Einhorn Collaborative::Campus Compact Learning Project
Student Bridge-Building Efforts in Higher Education
Project Findings

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This report outlines findings and recommendations from a comprehensive learning project undertaken by Campus Compact, in collaboration with the Einhorn Collaborative, to assess the nature, quality, and breadth of student bridging development experiences across a range of US higher education institutions. The report outlines the project design and provides provisional findings, examples of model programs, and recommendations on how high-quality, high-impact experiences might be further supported and expanded.

Project Purpose and Guiding Questions

The goal of this collaboration was to answer a set of questions posed by the Einhorn Collaborative about college campuses as a potential system or setting in which to center an emerging bridging strategy. The central goal of the Collaborative's bridging strategy is to reinforce young people's abilities to understand themselves and each other, positively relate across difference, and develop lifelong skills of perspective-taking and bridge building. Campus Compact, as a trusted intermediary in the higher education and civic learning fields, was well positioned to conduct research within our network to derive insights on the Collaborative's questions as they relate to the quality, nature, and diversity of student bridging development efforts in higher education contexts.

Campus Compact began our investigation with the following set of framing questions, posed by Einhorn Collaborative:

1. Across college campuses, who is participating in bridge building types of experiences (e.g., as it relates to quantity, demographics, or ideological diversity)? What do they look like? For students who are not participating, what barriers stand in their way?

2. What is the quality of the civic experience as it relates to addressing community needs or addressing systematic dehumanization? How is quality currently being defined and measured?

3. What is the availability and quality of moral, ethical, and personal/leadership development alongside civic experiences? How is quality being defined, what does it look like, and how is it being measured? What bright spot campuses or cross-campus programs come to mind?

4. Are there stakeholders interested in increasing the availability and quality of these civic experiences for young people? Are there stakeholders interested in the quality of moral, ethical, and personal development? What strategies might help that to happen?

5. What is the current funding model and ecosystem (philanthropy, government, pay-for-service, etc.)? What is the appetite of funders (and others) to invest in and sustain this work over the long term?

These framing questions were included in our survey and interview instruments, and we have integrated the responses we received into our analysis, findings, and recommendations as presented in the sections below. At the same time, our review and analysis of data in the study pushed us to examine the variety of ways higher education institutions are providing spaces and support for transformational bridge building experiences for young people and how such efforts might fruitfully be supported or expanded.

Research Design

The bulk of our data collection and analysis for the project took place between December 2020 and early February 2021. Our research team's primary focus was to address the framing questions and identify bright spots: spaces on campuses and in communities where colleges and universities are supporting students to develop bridge building knowledge, skills, practices, and habits. Data collection was facilitated through the following instruments and strategies:

❏ Online surveys were distributed to more than 1,300 community engagement professionals in Compact Compact's network, including member institution faculty and staff, with a focus on engagement center directors and program staff.

❏ Online surveys were distributed to 292 community-engaged undergraduate student leaders identified as 2020 Newman Civic Fellows.

❏ Focus groups were conducted with community-engaged student leaders (Newman Fellows) to explore more deeply their own personal and transformational bridge building experiences.

❏ In-depth interviews were conducted with field-level experts and program staff overseeing model experiences in order to better understand the dynamics of successful bridging efforts and the key elements in creating activated spaces.

To support a process of shared analysis, comprehensive notes were generated from all interviews and focus group sessions and made available to the full research team. In addition, all survey responses were aggregated, cleaned, and organized into a single spreadsheet for all team members to access. In cases where survey responses were not sufficiently complete, research team members followed up directly with program-level staff or conducted additional online research to round out their understanding of the experiences that were shared.

Our Sample

Ultimately, the sample that informs our analysis covers more than 40 well developed bridge building experiences offered to students in a range of higher education institutional settings, including 4-year public and private institutions, 2-year community colleges, and a significant (though not fully representative) sample of minority-serving institutions (HSIs and HBCUs). As demonstrated in Illustrations 1 and 2 (below), the bridge-building experiences take a variety of forms—from K-12 outreach efforts to living-learning communities (LLCs) to alternative spring break programs—and they

are well-distributed across curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular contexts. More than 80% of the experiences in our sample include a community engagement component, and, among those, the vast majority are sustained engagement experiences (defined as at least an academic semester in duration). While the number of students able to participate in each experience varies considerably (see Illustration 3), approximately 40% of the experiences engage 100 or more students a year.

Illustration 1: **Type of Bridge Building Experience**
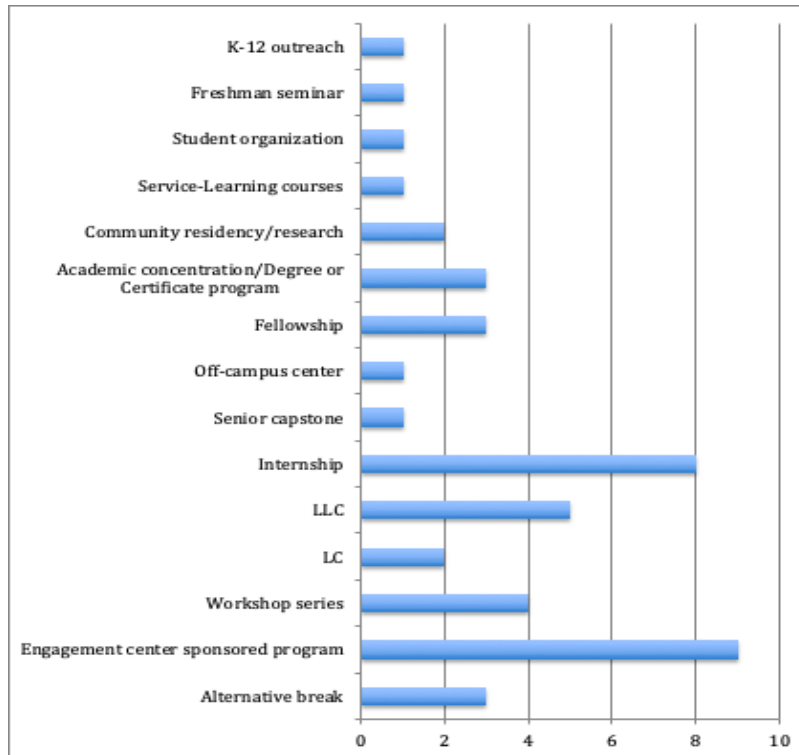
Note: LC = Learning community; LLC = Living-learning community

