DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING PARTNERSHIPS

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Modified by Goals and Initiatives Work Groups

Goal #9 Expanding and creating new partnerships throughout the region

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The Issue

Developing partnerships and collaborations with business, educational institutions, governmental entities, non-profit organizations and individuals is of strategic importance to CSU Stanislaus. These partnerships support the university’s mission in providing intellectual, educational, cultural, and financial benefits and thus improve the university’s ability to achieve its teaching, research, and service functions. Successful partnerships call for mutual respect, shared goals, clarified expectations, and a willingness to contribute necessary resources.

Partnerships in education are essential for healthy program survival; they provide critical linkages between the college’s courses and K-12 classrooms. National (NCATE) and state (CCTC) accreditation standards address partnerships under the term, “Collaboration.” Specifically, each accrediting body calls for higher education/K-12 connections. Likewise, partnerships with business and industry provide evidence of critical linkages for business accreditation. Partnerships with community-based organizations have assisted university research efforts while helping to build capacity in communities. Recent collaborations with industry have resulted in new programs in nursing and agricultural studies in the College of Arts, Letters and Sciences. Collaborations with community agencies have resulted in subsidized faculty positions and a wellness center at CSU Stanislaus-Stockton.

The definition of partnerships as “collaborations” calls for partners to build sustainable relationships to reach common goals. Each partner has a responsibility to contribute in some defined way to the partnership. Partnerships that enhance the quality of life for the region and utilize the university’s strengths have particular value. Hence, partnerships and collaborations can serve to build consensus for achieving the common good. Partnerships are based on mutual interest, achievable results, and clearly defined roles.

CSU Stanislaus is a medium-sized university with a finite amount of resources and people to devote to the major economic, social, and economic opportunities in the region and state. The university has actively engaged in numerous partnerships and collaborations throughout its history. Many have met with substantial success; some have not generated the outcomes expected. All have required the university and its partners to address serious challenges to the success of the proposed partnership. The administration, faculty, and staff of CSU Stanislaus have been widely involved in these efforts and have learned valuable lessons about the elements that affect success.

The university’s experience with partnerships and its commitment to connect strategic planning and budget allocation raise three critical questions:

(1) How can CSU Stanislaus be responsive to emerging needs through the creation and maintenance of successful partnerships and collaborations with organizations and individuals external from the university while operating within the context of its strategic planning efforts?
(2) How can CSU Stanislaus organize its efforts to identify emerging opportunities, judge their viability early in the process, and ensure the greatest chance for success in initiatives that it pursues?

(3) How can CSU Stanislaus achieve opportunities for success that help meet our academic mission while we work with fewer human and fiscal resources during periods of fiscal constraints?

Key Elements

From the input received based on the experiences of CSU Stanislaus personnel, the following guiding principles, characteristics, processes, and outcomes are presented to generate discussion regarding their importance as key elements in successful partnerships and collaborations.

Guiding Principles—CSU Stanislaus should pursue potential partnerships and collaborations that—
- Support the university’s mission and core values of the university
- Fulfill the educational mission of the university (the highest and essential criterion)
- Protect the missions, autonomy, and integrity of the partners
- Maintain university flexibility and autonomy to make decisions
- Result from natural connections between the partners and are not forced by third parties
- Are judged to be worthy of the investment of the university’s time, effort, and fiscal resources
- Have developed university-wide support following appropriate consultation and consideration among the affected university divisions
- Recognize and understand not only the values, goals, and constraints of the partnership but also the values, goals, and interests of each partner
- Different issues may require different kinds of partnerships
- Partners must have a mutual understanding and a respect for each partner’s role

Characteristics—Partnerships and collaborations involving CSU Stanislaus should possess the following characteristics:
- Be clearly defined and articulated
- Be mutually beneficial, designed to achieve the goals of the university and its partners
- Employ innovative approaches
- Provide opportunities for future connections
- Require reasonable in-kind investments of time and energy
- Be able to generate unified support

Challenges—CSU Stanislaus must seek solutions to the following challenges that have characterized past partnership efforts:
- Identifying and committing the resources needed to sustain collaborations
- Creating sufficient support so university representatives deliver a consistent message to partners and third parties.
- Accurately estimating the human and fiscal resources required for initial and ongoing success.
- Sustaining an ongoing commitment.
- Turning down intriguing opportunities that are not closely related to the university’s mission.
- Developing a reputation of responsiveness to the needs of the state and region.
- Recognize that you cannot “shoe horn” all organizations into the same relationships.

Processes—CSU Stanislaus should ensure that partnerships and collaborations employ the following processes:
- Involve the right people early in the process, thus allowing us to address internally potential problems and objections prior to finalizing a partnership agreement
- Build on planning being done within the university
Generate commitment of appropriate constituents (faculty, administration, & staff)  
Respond to good ideas, deflecting or modifying inappropriate ideas  
Allow for evaluation and appropriate modification within the established process  
Provide avenues to manage ongoing relationships  
Identify potential conflicts of interest and potential perceptions of conflicts of interest, addressing the concerns  
Adhere to university policies, e.g. policies referring to how intellectual property rights are determined  
Identify the economic risks to the partnerships  
Employ clearly defined roles and responsibilities in written partnership agreements.  
Determine and define how to accomplish objectives for CSU Stanislaus, but how do we help our partners accomplish their agendas as well.

Outcomes—Partnerships and collaborations involving CSU Stanislaus should be developed and managed to achieve the following outcomes:

- Mutual benefits to the partners  
- Benefits to the community in general  
- Enhanced value to CSU Stanislaus academic programs  
- Positive recognition to the university and its partners  
- Fiscal health of the university  
- Financial resource support  
- Visibility  
- Credibility  
- Reputation for responsiveness  
- Public awareness  
- Branding or a description of how CSU Stanislaus is unique among universities  
- Mutual success must be collaboratively defined  
- Partnerships have life cycles

Potential Solutions

The following suggestions related to a potential solution to this issue were forwarded as part of the input received:

- Developing a unifying theme, perhaps a commitment to diversity, social investment, or economic development  
- Reviewing administrative structure to develop/support partnerships and collaborations. The issue of centralization or decentralization would need to be addressed  
- Keeping faculty informed and involved  
- Looking for “quick win” elements  
- Being innovative—thinking out of the box  
- Applying the “Seven C’s”: Coordination, Cooperation, Collaboration, Consolidation, Combining, Contracting, and Communication  
- Developing strong planning processes at every level and coordinating their connection to potential partnerships and collaborations  
- Maintaining ongoing and honest dialog among all relevant entities  
- Identifying our assets; matching them with community needs and opportunities  
- Developing an opportunistic mindset  
- Involving faculty from the beginning  
- Accurately estimating costs  
- Identifying funding solutions  
- Maintaining high visibility and credibility within the community to be able to gauge/determine needs.  
- Developing a strategic planning process that expresses the desire to form partnerships and identify benefits to all partners