. Who would score and send out these evaluations is a good question, but I do think this is a way to get a healthy conversation started.

It is also hard because I feel the success of most projects are determined long after a semester concludes. What might have thought to initially fail might just have needed additional time or momentum. Further, if it is a semester project, who is responsible for maintaining the project after the semester concludes? If nobody is able to maintain a project after the semester, does that mean the project was not an effective product, even if it raised awareness of a particular historical event?

6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are *driven* by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?

Absolutely. My experience with this has been through assistantships. Our university has allocated funds to several community organizations that have graduate students working in these institutions. The organizations have the task of creating work plans that cater to the organization's ultimate goals and allowing the graduate students to serve in full-time positions of the organization. This, however, has been a long-term relationship with both the university and the organization and so I am unsure as to what the process is like in beginning new partnerships.

One way I do think organizations can drive these partnerships is through grants. As long as local organizations are cognizant of the value of graduate students or faculty at neighboring universities, factoring in the use or partnership with students and faculty seems a potential catalyst to provide both financial assistance and learning opportunities for all involved.

## Case Statement: Samantha Norling, Archivist, Indianapolis Museum of Art

### My background on this topic:

I am a graduate (MA/MLS, 2013) of Indiana University, Indianapolis (IUPUI)'s [Public History graduate program](#), which places students in year-long paid internships at Indianapolis cultural institutions through a cost-share arrangement with the [hosting institutions](#). In exchange for working 20 hrs/wk for 10-12 months at their host institution, students receive a monthly stipend of approximately \$1,000, paid course credits, and student insurance (details may vary for certain positions). During my first year in the program, I enjoyed my placement in the Indiana State House Tour Office, but going into the second year of the graduate program I unfortunately found myself left “on the edge” of the internship placement system. By that time, my career path was moving rapidly towards archives, but my only option to continue in the internship program was to accept a placement completely out of that realm. In order to further my career, I turned down the internship in favor of a part-time position that was more in-line with my professional interests.

Despite what some may consider a negative experience, I have remained a strong advocate for this model of community partnership as an important component of Public History graduate education. I accepted the position of Archivist at the Indianapolis Museum of Art in January 2014, and immediately began making the case within my department and the broader museum for utilizing a donation to cover the cost-share of hosting an IUPUI Public History graduate student, instead of advertising for an unpaid internship. After successfully advocating for this use of the donated funds, a dual MA/MLS student was placed with the IMA Archives and began working August 2014--she will continue through July 2015, and we hope to host an IUPUI Public History student again next year.

Naturally, my experience as both a student and now community partner in this arrangement has provided me with a lot of insights into this particular internship program. This has led me to form ideas (some concrete, some still forming) on the benefits of these partnerships and the challenges inherent in making them work for everyone involved. While I have shared some of these thoughts in [a post on my blog](#), I look forward to the possibility of joining others with experience in a variety of related community partnerships to look past our individual projects and programs to develop universal guidelines for establishing fruitful partnerships between academic programs and local cultural institutions.

### Key Themes and Questions

1. [How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship \(or the other way around\), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?](#)

Academic Public History programs are in a uniquely advantageous position to create and nurture partnerships within their communities—primarily because many graduates of a program likely work in local cultural institutions. Taking stock of and then leveraging connections with former



students who are now PH professionals can be a great start to a community partnership. Reaching out to non-affiliated PH professionals in the community for various academic program events (e.g. asking them to speak to a class, participate on a panel/workshop, etc.) can also form relationships that would make a good basis for a future partnership/collaboration.

As with any collaborative project, establishing parameters and individual/organizational roles and relationships are essential to success. Keeping lines of communication open throughout the life of a partnership/project will hopefully bring any issues to light as soon as they arise, making them easier to address. A regular, structured review process can keep this communication open.

2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?