Illustration 2: **Nature of Bridge Building Experience**
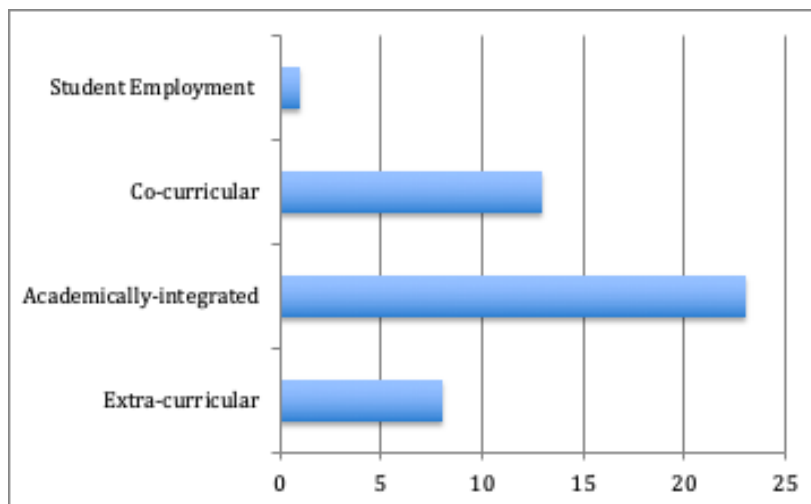
The vast majority of experiences in the sample were coordinated or sponsored by higher education community engagement centers, with a smaller number originating in career services, university housing, academic units, and student leadership, as captured in Illustration 4 below.

Illustration 3**: Number of Students Participating in Each Experience (per year)**
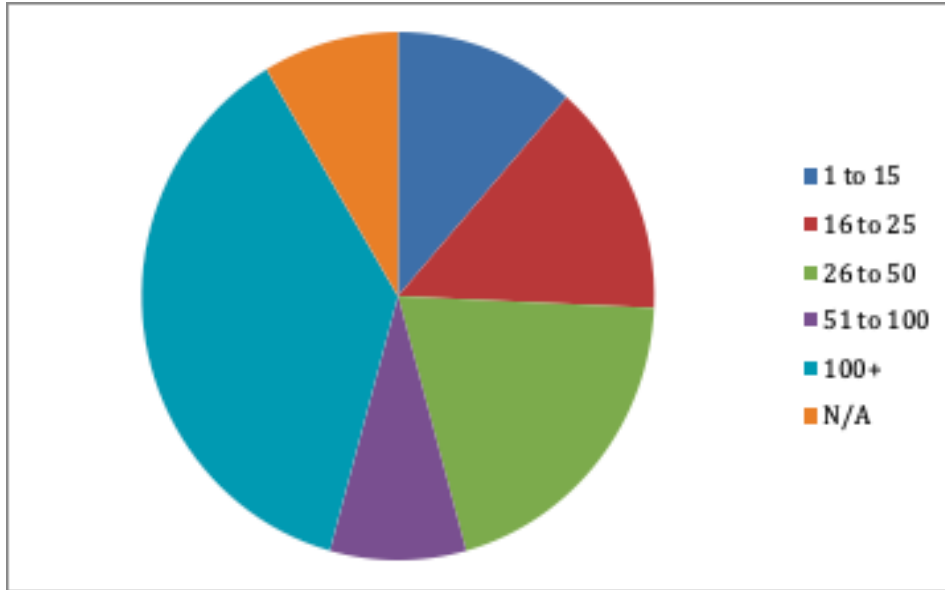

Illustration 4: **Entity or Office Hosting the Experience**
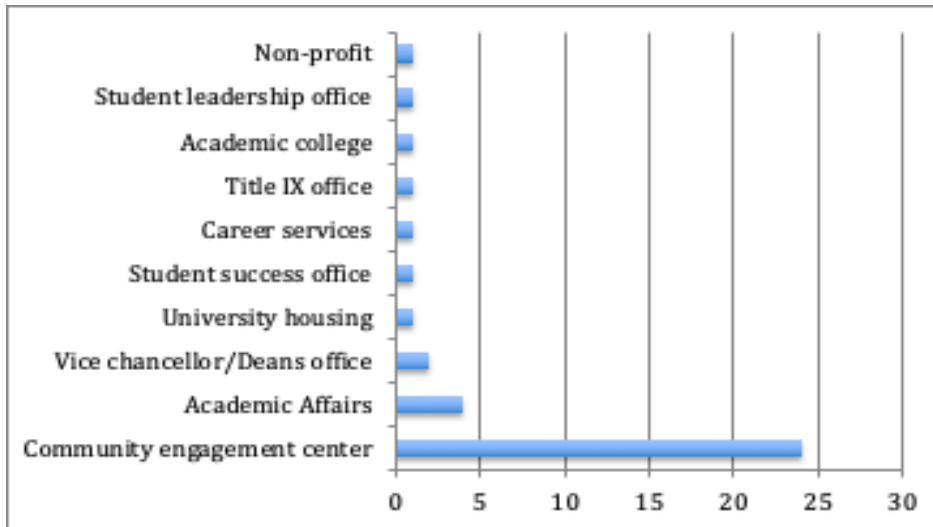
Project Findings

In this section, we present our findings as a set of distinguishing features that we believe significantly and positively influence the quality and impact of student bridge building experiences in higher education contexts. These features were distilled from our interviews and surveys with both students and community engagement professionals, as well as from the collective knowledge of scholar-

practitioners within our research team. The key features are summarized in the following table and explained in more detail below.

Table 1: **Summary of Key Features of High-Quality Bridge Building Experiences in Higher Educational Contexts**

1. Community immersion experiences for students

2. Ongoing critical reflection

3. Student engagement in real work on real projects with knowledgeable partners who are actively engaged in improving communities

4. Emphasis on partner outcomes and impacts over student learning goals and outcomes

5. Activities that provide students with language and frameworks for critical analysis

6. Scaffolding and sequenced experiences to deepen bridge-building skills and habits over time

7. Cohort-based experiences

8. Activities that allow students to explore their identities in order to better understand themselves and their relation to others, on and off campus

9. Asset-based understandings of community development and social change

1. Community immersion experiences for students

The degree to which students had the opportunity to become enmeshed in ongoing relationships for mutual benefit emerged as a key factor in determining the effectiveness of programs and projects as sites for the development of bridge-building capacities. In interviews with practitioners responsible for high-impact programs, crucial clues about what made their programs effective were found in the backstories they provided about how programs came to be. These narratives invariably involved an account of how they themselves had built relationships with community partners. Students were then invited into those relationships and the shared work that cemented them.

This participation in networks of relationships provides both a motivation and a model for students to engage across differences, discover commonalities, and identify pathways to achieve shared goals. While many aspects of the environment may be new to the college students, the pre-existing network of relationships enables them to engage from a foundation of trust, while simultaneously entrusting them with the maintenance of those valued relationships. The students do not find themselves located as pioneers or ambassadors to an implicitly othered community; they are positioned as members of an evolving community in which they have a stake.

