



# *Educated and Empowered:* The Process of a Cross- Cultural Community Collaboration

**UNIVERSITY-  
COMMUNITY  
COLLABORATIONS  
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## **ABSTRACT**

In this paper, we describe the process by which a team of interdisciplinary graduate and undergraduate students, together with their faculty, engaged in a semester-long project in which they partnered with and planned a community-facing event with, by, and for the local Haitian immigrant community. The event, *Educated and Empowered*, consisted of a three-hour long community fair which provided members of the local Haitian community with resources on area social service agencies, opportunities for civic engagement, and an outlet for building social capital via both intra-cultural bonding and cross-cultural bridging. A discussion of the key take-aways (lessons learned) and reflections on student learning are provided.

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Haitian people have a rich cultural history. Haiti is the first colonized country to self-liberate via revolution, and is the world's first Black republic (Shen, 2015). While this is a source of pride and has fostered a spirit of self-reliance, their history of colonialization, oppression, and exploitation is linked to distrust of outside communities, particularly professionals and those in authority (e.g., see Nicolas et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2014). Sometimes described as transnational, the Haitian diaspora maintains strong economic, socio-political, and familial ties in both Haiti and the U.S. Transnational ties serve as a protective factor through reinforcing cultural identity, meeting spiritual and religious needs, facilitating information and resource sharing, and establishing hometown associations to maintain ties with and provide material support to Haiti (Allen et al., 2016; Joseph et al., 2018; Pierre-Louis, 2013).

The Haitian immigrant community, both in the U.S. and internationally, retains strong faith-based ties which inform their social justice work (Mooney, 2009). Strong family relationships can lead Haitians to primarily rely on family, not professionals, for assistance (Nicolas et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2014) and to maintain strong boundaries between private home life and school contexts (Doucet, 2011). These strong familial ties, commitment to self-reliance, and an emphasis on the value of education are significant community strengths. Many Haitian immigrants identify as Haitian or Haitian American rather than Black or African American; this might be due not only to pride in their culture, but also perceptions that African Americans are stereotyped negatively in U.S. society (Song, 2010). However, shared experiences of racial discrimination can lead some Haitian Americans to feel connected to the African American community (Thornton et al., 2013). Differences in the experiences of first- and second-generation immigrants, and different experiences of acculturation or assimilation processes, further add to the complexity of Haitian immigrant communities (e.g., see Furon & Schiller, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 2012; and Schiller, 2017 for further discussion of generational acculturation and assimilation processes among Haitian people).

The U.S. is home to the largest Haitian migrant population. The time between the 1960's and early 1990's served as a critical period of Haitian migration as many Haitians fled the repression of the Duvalier government and failed neoliberal economic policy in Haiti. A number of refugees sought to reach Florida by boat, hence the term "boat people" adopted by some U.S. media; yet the U.S. declared them economic migrants, rather than political refugees. This period, referred to as the protest period, saw the mobilization around the right to political asylum for Haitians, who were treated differently than Cuban refugees migrating during the same period. Whereas Cuban refugees were offered asylum and economic support, Haitian refugees were jailed and

returned to Haiti where they faced governmental persecution (Higman, 2011; Pierre-Louis, 2013). After the Duvalier regime was overthrown in 1986, many Haitians returned to Haiti to assist in rebuilding the country. In New York City, with the experienced leaders returning home, new Haitian leaders emerged with a focus on civic engagement, including advocating citizenship, voter registration, and lobbying (Pierre-Louis, 2013).

With the compounding effect of political instability, poverty, and natural disasters, including the devastating 2010 7.0 earthquake, the migration of Haitians to the U.S. continues to grow. In 1980, the Haitian immigrant population was 92,000; by 2015, the number had grown to 676,000 with metro areas of Miami, New York, Boston, and Orlando accounting for 74% of the Haitian population (Schulz & Batalova, 2017). One factor influencing the swell in immigration from Haiti is the designation of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in 2010, a temporary legal status granted to certain groups who cannot return to their country because of natural disaster, ongoing conflict, or other circumstances preventing the country from receiving the individuals. Following the 2010 earthquake, Haiti was added to the list of TPS, creating legal migration pathways for Haitians. Despite attempts to end TPS for Haitians, they remain a protected population (U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services, 2019). Despite growing migration, Haitians account for less than two percent of the U.S. foreign-born population (Schulz & Batalova, 2017).

