

Social Capital and the Campus Community

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Abstract

We explore the usefulness of the concept of social capital, which refers to an economy based on reciprocal relationships among people for planning and implementing organizational development at institutions of higher learning. Specifically, we use social capital and related concepts to analyze efforts to build community within three institutions of higher learning of very different types: a midsize private comprehensive college, a small, public liberal-arts college, and an online institution of higher learning serving adult learners. In addition to applying a five-part conceptual scheme to the assessment of social capital within these institutions, we identify significant opportunities for future research developing tools to measure social capital at institutions of higher learner measuring the effectiveness of efforts to increase social capital and to exploit that resource in professional and organizational development efforts.

Social Capital and the Campus Community

Building community is important in higher education and concern with community is evident in discussions of student life (Kuh 2007), institutional well-being (Keeling 2004) and teaching and learning (Fink 2003). Community is also central in efforts to enhance faculty experience through faculty learning communities (Cox and Richlin 2004), and wider intellectual exchange (Carnegie).

The study of social capital has been developed primarily in political science, economics, sociology, and community organizing. We submit that social capital is a valuable concept in exploring community in faculty development. Theorists, researchers, and practitioners describe attributes and characteristics of social capital, suggest strategies for increasing it in groups or individuals, and provide some ways to measure it. If we understand the role of social capital in faculty and organizational development, we may have more tools to build community on our campuses.

We begin with a review of the literature on social capital, focusing on its use in planning and community development. We then identify key concepts and describe their application in each of our institutions. The final section suggests ways to investigate evidence of social capital and strategies for further use of the concept.

Social capital describes a system like an economic system. If a financial economy is based on exchange of money and capital is accumulation of financial resources, social capital is based on relationships between and among people. The parallel to currency is the trust and shared norms of the relationships and the parallel to wealth is social

networks. Ivan Light illustrates the various uses of the metaphor of capital through this figure:

| <i>Form of Capital</i> | <i>Definition</i> |
|------------------------|---|
| Financial | Money available for investment |
| Physical | Real estate, equipment, and/or infrastructure |
| Human | Training that increases productivity on the job |
| Cultural | High cultural knowledge that can be turned to the owner's socioeconomic advantage |
| Social | Relationships of trust embedded in social networks |

(Light 2004)

Theories of social capital investigate how relationships of trust embedded in social networks serve to support individuals' and groups' productivity and capacity to plan future action and achieve collective aims; in James Farr's useful characterization, "social capital is... conceptualized as the network of associations, activities, or relations that bind people together as a community via certain norms and psychological capacities, notably trust, which are essential for civil society and productive of future collective action or goods" (Farr, 2004, p. 9). It is a key assumption of this paper that faculty developers have much to gain by, first, understanding the network of associations operative in their own institutions and, second, conducting interventions that serve to

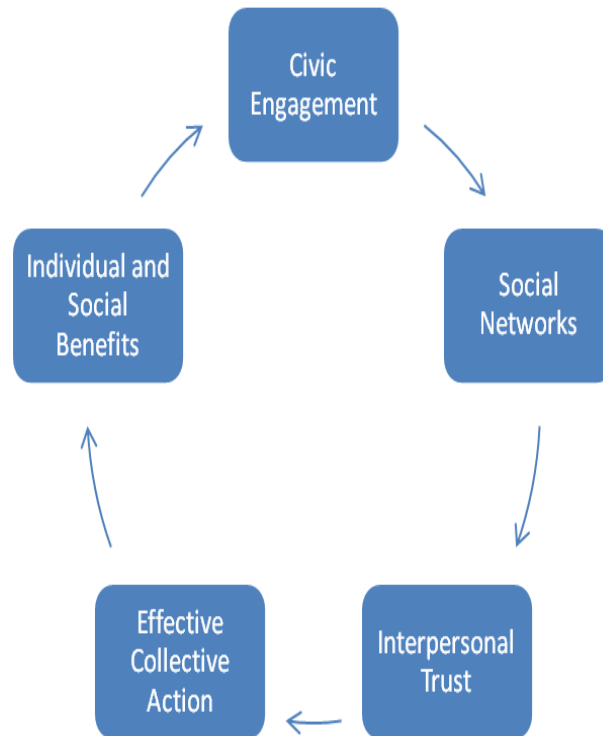
enhance social capital in ways that improve faculty productivity, increase student learning, and enhance institutional capacity to learn and to improve.