In the passage below, a student at the University of Central Oklahoma who participated in an immersion experience through the university's Study Tours Program describes the transformational impact this experience had on his ability to connect with others across difference:

> I was challenged to think outside the box during difficult situations such as heat exhaustion and illness. I was living in a community that did not have access to commodities I was used to such as hot water, A/C, or modern medicine. I was forced outside of my comfort zone in so many ways, but I grew from each experience. I learned how to empathize with and view other

perspectives of people from a completely different continent, let alone culture and personal background. I had to challenge my own unconscious biases to connect with them.

The depth of perspective taking and personal transformation this student demonstrates is not a product of the immersion experience alone; he also credits the impact of a required academic course that accompanied the experience and the ways in which the course challenged him and other participants to engage in the often uncomfortable work of reflecting on their identities, unconscious biases, and the assumptions they inevitably bring with them into community settings.

2. Ongoing critical reflection

Nearly all of the students we spoke with in our focus groups were able to share instances in which their bridge building skill development benefited from having spaces to share multiple perspectives, communicate, and engage in storytelling with their classmates**.** They emphasized the importance of having access to collaborative, supportive, and reflective co-learning spaces that allowed for "discussion-based conversations where you can build from one another."

In fact, providing space and opportunities for sustained group reflection among student peers may be the most prominent feature of high-quality bridge building experiences in higher education. In most cases, there is an expectation that students participate in regularly-scheduled, facilitated group reflection sessions before, during, and after their community experiences. For example, in the University of Michigan's [Active Citizens' Alternative Spring Break] program, all 300+ student participants attend a series of required pre-experience "EEE" (entering, engaging, and exiting communities) group trainings as well as daily cohort reflection sessions with peers throughout the immersion experience, itself. As the program's staff coordinator explains:

> A key part of the [students'] trip is reflection . . . The focus on education and reflection of participants, as well as teaching students how to ethically enter and exit communities, centers the needs and values of the community partners we work with. If you are entering a new community, these are crucial foci to have. It is important to us that participants have a holistic understanding of social justice, their selected site topic, and the intersectionality associated with all of our site topics. Our goal is to cultivate a community on the University of Michigan campus of Active Citizens who take part in positive social change for their lives - during spring break, their college careers, and their lives after college.

U of M's program, like many other cohort-based immersion experiences, trains and engages student as facilitation leaders for these ongoing group sessions. As a student describes it:

> Site leaders are taught how to lead reflection with their trip participants, and during the trip, the site leaders lead reflection each night about the service that was done each day. This reflection allows students to think critically about the work they're doing, their identities, how service and community work affects everyone differently, and what the issues/topics are like in real life beyond the education that they got earlier in the year.

Such training in critical reflective practice and facilitation does not necessarily need to be paired with community immersion in order to be effective. For example, in Colorado State University's [Center for Public Deliberation], students receive training in deliberative interviewing, active listening, and equity-centered frameworks to host either one major community dialogue or multiple events over several semesters (see also Bowdoin College's [Makeshift Coffeehouse]).

3. Student engagement in real work on real projects with knowledgeable partners who are actively engaged in improving communities

A key factor driving program impact is the degree to which students are actively engaged in efforts to solve real problems, seize real opportunities, make real change, or otherwise grapple with real-world settings. This experience of the authenticity of their work emerges in varied ways across diverse contexts. In some cases, as in a student taking a course in a prison, the setting itself reminded students that everything about the context was real. In other cases, students were members of the communities in which they were working and faced the specific challenges, such as housing and food insecurity, that were the focus of their efforts. In still other cases, students were given the time and space to get to know community members, which enabled them to understand the practical significance of their efforts.

The positive impact on students' bridge building development is well illustrated in the following SUNY-Oswego student's description of an experience participating in a semester-long service project as part of a sustained campus-community partnership:

> The quality of the programs and the constant development was amazing; we were always trying to find ways to better help the community, and to see development from scratch for projects was truly amazing. . . By working side by side with a diverse community, I was able to see perspectives from each community. Being able to see how an elderly [person] lives is different from a child which is different from adults with disabilities."

This focus on the reality of their work prompts students to approach their efforts in an other-directed way. Whereas students approach most courses with a focus on what they themselves must do—reading, writing, exams—students in these high-impact programs fix their gaze on the challenges facing people and communities. That step, which is fundamental to empathy, is where the learning of bridge-building begins.

Students we interviewed in focus groups described, in sometimes emotional terms, the opportunities they had to develop personal relationships with individuals who have direct experience or knowledge related to the issues and challenges they were seeking to understand. They spoke of the importance of establishing equal footing in building these relationships across difference. They stressed the importance of direct access to, and support of, engaged faculty and university staff, community-based organizational staff, and local residents and leaders who provide encouragement and help them direct and hone their bridge building skills and experiences.

4. Emphasis on partner outcomes and impacts over student learning goals and outcomes

Another factor contributing to the effectiveness of programs for developing bridge-building skills and dispositions is the orientation of the program toward community goals rather than simply to student learning outcomes. These programs drive student learning and development in part because they are not built to do that. That is not to say, of course, that faculty and staff designing programs are uninterested in student learning. However, when asked to describe the ways in which program designs are linked to achieving goals, these program designers inevitably talk about community goals. They operate on the basis of a (sometimes implicit) belief that engaging students in community work will foster learning, but they build programs based on what will achieve community goals.

This orientation to achieving community goals creates an environment in which students are most likely to be focused on what will actually succeed. Just as engineering students learn by building real vehicles—and experiencing success and failure—students of bridge-building learn by working with others to achieve goals. If these programs were designed around student learning outcomes rather than community goals, that form of learning might well be lost. In addition, the focus on community goals

enables flexibility in the face of changing circumstances. A course rigidly focused on specific student skills might not provide a context in which students could adapt as obstacles and opportunities emerge.

None of this is to suggest that there might not be clear learning outcomes motivating these programs. But at the level of building specific experiences, those outcomes recede into the background in favor of getting the job done for and with the community.

The following quote from a student participating in the Michigan Active Citizens Alternative Spring Break (MAC-ASB) at the University of Michigan provides a prime illustration of unique personal and bridge building skills that are made possible through such experiences:

> MAC-ASB emphasized for me the need for people to center the community organizations and people that are already doing the work and their needs. I met some of the best people I've ever known. I've grown so much in my leadership abilities—working with others, reflecting on personal growth and difficulties, sharing responsibilities and delegating, recognizing my limitations and celebrating my strengths. I have gotten a lot more confident and passionate about social justice issues I care about. MAC-ASB encouraged me to choose my minor (Community Action and Social Change) and has allowed me to meet alumni who are doing work that I think is valuable, changing how I think about my community engagement work after college.