## **CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNITY COLLABORATION**

The community in which the project occurred is a quasi-rural city located on a peninsula. The city is the largest in the region, serves as the county seat, and has a population of 30,343, with just under 99,000 people residing in the County, per the 2010 U.S. census. The city is a minority-majority city (Cox, 2018), which includes many immigrant groups of which the Haitian community is the largest. Leaders estimate the size of the local Haitian community to be about 7,000 people, based on church attendance. The Haitian population is likely underreported given concerns about immigrant status (Ryan Weaver, personal communication, 2019).

The local community in which the project took place has deep African American roots and a history of racial tension. The region is home to several prominent African American historical figures, including Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, who were both enslaved in the area. The city is home to the oldest-standing African American church on the peninsula, built by formerly enslaved people in a meadow where they gathered for worship while enslaved. Historical stories suggest Haitian people resided in the area during the colonialization

period (Associated Press, 2006; Ryan Weaver, personal communication, 2019).

The partnering university is a predominantly white institution (PWI) with a growing racially and ethnically diverse student body and an institutionalized value of community and civic engagement. In the fall 2018 semester, local Haitian leaders reached out to the university via a public-facing civic engagement office, upon which they were referred to one of the faculty members (Michele). The faculty member (Michele) met with three of the community leaders: two Haitian leaders (both first-generation immigrants and naturalized citizens living in the U.S. for over 20 years) and one African American leader, who is the chair of an organization of Black leaders in the region, at a preliminary meeting to discuss project goals and objectives from the standpoint of the community leaders. From there, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) was developed. The MOU consisted of a plan to increase civic engagement in the Haitian community via the development of targeted voter registration efforts, incorporated into a community-building effort.

The initiating faculty member was teaching an undergraduate community psychology course in the upcoming semester. Discussing the collaboration with the Haitian community with a colleague in social work, the pair decided to work together on the project given the colleague was teaching macro social work practice and planned to develop a community-based experiential learning project. Both community psychology and social work share a lot of common ground as both are committed to social change and social justice and recognize individuals operate within a larger socio-cultural, political, and economic environment (Misca & Unwin, 2017), making the decision to collaborate easy.

## PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of the project was three-fold, which was informed by the initial leadership team as well as the input of community members during the assessment phase. First, we wanted to provide the local Haitian community with an opportunity to build a sense of community and shared culture. Sense of community is a psychological feeling of belonging, interdependence, and emotional investment (e.g., McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Feelings of a sense of community are established via several means, including but not limited to, connections to a physical space with a shared cultural history (e.g., Brodsky et al., 2004) and establishment of social capital (e.g., Putnam, 2000).

It is in this spirit that we decided to hold the event at the aforementioned former church and current historical center, which is located near a small Haitian enclave. With its prominence as a historic cultural site for the local African American community, it was hoped that hosting an event at this location would aid connecting

and integrating the immigrant Haitian and local African American community. Holding an in-person event allows for the establishment of interpersonal ties and connections, thus increasing social capital. Building these connections, known as bridging, effectively enhances and grows social capital (e.g., Coffe & Geys, 2007).

A secondary outcome was to encourage community empowerment and civic participation. Community empowerment entails feelings of community pride, and additionally encompasses the ability of people to control their own lives and their community's future (Rappaport, 1981). Ideally, community empowerment encompasses citizen participation: the ability of community members to take part in institutional decisions that impact them (Wandersman et al., 2004), including civic engagement and public policy (Wandersman, 2009).

A third outcome was to better connect the university and local Haitian communities, and to provide university students with hands-on experience developing community practice skills. The organizing team consisted of undergraduate psychology students, graduate social work students, Haitian community leaders, and people affiliated with the local cultural center. The event provided students with grounding in community practice fundamentals.

## Assessment

To engage with Haitian leaders and local Haitian community members to establish the most suitable intervention practice, graduate social work students conducted a qualitative assessment of local community need as an initial starting point. Students worked individually to gather information about the local Haitian population, including lists of known Haitian churches, restaurants, and businesses.

A review of census data and local news articles revealed a lack of public information to provide a comprehensive picture of the population. Holes in the existing data included an accurate population size, public visibility, and access to Haitian businesses, other Haitian establishments, and social organizations. Beyond the possible population underreporting, the Haitian leaders stated there has been substantial population growth since the 2010 census. The limited publicly available information suggests that they are relatively disconnected and inaccessible to the greater community.