Before discussing these themes with respect to our diverse institutions, we pause to reflect that contemporary concept of social capital has a long intellectual history and pedigree that includes work on political economy by philosophers Jeremy Bentham and Henry Sidgwick, work on social structures by Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, and work on democracy and education by John Dewey (Farr, 2004, p. 7). Farr (2004) identifies the first use of the term “social capital” by Karl Marx in 1867 (p. 8), but we note that the intellectual history of the concept has much deeper philosophical roots: Marx's usage of this phrase draws heavily on Aristotle's conception of human flourishing within a social context and, in particular, by Aristotle's use of the concepts of friendship (*philia*) and political community (*zoon politicon*) to understand the structures of society and political economy and their relation to individuals' ability to develop their capacities through action in social and political contexts (McCarthy, 1990, and Gilbert 1981).

Most recently, the concept of social capital has gained visibility in the United States through the work of Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam, who defines social capital as “social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit,” (Putnam 2000).

The key concepts in our analysis and application of social capital to institutions of higher learning were summarized in the *Journal of the American Planning Association* (Rohe 2004) as civic engagement, norms and trust, and effective collective action. Rohe

illustrates the dynamics of the social capital system; we have reformatted his diagram to emphasize the cyclic nature of the process.



If used to describe an individual in terms of that person's wealth in social capital, we can say that increasing engagement in the community, particularly by joining or forming social networks, can build interpersonal trust. Putnam and others suggest that it is the reciprocal nature of the relationships within the networks that increases interpersonal trust.

A community or organization in which many of these social networks exist is more able to engage in collective action to achieve common objectives, in part because of the number of shared norms and thus common goals within social networks and groups.

Effective collective action can bring benefits to both individuals and the organization or community. Thus both individual and community become wealthier in social capital when there is a higher level of social engagement, and individuals and organizations are likely to be able to increase their social capital further through shared goals and actions. This characteristic of social capital, that new capital can be created, differentiates it from the financial capital system with which we are more familiar.

Theorists also differentiate two forms of social capital, and planners focus on them for different purposes. They are bonding capital and bridging capital. Bonding capital brings people who already know each other closer together: e.g. neighborhood groups. Bridging capital connects people who previously did not interact: e.g. linking local groups with civic leaders. (Vidal 2004)

Within higher education, the concept of social capital has certainly been used directly or indirectly. Milton D. Cox reports findings from Putnam's book when emphasizing the importance of community and the value of Faculty Learning Communities. (Cox 2004) Participants in Faculty Learning Communities probably build more social capital as they form bonds with each other, establish shared norms, and engage collectively in common scholarly activity. Proponents of FLCs demonstrate that they benefit both the individual faculty members and the institutional culture; we suggest that analyzing Faculty Learning Communities in terms of the specific dimensions of social capital could be helpful in maximizing their potential.

Writers such as Robert Boice urge new faculty members to become engaged in their campus community and although they seldom mention social capital directly, they

imply that civic engagement will help faculty learn norms and build relationships of trust. (Boice 2000) His research on successful new faculty members demonstrates that these “quick starters” built social capital more effectively than their peers. A systematic examination of his findings in terms of the variables of social capital would be an intriguing way to guide faculty development efforts.

The strong networks formed intentionally by the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education (POD) have the function of increasing bridging capital when leading scholars engage with newcomers at conferences and online. One could suggest that the concept of the Commons, as in the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching advocating a Teaching and Learning Commons, can be seen as an effort to build bonding capital among faculty worldwide.

Following is a brief description from each of the contributors of the ways the concept of social capital has been valuable in understanding faculty and organizational development efforts on our campuses. We represent several institutional types and a range of local concerns.

Ithaca College is a midsize private comprehensive college with 6,000 undergraduates in five schools and a few hundred students in professional graduate programs. The 450 full time faculty members have been quite isolated in their schools though highly engaged in teaching and scholarly work. The institutional faculty development efforts have been decentralized, with only a faculty member assigned half time to support organizational and individual development. The college is too large and has too fragmented a history to have a strong collective sense of faculty community; the

part-time faculty developer has attempted to work with others to build that campus community.