5. Activities that provide students with language and frameworks for critical analysis

Several of the program-level staff we interviewed raised the importance of providing language and frameworks for students to engage in critical analysis. This means providing tools for students to connect the micro and the macro and to understand how structural and institutional realities impact the individual. Engaging in these forms of critical analysis creates opportunities for students to gain a deeper understanding of community development and the role of community agency in creating systemic change. For example, multiple students we spoke with in focus groups shared the transformational impact of being introduced to frameworks and language allowing them to distinguish between deficit and asset-based (reciprocal) models of community development and expressed that this knowledge was essential in helping them frame their perceptions as they engaged across difference in community contexts characterized by unequal resources and power.

Many of the experiences we looked at were oriented toward social justice and aligned with university values. They engaged students in issues such as educational equity, immigration and the US-Mexico border, incarceration, transportation, and housing. Critical frameworks included anti-blackness awareness, cultural humility, how to enter/exit a community, community cultural wealth, multiple identities, and adaptive leadership. A number of experiences in our sample have learning objectives that intentionally center critical analysis and are directly connected to the projects and activities in which students are participating. For example, a program director at the Mulvaney Center for Community, Awareness, and Social Action at the University of San Diego shared this insight about their center's program goals:

> We seek to offer valuable services, when applicable, but I think the bigger learning and the biggest takeaway is rooted in developing relationships with the community partners and building capacity to understand the systems dynamics that are ever apparent while working with communities—marginalized communities, in particular. And giving [the students] the space, and creating space, to be very deliberate and intentional about examining them, unpacking them, and finding their place in those dynamics and really pushing for folks to do that work as part of the learning.

A staff member at the [McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good](#) at the University of San Francisco shares a similar goal of centering learning about systems change throughout their engagement experiences:

> It's wonderful to encourage our USF students to stay involved and engaged, but it's also important for us at the McCarthy Center to open pathways for people who come from diverse backgrounds, to see how institutional change is facilitated at a systemic level.

These examples are emblematic of a growing interest in the field to engage and situate engagement through social justice frameworks like critical service learning, asset-based community development, community cultural wealth, critical race theory, etc. These equity-focused practices and frameworks for engagement seek to connect threads across programming for students, faculty, staff, and community partners.

6. Scaffolding and sequenced experiences for to deepen bridge-building skills and habits over time

Several of the high-quality bridge building experiences in our sample offer scaffolded experiences for students that allow them to engage more deeply with the community and their own learning over time. In some programs, scaffolding means providing students with a clear pathway to move from introductory engagement experiences toward more committed positions where they facilitate training and supervision for other students' engagement experiences. In other cases, scaffolding takes the form of a series of deepening opportunities for engagement in the community accompanied by supplemental programming (academic or co-curricular) to support students' exploration of community histories, assets, and the issues most relevant to area citizens and stakeholders, as well as to reflect on their own assumptions about the community and their role as citizen-scholars within it.

The scaffolding of learning and engagement experiences provides other benefits as well: It creates an important space for program staff and students to work with community partners as co-educators, framing relationships around the values of community knowledge, long-term and sustainable partnerships, deep student learning and engagement, and transformational change. Students' ability to engage with difference and challenge their own world views and assumptions is enhanced when they are in sustained and ever-deepening relationships with individuals, whether that be with fellow students, center staff, or community members. In this sense, scaffolded programs focus as much on processes of learning and partnership as on outcomes.

Scaffolded programs can take a variety of forms. At Siena College, a [community development certificate program](#) encourages students to commit to a multi-year, community-engaged learning process that includes a sequence of compelling coursework, a 300-hour internship, a five-week global internship, and a capstone research project. Together, these experiences are designed to enhance students' personal and professional skills. Stanford University's [Cardinal Commitment](#) initiative supports and recognizes students' sustained public service of three or more quarters to a community, organization, or issue and offers advising, funding, connection to the community, training, and opportunities for students to reflect on and improve their learning and skills development. At UNC Charlotte, the [Levine Scholars Program](#) offers participants four-year scholarships that include full tuition, room, board, grant projects with community partners, customized curricula, and four summers of engagement experiences in which they develop leadership skills, social awareness, and an international perspective. Ultimately, the goal of the scaffolded experience is to equip participating Scholars to "graduate fully prepared to begin their next chapter as versatile intellects, thought leaders, and compassionate humanitarians."

A number of the academically-integrated community engagement experiences in our sample utilize required course sequences, as an accompaniment to community engagement experiences, to provide

students an essential knowledge base from which to continually build and develop their inter-cultural competency and bridge building skills. These include year-long, cohort-based learning experiences (such as first-year seminars or senior capstones) as well as multi-year course requirements (such as academic concentrations and certificate programs). These sequenced experiences are distinct from stand-alone service-learning or community-engaged learning courses; their advantage is in providing more sustained community engagement for students, better scaffolded knowledge development and skill-building opportunities, and (in many cases) access to a cohort-based learning community with opportunities for co-learning, trusting relationships through which to continuously practice emerging skills, and social development and support. Please see Appendix A for specific examples of coursework sequences and course offerings at various institutions.

While this kind of intentional scaffolding was not an attribute of all of the experiences in our sample, staff who oversaw programs of this kind felt they were particularly impactful. As a program director at the University of San Diego put it, these are the kind of experiences that they put the most "heart, energy, soul, and resources in because those are the ones that cost the most money to pull off but are also the ones that yield the most benefit." Here, the benefits are understood not just in terms of the heightened quality of student learning and development but also in the investments in equity-focused partnership models. (For another high-quality example, see the Honors Living Learning Community at the University of Rutgers-Newark.)

7. Cohort-based experiences

Cohort-based experiences provide students with opportunities for regular interaction, learning, and reflection with peers in smaller group settings, typically ranging from 10 to 25 participants, over a sustained length of time (anywhere from a semester to four-year period). Cohort-based experiences are not necessarily restricted to few student overall; programs such as the University of Michigan's Active Citizens Program and Colorado State University's Key Communities engage hundreds of students at a time. Instead, cohort-based experiences are defined by intentionality in creating and staffing "right-sized" learning communities where students can engage in deep conversation, relationship building, and collaborative personal, civic, ethical, and intellectual development. Brown University uses a cohort model in its Community Corps program to give students sustained access to a community of peers to engage in thinking about the connections among community work, active citizenship, social justice, and academic learning. Similarly, student Civic Leaders at Hobart William Smith—who serve as the backbone support team for outreach and civic engagement collaborations at their Center for Community Engagement and Service-Learning—are organized into cohorts so they can support and reflect upon each others' endeavors and maximize alliances with other student clubs and programs while working hard to support and build upon extended community partnerships.