Early in the project, two panels comprised of Haitian leaders and community members were held in the partnering classes. Both panels were attended by a local African American leader, who served as a conduit between the Haitian community and local community organizations, with an expressed interest to build the power of Black people in the area. Haitian panel members shared their experiences of migration, assimilation, and acculturation and spoke to the various differences of first- and second-generation immigrants. Living in a rural community on the east coast of the U.S., the panelists

highlighted the many challenges Haitians experienced in smaller communities, including limited access to adequate services, differences in parenting practices, and the lack of representation despite being the largest local immigrant population. Panelists also discussed commonalities, differences, and tensions between Haitian immigrants and the existing African American population. Given their limited exposure to the Haitian community, students engaged panelists with questions to further their understanding and build on information that they had gathered.

The African American leader stressed the need for local political representation for the Haitian community. Other panelists agreed and talked about the need for voter registration and U.S. Census participation. The panel members shared a lack of trust within the Haitian community of outside agencies who offer aid. They stressed that establishing trust and engaging the Haitian community more with the greater community was necessary for longevity.

As one student stated, “A sense of trust had to be developed on at least some level to establish that our class/school genuinely wanted to help and that meant showing up.” To this aim, faculty members and students attended two events the Haitian community. The grand opening of an immigration services organization, housed within a Haitian church, served as a networking opportunity with Haitian leaders and community members. The second community event was a seminar providing both Haitian and African American community members with information on how to prepare for homeownership. At the event, Haitian and African American community members interacted, and the project was announced. Interpreters were on-hand for Creole speakers.

After the initial meeting with the Haitian community leaders, in-class panel discussions, and attendance at these community events, the graduate social work students conducted field interviews with Haitian community members. Students established contacts within the Haitian community through personal and professional connections. Interviews with members of the general Haitian population allowed students to assess the needs of the community and further establish trust. Students prepared questions based on content

shared during the panel and research of publicly available documents as a starting point for discussions.

Interviews revealed discontinuity in perceived needs between Haitian community leaders and the broader Haitian community. While the Haitian leaders felt the biggest need was civic engagement and increased voter registration and representation, broader community members desired access to local community resources and support service agencies. Community members felt that learning how to navigate various systems (e.g. education, legal, social service) outside of the Haitian network could help them surmount current barriers like food insecurity, housing, and school enrollment. Many community members viewed limited English proficiency as a large barrier to their engagement. Many of the print resource materials and access to public services requires reading and writing in English. Given limited translation and interpreter services, community members often forego needed resources. The interviews also revealed that community members did desired change, but were also distrustful of outside sources. While the interviews themselves would not completely resolve trust issues, the connections lent to a mutual interest and provided students with the necessary information to plan the intervention.

### Planning

Once data was collected, the students determined that there was a wide variety of needs. This includes limited access to and knowledge of community resources, lack of representation in local government, and the need for a general sense of community between Haitians and the greater area.

Students in both classes met to discuss how to address the needs expressed by community leaders and members. Given the Haitian leaders expressed interest in a civic engagement event, core members of the university team met with the leaders to broaden event goals to address both civic engagement and community empowerment through accessing needed resources, speaking to the articulated needs of both leaders and community members. **Table 1** provides an overview of the stakeholders involved, and their role in the planning process.

To streamline event planning, students in both classes were split into teams, with each team having specific

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	TASKS
Faculty mentors	Provide oversight and guidance of student work; act as liaison between Haitian community leaders and students; acquire funding
Haitian community leaders	Translation; advertising (in partnership with student teams)
Graduate students	Assess community need; outreach to vendors; volunteer at event
Undergraduate students	Assist graduate student teams in vendor outreach; develop preparatory materials; volunteer at event

**Table 1** Stakeholders' Role in Planning.

planning goals aligned with the purpose of the event. The four teams included the Planning Team, Street Team (outreach and recruitment), Fundraising Team, and Ad Team. So that psychology and social work students were not duplicating efforts, all teams worked collaboratively with their counterpart in the other class. In most teams, the graduate student team members assumed leadership roles; this is not surprising, considering the differential knowledge, experience, and maturity levels between graduate and undergraduate students. The only exception was the Street Team, in which graduate and undergraduate students shared leadership via collaborative process. Several joint class sessions were held and most teams set up group texting in order to share timely information.