At Ithaca College intentional efforts to enhance social capital include:

1. Civic engagement → The Faculty Commons is a new model for coordinating the various faculty development efforts within a blended online and face to face environment. The program relies on participation by faculty and staff from all areas and seeks to build engagement through careful employment of social networking and other web-based tools. Additionally, the new president and provost have engaged in an active strategic visioning process which led to a series of integrative curriculum projects, also designed to build engagement of faculty in new ways.
2. Norms and trust → Intentional efforts to build shared faculty norms and trust across campus include the all-college mentoring program, tenure seminar, and cohort groups. All include small faculty groups designed to increase shared knowledge and reduce isolation and anxiety.
3. Effective collective action → Faculty governance is being actively revitalized by the new president and the dean of the largest school. From the top the administrators urge collective faculty communication, engagement, and action.
4. Bonding capital → With the generational transition, many departments are becoming more effective bodies. A culture of mistrust of administration and of factions within departments is shifting as newer faculty members perceive themselves as institutional citizens in addition to teacher/scholars. Cooperation and support among colleagues in “newer” departments appears to enhance both

the individual social capital of faculty and the capital of the department within the institution.

5. Bridging capital → Intentional and increased use of the web environment is linking people across status and divisions.

St. Mary's College of Maryland is a small, public, liberal arts honors college with 2,000 undergraduates and a single graduate program (Master of Arts in Teaching.) After identifying communication as a primary issue and academic excellence as the main priority on campus 5 years ago, the 140 full time faculty members instituted changes in faculty governance, tenure and promotion, a new core curriculum for general education, and a vigorous participation in institutional planning. As a result of these changes, faculty development shifted from four Division Heads working with the Provost to an Associate Provost working with seventeen departments.

At St. Mary's College of Maryland intentional efforts to enhance social capital include:

1. Civic engagement → The college began weeklong Teaching Excellence Workshops open to the entire faculty in 2006. A slightly marginalized Education Studies department was encouraged to develop workshops; their engagement then sparked another 10% of the faculty to volunteer to lead discussions and active learning sessions on pedagogy of liberal arts skills, classroom management, assessment and international education. After a modest beginning, the workshops now host over 50% of the faculty each

August.

2. Norms and trust → The campus focused on new faculty to who share their first year experiences with peers in a seminar, visit classrooms of peers and more experienced colleagues, learn about norms from colleagues outside their departments, and work in cohorts to develop their review/ tenure portfolios. Cohorts are urged to generate questions and requests of the Provost who visits at their invitation. Simultaneous small group discussions by over 75% of the faculty on the mission of the college, with postings of the groups' ideas led to satisfaction and trust that we have a common goal.
3. Effective collective action → Faculty vigorously discussed proposals in small groups and large forums that led to changes in faculty governance, tenure and promotion processes and a new core curriculum within the last 5 years. The Provost worked closely with the faculty senate to develop opportunities for collaboration, review and critique that produced strong affirmation of faculty generated change.
4. Bonding capital → The new core curriculum has led faculty to collectively study ways to teach four liberal arts skills effectively. Concern expressed by individual faculty paved the way for effective cohort building around faculty development of teaching and assessment skills in the new first year seminars. This yearly cohort has taken their skill and experience back to their

departments to apply the principles to their majors.

5. Bridging capital → The discussions of each of the major changes on campus occurred with input from faculty, students and staff serving on each small group. Faculty from disparate departments were intentionally placed together in small groups. The discussions that ensued were richer because they bridged the concerns of any one campus group and faculty often brought different departmental perspectives to the discussion. All committees, both administrative and faculty, post minutes, agendas, and background materials on a campus portal. The administration often asks for written feedback and publishes anonymous surveys of opinions and preferences. This vertical linking to authority has engaged the community in the decision making process, increased transparency and trust and revealed community norms.

Ellis University is a mid-sized institution serving 3,000 undergraduate adult learners and 1,000 graduate adult learners exclusively through online instruction. Unlike many other online institutions, it operates under a not-for-profit business model. The selection of this business model was intended to support an institutional focus on the quality of student learning and the integrity of its academic programs and systems, which is a source of pride for many among its 12 full-time faculty and 200 adjunct faculty. Those faculty and other stakeholders have had many opportunities for collective action following the launch of this university as an independent institution in 2008, and they have also had many opportunities to create new academic policies and systems, to set

institutional values and priorities, and to define other aspects of the culture of this new organization.