Ultimately, the purpose of these projects and partnerships is mutual beneficence for all involved. All organizations, institutions, and/or individuals entering into the partnership should have a clear understanding of their need(s) and how they want the partnership to help meet their needs. These needs could fit into any of the “focuses” mentioned above, and will probably vary for each partner. Academic institutions will likely have the professional and academic needs of their students as the primary focus, while community partners are more likely to prioritize one of the latter two categories, though all partners could have multiple needs with differing focuses. As long as the goals/needs of all partners align on some level and do not conflict in any way, a successful partnership is possible. To be sure that this is the case, all partners should come to the table with a clear idea of what they want to get out of the partnership (e.g. a specific end product/deliverable or a more abstract, but measurable, outcome such as raised awareness) and how they envision their needs being met. Combining and aligning the “hows” of each partner will determine the structure of the project.

3. For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?

As a current community partner in a paid internship program with the IUPUI Public History Department, our primary reason for entering into the partnership was to get specific projects done that we could not undertake at normal staffing levels. For the current internship cycle, we planned to get one collection fully processed and available for research, then digitized and made available online. So far, the intern has processed three collections that are now available for research, digitization is in progress, and we have seen many added benefits to having an additional person “on staff” 20 hrs/wk, completing a variety of daily tasks. An unanticipated benefit is being part of the PH Department’s network that connects dozens of cultural institutions in the area.

Fulfilling the primary needs/goals is definitely important, but it is the added benefits like this that make the partnership truly worthwhile and something that we are keen to continue. Knowing that we play a role in preparing the graduate students for their careers (which may be secondary for us, but is the primary need/goal for the academic partner) is also very rewarding, and our efforts in that regard grow as the partnership moves forward. While I refer to my specific arrangement here, I think that this balance between the needs/foci of all partners and awareness of how each partner contributes to meeting everyone's needs is key to the success of any arrangement. The relationship between the academic program and community partners in this case was clearly stated in a contract drawn up by the academic department and signed by both intern and host supervisor. With this document, all expectations were clear and help to avoid difficult situations from escalating and compromising the arrangement.

4. What is the best way for instructors to balance the need to provide students with important background information and theoretical underpinnings with the opportunity to engage in hands-on experience with a community partner through a course project? Is this balance (especially one that also serves the needs of the partnering institution) even possible with a class of new public history students?

The best way that academic partners can balance theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience is to take the time to learn about each student's professional and academic goals and interests. A student who is completing a project that they have an interest in and that will move them forward on their career path are more likely to naturally understand, and even actively pursue, more theoretical knowledge, even if introductory and other courses cannot possibly go in-depth on their chosen PH focus. Working with community partners to identify relevant readings/theories related to the project is also important, and would ultimately benefit all—community partners will have more prepared student workers/interns who are genuinely interested in the host institution's mission, the students will expand their theoretical (but still professionally relevant) knowledge outside of the classroom, and academic programs will produce students ready to succeed in the field.

5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?

A variety of measurable outcomes should be established and agreed upon by all partners together before a project begins. These should then be regularly revisited and either added to or amended to account for changes that naturally take place throughout the life of a project. Any additions and amendments should be approved by all partners, and only with good reason, so that these changes are not made to impact the measurable "success" of the project. Review of these desired outcomes is especially important for new partnerships and projects.

6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that

community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are *driven* by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?

Yes, yes, yes! Not only is it *possible* to create a “learning laboratory” environment while still benefiting the community partner and meeting their needs, but having this balance may actually be the *key* to a successful partnership.

## **Siera Erazo, Curator // Winnetka Historical Society**

Since 2012 I have been a Museum Curator at the Winnetka Historical Society, a local history organization with a small part-time staff and volunteer base that manages a log house and a community museum and research space in an historic house. Also, I am the consulting archivist at North Shore Country Day School, a private school preparing for a centennial in 2019.

As a public history graduate student at Loyola University Chicago, I participated in a variety of internships and in-course community partner projects that focused on small community organizations like the one I am part of now. One group consulting project for the Oak Park River Forest Historical Society was in hindsight a really useful experience. I learned a lot about the realities and challenges small organizations face related to collections, storage, and volunteer planning, and my team was able to create a useful deliverable for our client.