Students we interviewed in focus groups emphasized the importance of spaces and opportunities for connection with interested and passionate peers—across difference—for friendship, dialogue, and peer support and learning. For many of the students, centers for community engagement at their institutions provided these spaces and opportunities. In one of our focus group interviews, students made a strong argument that having the opportunity to build community with peers across difference should be regarded as *a prerequisite* for students to engage in larger community contexts off campus. Here, students expressed the value and importance of cohort-based discussion and reflective practice where they could engage in self/other identity work, challenge assumptions and stereotypes, and participate in critical discussions about the ethics of entering and leaving communities. This pre-work, they suggested, is essential and best done collaboratively because it creates a baseline of understanding and trust that allows groups of students to more appropriately and capably process new experiences in a community context.

8. Activities that allow students to explore their identities in order to better understand themselves and their relation to others, on and off campus

A key and growing practice in higher education bridge-building experiences is the inclusion of group exercises and training designed to help students reflect on their own positionality and intersectional identities in ways that allow them to critically (re-)evaluate the impact of their actions and communication on others, particularly in community and campus contexts characterized and shaped by inequities in privilege and power across difference. For example, students in CSU-Channel Islands' Project Promesas Peer-Led Mentoring Program engage in regular identity development programming to improve their ability to be strong mentors to a diverse range of undergraduate students with whom they work. One of the student peer mentors shared the transformational impact she felt from the "many personal development training sessions on understanding my identities and how they may influence my interactions with others, as well as being aware of others' identities and how my approaches might non-visibly impact their sense of potential, belonging, and ability to succeed." Stanford University's Branner Hall Service Scholars Program (BHSSP) partners with the institution's Office of Diversity and Inclusion to host conversations with students about how their identities are likely to shape their views of public service and impact the quality of their relationships with those they encounter in the course of their community engagement activities. As the program coordinator explains:

> We have a conversation where students wrestle with and discuss different facets of their identities and how those play into their public service experiences, such as: How do my identities shape my view of service? How does my identity alignment (or lack thereof) with the beneficiaries shape my service work? What does it mean to view service as partnership rather than as one person serving another?

9. Asset-based understandings of community development and social change

A number of high-quality student bridge-building experiences in our sample included intentional activities to actively shape students' understanding of asset-based (as opposed to deficit-based) approaches to engaging across differences and making sense of new experiences in community contexts. In our focus groups with students, many expressed the essential value of being introduced, in an intentional way, to the community sites where they would have the opportunity to serve, including an orientation to the organization's mission and staff. They felt connected when they were able to witness the nature of existing, deep partnerships between the university/college and the community.

A good example is provided by Brown University 's Community Corps program where:

> While engaging in meaningful community engagement, students learn first-hand about the assets and strengths of the Providence community and our community partner organizations. Through meaningful community partnerships, these students contribute to the programmatic capacity of our partners and help make an impact by creating a more just and equal society.

Similarly, in the University of San Diego's Border Immersion experience, the 180+ student participants attend "regular meetings where they learn about grassroots issues and organizations advancing social justice on the border, foster community engagement, nourish their personal development, and promote global dialogue." These trainings are intentionally designed to increase students' capacity to engage in authentic relationships cross-culturally, reflect and break down stereotypes and assumptions, and recognize their impact on other communities. In a number of experiences in our sample, community partner organizations and leaders are leveraged to co-facilitate or lead these asset-based training for students, in both campus and community settings.

Additional Responses to the Framing Questions of the Study

In the section, we directly address a smaller set of the initial framing questions not addressed in our findings section above. Our responses draw significantly from data we obtained through the institutional surveys sent out across our network.

Is there an intentional emphasis in bridge building experiences on moral, ethical, personal, or leadership development?

The short answer to this question is yes. The vast majority of the bridge-building experiences in our sample intentionally emphasize and integrate moral, ethical, personal, and leadership development, although they typically do not couch their student development efforts in that language. Details of these efforts, we believe, are well captured in our finding above.

Is there a desire to increase the number of students participating in bridge-building experiences? If so, what are the barriers?

When program coordinators were asked about their interest in increasing the number of students who participate in their bridge building experience(s), the majority of respondents answered in the affirmative. The barrier most often mentioned was lack of funding to hire and train faculty and staff facilitators so that programming could be extended to reach more students. As one program coordinator at Stanford University's [Haas Center for Public Service](#) suggested, growth only makes sense if it is scaled in such a way that allows for reasonably-sized group learning experiences: "We would love to have more students share in this experience but also find it important for cohorts to remain small enough that students can know each other and have sustained interaction and conversation over the year, thus building trust." A program director at College of the Canyons, a California community college, indicated that she would love to expand to all students a program through which honors college students work on community projects with community-based organizations; only staffing limitations prevent her from doing so.

What is the funding ecosystem for student bridge building experiences?

We found that support for the facilitation and administration of student bridge-building experiences generally originates from institutional sources such as student and academic affairs, base budgets of community engagement centers, career services, residential education, and student activity fees. However, student scholarship funds—which are offered in over half of the experiences we analyzed— come primarily from a variety of external sources, as illustrated in the graph below.

AmeriCorps and Federal Work Study-Community Service (FWS-CS) serve as important sources for supporting student participation. Other scholarship-based experiences draw from multiple external philanthropic sources.