At Ellis University intentional efforts to enhance social capital include:

1. Civic engagement → The need to construct a new organizational culture, creating academic policies, developing new degree programs, and meeting external demands of regulators posed extreme challenges for the institution, but working to overcome those challenges also made many stakeholders highly engaged in institution building. A notable example was an eighteen-month highly collaborative process designing a system of shared governance that led to the institution's board of trustees approving a faculty senate constitution and a separately-negotiated shared governance agreement designed to provide the majority adjunct faculty with significant opportunities to participate in academic decision-making, institutional assessment and improvement, and strategic planning.
2. Norms and trust → This new institution confronted serious challenges building trust between administrative leaders and its faculty, a group that is widely dispersed geographically and consists largely of adjuncts, a population that often is marginalized and often is exploited within academia. However, conducting the ambitious governance creation project described above generated a high degree of trust among stakeholders and required enforcing strong norms supporting open communication and promoting collaboration. Strong norms supporting open communication and promoting collaboration.

The faculty, staff, and administrators of this institution also share a strong sense integrity and commitment to building an online institution that does more to support academic quality than do many of its for-profit peer online institutions.

3. Effective collective action → In addition to the governance creation project , significant recent collective action include the creation of six new degree programs, the development and implementation of a formal institutional decision-making model designed to ensure transparent and inclusive decision-making, and successful navigation through numerous regulatory challenges, including most significantly securing of regional accreditation. Confronting the serious challenges required to launch this new institution both required the extensive use of social capital and served to build that resource.

4. Bonding capital → All faculty interact via an effective virtual social network facilitated by sophisticated virtual campus learning platform that includes many social networking functions and widespread use of "web 2.0" communication functions like wikis and blogs. These tools allow those individuals partially to overcome the largest challenge they face with respect to building and using social capital, namely, the severe communication problems caused by the geographical-dispersion of the faculty.

5. Bridging capital → Intentional attempts to bridge traditional social cleavages, for example between full-time faculty and adjunct faculty and between trustees and faculty.

The College at Brockport is one of thirteen regional comprehensive colleges in the State University of New York system. Most of the nearly 7,000 undergraduate and just over 1,000 graduate students are from the western New York region close to where the college is located. Over the last few years, the college has sought to change its identity in order to compete for students in other markets. To help bring about this change, the college recently reorganized the academic affairs division from three schools to four (with a fifth to come sometime in the near future) in order to create a more “entrepreneurial culture”. These changes have predictably caused anxiety among many of the 573 full and part time faculty as they are not certain whether they fit with the college’s plans for the future. In response to this change, many faculty have chosen to focus more on their personal professional career at the expense of initiatives that could increase the levels of social capital at the college. From a faculty development perspective, the challenge has been to help faculty reframe these changes as opportunities to work together to collectively to improve both student learning and their own professional development

1. Civic engagement → The college is in the midst of a three year pilot to explore faculty learning communities (FLCs) as the model for all faculty development initiatives. The FLC approach helps increase engagement as the participants bring together compare their own interests with college communities’ investment in a particular topic. For example, three FLCs (on diversity, service

learning, and online learning) have given the faculty involved a sense of ownership over three areas that tend to be top down administration-led initiatives.

2. Norms and trust → Due to the recent changes, some faculty are hesitant to trust the institution's commitment to its stated goals. The Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (the faculty development center at the college) has tried to increase the overall level of trust through seeking administrative support for interdisciplinary collaboration and interaction. To this end, a "Teaching and Learning Day" was established where faculty present to colleagues outside their department on what they are doing in their courses to improve student learning. We have also been using the FLC approach to help new faculty orient to the college.
3. Effective collective action → Since the FLCs are still in their early stages, it remains to be seen if they can help effect positive change through more broad based collective action.
4. Bonding capital → When combined with weekly "brown bag lunches" and periodic workshops, the FLC approach to faculty development provides ample opportunities for faculty to bond with each other.

5. Bridging capital → There is a challenge (and also an opportunity) to create bridging capital between faculty and the administration through helping to address assessment, diversity, and online learning needs. While the administration has identified these areas as important for the future of the college, the faculty remain largely uncertain and/or skeptical about these initiatives.

The next step in our use of this analysis is to explore ways to assess the level of social capital in our institutions. Social capital has been measured using the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, designed in 2000 by the Saguaro Seminar of the John F. Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University (Roper 2000). We see a good opportunity to adapt items included in the survey so they apply to faculty experience and can be used to form a composite measure of social capital experienced and used by faculty at institutions of higher learning. Such a measure would support additional useful research creating benchmarks, comparative analyses within and across institutions of higher learning, and evaluations of interventions designed to increase social capital at colleges and universities or to exploit existing social capital to improve student learning at those organizations or to promote faculty or organizational development. We conclude, therefore, that there is great value in using the concepts we discuss here to evaluate the level social capital within and across our institutions and to measure the effectiveness of intentional efforts to harness that asset.

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