Another was a general historic buildings resources survey project with the Winnetka Historical Society, which I have since inherited. WHS received a semi-usable product and the survey got off to an energetic kick start with the help of the students. The project was well-defined, staff supported, and representative of how a community preservation project begins.

The students in the class though, including me, responded in course evaluations that they did not feel they got much out of the project. Student evaluation - positive, negative, and constructive - is just as important for community partners as it is for academic partners. The feedback we received, only known because I was a student in the class, led us to reevaluate our project criteria and create a more meaningful version of the project for future individual interns, as we did not continue the relationship with the course.

### **1. How should academic partners and instructors initially find community partners and then create a relationship (or the other way around), how should these partnerships be maintained in a healthy way, and what should happen when problems arise?**

Existing relationships are a great resource. Chicagoland has many programs, however, as an early career public historian with a limited network mostly from my alma mater, I wonder: would cold-calling (or emailing) a program director or a specific course instructor for a brief introductory meeting be an appropriate option to open dialogue in order to professionally connect? With internships, I try to have a structured project that is still loose enough to tailor to the individual student. Would a similar format for working together to create a useful course assignment partnership work?

Open, honest communication from the outset is the best way to manage any working partnership. I see any healthy partnership extending beyond the professor and the community partner to include students. Tackling problems constructively as they arise rather than after the fact is beneficial for all parties. Mid-project evaluations by all parties might be a good tool for actively including student voices and identifying problems before a project is over.

### **2. What is and what should be the purpose of projects and partnerships like this? Is the focus bringing hands-on experience and practice to students? Is it fulfilling a professional, usable end product for a client? Is it based more broadly on the idea of civic engagement and offering a service to our communities?**

Partnerships should be mutually beneficial and hopefully include all those elements. As a community partner, it is our goal to have a usable or at least draft end product, but we aim to provide an engaging,

positive, and useful experience to students dedicating their time and talents to our organization. A successful project that results in real world action is going to be more meaningful for a student portfolio or c.v. than one that does not get implemented.

**3. For the community partners, what are you looking for in these relationships? Are they worthwhile to your organization (and what needs to happen for them to be worthwhile)? From your viewpoint, what needs to be done to promote better relationships and communication streams?**

As a small organization, we look for the youthful enthusiasm students bring and in return, we hope to provide them with a project or a part of a project they can own and use when looking for a job. Realistic, defined expectations from all parties from the outset help promote better relationships. Managing student expectations is part of this. Sometimes students will be working on a part of a whole and may not see end of a project. Ensuring students fully understand and can visualize how projects work as a whole, though they are only a piece, is part of the practical experience of working outside the classroom. Also, sustaining communication as an open dialogue and not just as assignment/evaluation structure may help. Projects where the coursework was treated more as a consulting experience with parties all on equal footing with equal respect resulted in better communication overall.

**4. n/a**

**5. How do we measure the success and effectiveness of applied projects undertaken in collaboration with community partners? Can and should we establish some criteria to evaluate this?**

Success should be measured by how the goals of all parties of an applied project are met.

- Did the community partner get a useable product? on deadline?
- Did the students meet learning objectives?
- Did students enjoy the project? Did they feel like they benefited from the experience?
- Would you repeat the project or work with the partner again on a different project?

**6. And, finally, as one of you so clearly asked in your application, universities recognize that community partnerships also serve as evidence of their commitment to service learning. Is it possible, however, to plan programs that are *driven* by those partnerships? Is it possible to position community partners as learning laboratories while still providing those partners with beneficial support and assistance?**

I think community partners, even small ones with limited resources, can be great learning laboratories for students when partnerships are defined and realistic. In a way, the small sites with limited budgets represent the majority of history institutions in the country, so it's important to include them as part of program partnership options. So far, any time and budget we have allocated on supporting students who enrich our institution with new ideas and energy has far outweighed the costs. We hope to expand and grow our partnerships with what we learn here.