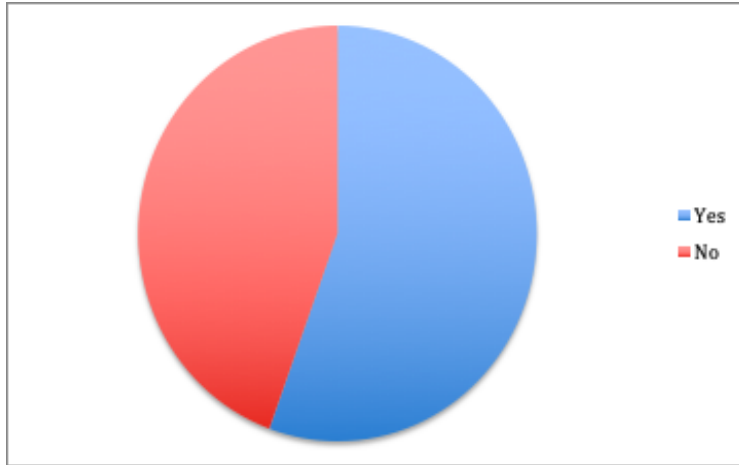Illustration 4: **Experiences Providing Scholarship Funds for Student Participants**
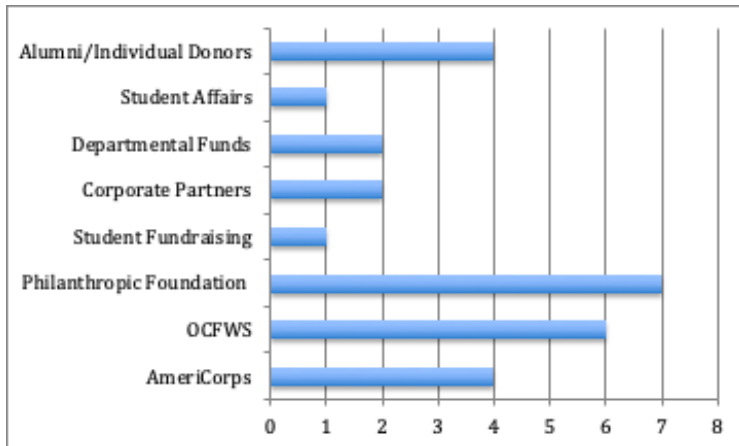
Illustration 5: **Sources of Student Scholarship Funds**

Notably, two of the most comprehensive multi-year, community immersive, and cohort-based student experiences are sustained by large endowments from a single philanthropic source: *the Levine Scholars Program* at UNC Charlotte (an endowment from Sandra and Leon Levine supports 4-year packages for 80 concurrently-enrolled students estimated at $105,000 for in-state students and $155,000 for out-of-state students) and the *Honors Living-Learning Community* at Rutgers University-Newark (supported by a $10M endowment from the Prudential Foundation that allows for the participation of approximately 250 students per year).

What have been the impacts of COVID-19 on these experiences?

As Covid-19 took hold in March 2020, Campus Compact began collaborating with a variety of higher education institutions who were seeking to "pivot" their community engagement experiences and partnership toward virtual environments and remote activities. To help facilitate this shift, the Compact offered opportunities and resources for engaged faculty to rethink course design and delivery in ways that would allow them to sustain community engagement commitments and partnerships in a fully online environment (e.g. our Fusion Course offering and our Summer Webinar Series). The Compact also provided leadership in convening and facilitating conversations among community engagement center personnel who were desperate to discuss, develop, and disseminate a set of thoughtful strategies for sustaining (or transforming, as necessary) campus-community partnerships and engagement activities in

light of restrictive "social distancing" realities. This creative and proactive approach to confronting the challenges wrought by the pandemic allowed many college and university engagement programs to adapt and rescale their efforts, rather than shut them down entirely. They did this by developing remote service and outreach projects, moving community-based courses online, and modifying co-curricular engagement activities through innovative pedagogies for remote learning and critical reflection. Yet the pandemic has brought tangible costs to these efforts, as well. They include reduced enrollments in academic and co-curricular experiences, the loss or postponement of community programs, and the loss of administrative staff and program facilitators. For faculty, the pandemic has meant "crash course" training in remote/virtual course design and delivery methods. For students, it has generated difficulties with retention in engagement activities, reduction in the quality of mentorship, and for some students, profound financial, food, and housing insecurity.

Appendix B captures statements from institutional contacts about specific challenges they have faced in sustaining student bridge-building experiences during the pandemic. In many cases, the statements illustrate the perseverance and resilience that many organizations have had to exercise in order to sustain their programs through unprecedented times. We must note, however, that campus engagement programs most negatively impacted by COVID-19 are likely to be far less represented in our research sample, with responses tending to come from the more fortunate "survivors" of the COVID-19 crisis. In other words, we assume that programs hit the hardest by the pandemic are less likely to have been able to respond to our calls for participation in the research.

Assessment of Higher Education Community Engagement

Assessment has long been a component of higher education community engagement. Various measures to assess impact and learning outcomes have been developed within individual institutions and across the field. These assessment tools have built the capacity of institutions and program-level directors to measure effectiveness in student learning as well as to measure community impact. Many of these measures and tools are geared towards students while others provide institutional community engagement snapshots or a view of engagement across higher education. Purdue University has assembled a list of assessments for service learning and international service learning, along with a broader array of quantitative assessment resources. Additional assessment, institutional self-assessment, and quality improvement tools include the following:

- Service Learning Quality Assessment Tool (SLQAT) This assessment tool measures the quality of design and implementation of service learning courses.

- Civic Learning and Skills Questionnaire This questionnaire focuses on college student self-assessment of attitudes and skills that may be affected by a service learning experience.

- HEIghten Civic Competency and Engagement Assessment This assessment evaluates college students' civic learning.

- Global Community-Engaged Learning Rubric (GCEL) This rubric was developed as a tool to support community partners, academic and student affairs staff, faculty members, and unit administrators in program planning, implementation, and evaluation of ethical, respectful, high quality, and high-impact global community-engaged partnerships.

- National Survey of Student Engagement This survey collects information from first-year and senior students about the characteristics and quality of their undergraduate experience.

- CIRP Freshman Survey This HERI survey looks at the characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes of approximately 15,000 first-year students nationally. This includes data on their social and political engagement.

- National Assessment of Service and Community Engagement (NASCE) The NASCE is an institutional assessment for measuring how well participating colleges and universities fulfill their missions as they relate to service and community engagement.

- National Study on Learning, Voting, and Engagement (NSLVE) NSLVE is conducted through The Institute for Democracy and Higher Education, based at Tufts University. NSLVE offers colleges and universities an opportunity to measure the voting and registration rates of their students and to study the effectiveness of educational programs to increase student civic learning and engagement in democracy.

- Carnegie Community Engagement Classification The Carnegie Foundation's Elective Classification for Community Engagement provides a special-purpose classification for higher education institutions with commitments in the area of community engagement.

- Compact2Learn Compact2Learn is a digital platform developed by Campus Compact in partnership with Liaison that enables colleges and universities to capture data on student civic participation, learning, and development.

Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are grounded in our conclusion that cultivating bridge building skills among college students requires developing context-sensitive programs that incorporate core principles and values, including the values of equity and full participation. If the goal is to increase the number of students participating in high-quality programs, actions must be focused on creating the conditions under which such programs will flourish and enable access for the broad diversity of students in colleges and universities. The recommendations are in three clusters. The first cluster focuses on fostering institutional learning and change. The second focuses on directing philanthropic support to maximize equity and impact. The third are recommendations directly from students.

1. Fostering Institutional Learning and Change

   a. **Provide sustained external support for program development, implementation, and assessment.**

   Developing and executing high-impact programs is an ongoing and iterative process of relationship-building, design, implementation, learning, adjustment, and (sometimes) expansion. Rather than resourcing institutions to try something once for a discrete period of time, we recommend inviting institutions into an ongoing relationship with external partners who can share principles and practices, give feedback on program designs, provide frameworks and expertise for evaluation, reflect with institutional personnel on successes and challenges, and consult on program development and growth. Program development, implementation, and assessment tools must center community knowledge, equity, and addressing barriers to participation.

   b. **Invite institutions to participate in an ongoing learning community of colleges and universities focused on bridge-building.**

   Efforts focused on fostering student success, such as those led by Achieving the Dream, provide a model for building sustained communities of institutions that form the basis for disseminating

successful practices, exploring shared values, and supporting institutions in developing context-specific approaches for achieving common goals. Institutional change processes should include analysis of power and privilege as well as reflection on institutional histories of harm to communities.

c. **Focus on sharing knowledge about the principles and values undergirding high-impact programs, resourcing their development and growth, and providing external infrastructure for continuing to develop our shared understanding of effectiveness.**

The programs catalyzing significant learning and development in bridge-building are not reducible to a short list of replicable practices. As a result, grant programs calling for applications that check a list of boxes are unlikely to produce the desired outcomes. The evidence from past successes, including the impact of federal programs such as Learn and Serve and Community Outreach Partnerships Centers (COPC), points to the importance of creating ecosystems of learning and action, rather than requiring strict adherence to prescriptive criteria. Future efforts should center the voices of underrepresented groups.

2. Directing Philanthropic Resources to Maximize Equity and Impact

a. **Direct investments toward institutions whose students are drawn from local communities.**

Colleges and universities that draw students locally also produce graduates who tend to stay local. When they pursue further studies, these students often do so at the same institution or others in the region. These institutions tend to have high proportions of students who live with their families during college. In short, these students are interwoven into the communities in which their institutions are located for the long term. Developing their bridge-building skills is an investment in the connective tissue of their communities for decades to come. Institutions that serve students from local communities—community colleges, regional comprehensive universities, and non-elite private institutions—also disproportionately serve students of color, low-income students, and first-generation college students. Thus, investing in these institutions simultaneously advances equity at the level of the students and their communities while also producing a greater overall impact than the same level of investment in institutions that draw students nationally or globally.

b. **Focus investments on creating student access to high-impact experiences.**

High-quality bridge building experiences are time intensive. Students from lower income brackets are systematically less likely to have discretionary time than their higher income peers. For these students, access depends on integrating bridge building learning into paid experiences, credit-bearing experiences, or a combination. Wages, stipends, and scholarships can all play a role. Flexibility to deploy funds in ways that fit relevant financial aid policies at the state and institutional level is essential.

c. **Create incentives for institutions to focus on long-term student engagement.**

Faculty and staff focused on community engagement are often encouraged to focus on high-visibility, high-participation, short-term engagement. While such experiences can have value if they are embedded in ongoing relationships with community partners, they tend to require energy and resources out of proportion to their value for communities or students. Linking philanthropic resources to long-term experiences for students can provide a counterbalance.

d. **Invest in building faculty and staff capacity for developing and executing high-impact programs.**

Faculty and staff who prioritize community partnerships and student engagement are indispensable elements of all successful programming. The resilience of such programming efforts is often dependent on the persistence and ingenuity of dedicated professionals. Program investments may not lead to sustainability beyond the funded term. Investments in the capacity of motivated professionals continue to pay dividends long after the funds are expended. Included in this investment should be an explicit inclusion of faculty and staff of color. BIPOC individuals are underrepresented in the field of higher education community engagement, and investments should be made in their participation and leadership.

3. Recommendations from students

We asked student leaders to share their ideas for getting more of their peers involved in meaningful engagement activities to develop their bridge-building skills, knowledge, and habits. Key suggestions follow.

a. **Increase cohort-based programs for first-year students.**

    Student felt that such programs would provide more regular engagement opportunities for entering students in ways that "allow for social connections and help make engagement a routine."

b. **Increase the availability of paid internships/employment opportunities that provide students with an entry point to community engagement experiences and help sustain that engagement over time**.

    Students spoke of how important work-study funding and other financial resources were to supporting their own sustained engagement and believed that more students should have this opportunity.

c. **Provide more financial support for students to participate in sustained experiences over time that provide scaffolding, mentoring, and diverse experiences and trainings and allow for the development of a clear plan for engagement and cross-cultural competence and bridge-building skills throughout their college experience.**

    Examples of such programs in our sample are the *Levine Scholars Program* at UNC Charlotte and the *Social Justice Fellows* program at Spelman College.

d. **Provide more opportunities for networking and training alongside engagement experiences.**

    Students expressed interest in having more access to networking and training opportunities and believed they and other students would benefit from having access to additional stipends or grants to use for this purpose.

e. **Emphasize support for students with activist orientations.**

    Multiple students, notably BIPOC students we interviewed, talked about the importance of providing more support to students interested in activist endeavors, suggesting that students of color and others with marginalized identities, in particular, may be more likely to want to use their position to advocate for others. To this end, relevant opportunities should be made available to "equip people to do work that is true to them."

Conclusion

Among every group we consulted for this project—students, faculty, administrators, experts—one view stood out: Developing bridge-building knowledge, skills, and inclinations is essential now. Everyone doing this work sees it as the most important thing they do, and they recognize it as what events in the world demand from higher education. Those who have built programs would love to see them grow, and students who have had the opportunity to participate would like to see many more follow in their footsteps.

At the same time, resource constraints are constant and are acute right now. Faculty and staff working in the field of community engagement have shown themselves to be extraordinarily resourceful over decades, building programs out of limited resources and maintaining them through a challenging period in the history of American higher education. Investments in this community are highly leveraged by the sweat equity of its people. There is good reason to believe that an infusion of support now would be met by an upsurge in activity leading to a significant expansion of deep and powerful learning opportunities for students.

It goes without saying that we at Campus Compact stand ready to join the Einhorn Collaborative in bringing forth that possibility.

APPENDICES

<u>Appendix A</u>. **Examples of Coursework Sequences Associated with High-quality, High-impact Bridge Building Experiences**

Experience	Academic Coursework Requirements
Honors Living Learning Community University of Rutgers-Newark	*Course Sequence:* 1. Local Citizenship in a Global World 2. Negotiating Space, Place, and Identities 3. Voice, Citizenship, and community engagement
Community-Engaged Senior Capstones Portland State University	*Credit-bearing capstone required for all undergraduate students* • Developed by faculty, each experience must address learning goals related to Ethics, Agency, and Community and include reflection on Diversity, Equity, and Social Justice
Community Scholars Program UMass Amherst	*Course sequence:* 1. Learning through Community Engagement: The Good Society 2. Tools for Democratic Change 3. Public Policy and Citizen Action 4. Organizing: People, Power, and Change
Community Development Certificate Siena College	*Coursework in the following areas (18 credits):* 1. Social Context (3 credits) 2. Diversity and Community Engagement Skills (3 credits) 3. Data Collection and Analysis Methods (3 credits) 4. Community Development Experience (9 credits) [practicum or capstone]
Public Service Scholars Program Stanford University	*Senior Research in Public Service* • Year-long, credit-bearing course in Urban Studies focused on critical communication skills, values and self-awareness, community and cultural awareness, and public action
Community Engagement through Leadership and Service Concentration Indianapolis University	*Course sequence:* 1. Intro to Community Service-Learning 2. Multicultural Competency through Service and Leadership 3. Community Leadership (capstone experience/project)
Engaged Citizens Corps Drake University	*Course sequence:* 1. Cohort-based, 3-credit Frosh Seminar focused on knowledge and skill development in community engagement 2. Additional year-long, 1.5-credit seminar exploring topics such as professionalism, communication, and time management

LifePrep Nazareth College	• Year-long course sequence that addresses social context, diversity and community engagement skills, and hands-on development experience (as capstone or team activity)

Appendix B: **Program-level Responses to the Covid-19 Crisis**

Below are thoughts from survey respondents about how they are negotiating the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their student-facing programs:

"We were unable to do a normal program this year. There are no trips happening because the University of Michigan has no spring break this year. We are doing virtual service that is spread out through the spring semester, with many fewer topics and groups than in a normal year, and we hope that next year students can go on trips again."
  • *University of Michigan - Michigan Active Citizens (Alternative Spring Break)*

"Due to safety precautions, we couldn't give tours or allow schools to visit. As such, we began building virtual outreach programming and virtual community building within the volunteer team."
  • *CSU Channel Island - Leaders in Educational Awareness Program*

"COVID-19 has put a lot of programming, meetings, and work online which is a barrier for some people."
  • *Drake University - Engaged Citizens Corp*

"COVID-19 has impacted every single aspect of our program. We now have to teach these 200 community-based collaboratively learning Capstones FULLY REMOTELY. We had to train faculty in this whole new course design and delivery method. It has changed our faculty development offerings including our workshops and consultations. It has changed our students' lives, their finances, their food security, their housing security...Our students are far more precarious now. It has changed our engagement in and engagement WITH the community which is at the heart of our program."
  • *Portland State - Community-Engaged Senior Capstone Project*

"[We have been] unable to do most in-person service, [leading to a] reduction in the quality of mentoring and some retention issues."
  • *Siena College - Bonner Service Leaders*

"All Social Justice speakers and convenings are held virtually."
  • *Spelman College -Social Justice Fellows*

"COVID caused us to delay running the program for one semester and will cause all of the internships and the course to be fully remote."
  • *University of San Francisco - Community Empowerment Activists*

"In attempting to navigate these trying times in ways that reflect our institutional values, we are mindful of the real risks of COVID-19 and want to ensure the safety of our community (both on and off campus). The Mulvaney Center, in consultation with our community partners, will limit our community engagement opportunities to remote projects only for the Fall Semester...We remain committed to

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supporting any faculty who would like to continue connecting and building relationships with already existing community partners, and we will also diligently work with faculty to explore new possibilities within the San Diego/Tijuana community. We understand that all community residents and organizations do not have equal access to technology that would support remote community engagement. To ensure that these voices and the voices of those most adversely impacted by the pandemic are heard, we will continue our outreach efforts in order to be responsive to a wide range of community needs as they emerge. The Mulvaney Center, along with our Faculty Council for Community Engagement, is currently working with faculty members to design remote community engagement for the fall. The Mulvaney Center also encourages all faculty interested in community engagement to participate in our Faculty Development for Community Engagement workshop series. We recognize that not all existing community engagement components can be translated into remote projects. However, the Mulvaney Team welcomes the opportunity to explore possibilities with you, share resources and best practices, and help faculty members to connect with our community partners...Ultimately, as a university committed to the public good and an anchor institution in the community, we want to actively be attentive and responsive to the profound needs that will surface during and, eventually, following this pandemic."

- *University of San Diego - Border Immersion Experiences*

"Less enrollment than usual due to people's unwillingness to relocate during a pandemic, and opportunity is only provided in person."

- *Wayfinding Academy - Self and Society Degree*

"Position in supporting first-year STEM students was not available this year as new student enrollment dropped significantly in the COVID-19 pandemic."

- *CSU Channel Islands - Peer-Lead Team Learning*

"Our program start has been delayed to Fall 2021."

- *Colorado State University - Learning through Dialogue Living Learning Community*

"Our program was designed as a result of the pandemic."

- *Mott Community College - I-Pals* [*I-Pals are college students who want to make friends with people who are different from themselves and build inter-connected communities.*]

"We are not able to do the program this year because we had no students in the dorm in the fall, and in winter/spring we will have two different sets of students whose ability to have social interaction is super limited. So we have mostly had to postpone our entire program until next year."

- *Stanford University - Branner Hall Service Scholars Program*

"Unfortunately, like so many other community-engaged projects and resources, the PC/Smith Hill Annex was upended in March 2020. As the pandemic became a reality in Rhode Island and on the Providence College Campus, the Annex closed in accord with public health and college policies; While COVID-19 has temporarily closed the physical space for the Annex, our commitment to community has not changed. We continue to work tirelessly to work through this situation and reopen with the same energy and vitality that you have brought to the Annex. Do what you can to stay well and keep your communities healthy."

- *Providence College - Smith Hill Annex*

"Personal connections were lost, but it has saved the program money."
- *Illinois State University - Deliberative Dialogues*

"We realize this semester has taken an unanticipated turn but we still want to ensure students have a chance to make meaning of their experiences and share with the St. Kate's community.
Over the course of this semester alone, 57 students thru AMP and Community Leaders have contributed approx 9,000 hours of work. Community supervisors and faculty/staff mentors have collaborated with them to make all the work possible. Each student has been asked to reflect on their work, learning and impact.
- *St Catherine University - Critical Service Learning/Course-based Engagement*

"Meeting in person and working in labs all severely curtailed."
- *Loyola University Chicago - Loyola Undergrad Research Opportunities Program*

"We were largely a hands-on, practical service program prior to COVID-19. We have adapted well and currently offer a plethora of virtual and safe distanced service to others."
- *Lee University - University-wide Service-Learning Program (graduation requirement)*