The *Planning Team* coordinated logistics and oversight of the event. Securing a suitable location for the event was the initial task. As mentioned, a historical church now a cultural center honoring the rich history of regional African Americans was selected for the event. This location holds reverence within the African American community and was chosen for its central location based on the recommendation of a community member. The Planning Team secured event vendors, ranging from local Haitian businesses and various service providers in the areas of education, social services and medical, which were determined by the needs expressed during the interviews as well as by requests of the Haitian leaders. Additionally, the Haitian leaders tasked the Planning Team with inviting local elected officials and church leaders to the event. The elected officials identified by Haitian leaders were the County Council President, the County Sheriff, and the city Mayor. Additional tasks included securing a DJ/Live music, obtaining tables and volunteers, delegating tasks to the other teams, and coordinating the day of the event.

The *Ad Team*, a small group, created promotional content: event flyers, radio ads, and social media posts. Given that many Haitians only speak Creole, all materials were in both English and Creole. The Ad Team worked with Haitian community members to translate the material; content was further modified based on feedback from the Haitian leaders. Finally, the ad team designed buttons promoting civic and community engagement, distributed at the event.

The *Street Team* worked closely with the Haitian community, attending events to spread the word. The Street Team posted flyers in locations where members of the Haitian community lived and worked. They also connected with local Haitian and non-Haitian businesses and faith-based communities situated in Haitian and African American neighborhoods, who promoted the event with announcements. In addition to traditional outreach, members of the Street Team connected with the local Haitian radio station and created a Facebook event to further promote the event. Furthermore, members of this team served as a liaison between the

students and Haitian leaders by relaying progress to the leaders and messages back to the appropriate teams during planning. The Street Team also recruited university students to volunteer at the event.

The *Fundraising Team* focused on raising money for the event as it was determined that the event would require financial support to secure a location and purchase refreshments, promotion materials, and supplies. The Fundraising Team hosted a bake sale on the university campus. This not only raised money, but also provided outreach and awareness to other students, staff and the campus community about the growing Haitian community. In addition, members of the Team secured several donations from local Haitian and non-Haitian businesses, ranging from gift cards to restaurants to pastries and drinks to monetary and in-kind support. Funds raised were supplemented with a small university grant, obtained by the supervising faculty.

### Intervention

The event was a three-hour event held on a Saturday in April. In line with feedback received during the assessment phase, a number of area nonprofit and government agencies served as vendors during the event, including representatives from state and regional agencies that serve the Haitian community (e.g., the Board of Education, regional agencies providing services to families and children), area nonprofits (e.g., local crisis center, mentoring program), and Haitian-owned businesses (e.g., a Haitian clothing store, a Haitian restaurant). A Haitian band played traditional music; a local Haitian radio station also broadcasted on-site.

The core planning team of Haitian leaders, students and faculty selected the theme and title of *Educated and Empowered* for the event. This title was selected as it resonated with the key areas of need identified during assessment. As part of the event branding process, the *Educated and Empowered* title was printed on the event poster and on giveaway tote bags, which had an image of the Haitian and U.S. flags, to symbolize culture spanning, collaboration, and connection between Haitian and American identities and communities.

To increase civic participation among Haitian community members, a goal of the Haitian leaders, one table at the event was designated as a location for distributing materials highlighting opportunities for civic involvement. Materials at this table included: (1) information on local boards and committees at the county and city level to which people can be appointed or elected; (2) information encouraging people to participate in the 2020 U.S. Census, including to identify as Haitian on the census form; (3) a voter registration table; and (4) buttons promoting voting, census participation, and unity between the Haitian and African American community.

The event was attended by approximately 50 people, including community members, students, vendors and

Haitian community leaders. Unfortunately, despite the event location and promoting the event in local businesses serving African American clientele, the event attracted little attention by African American community members. During the event, students registered two Haitian community members. Seven individuals visited the civic engagement table, which provided a list of local community meetings, boards and committees that were open to the public. Participation in voter registration and civic engagement table was lower than expected by Haitian community leaders.

## REFLECTION ON THE PROCESS AND KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Overall, the *Educated and Empowered* project had mixed success. Attendance was lower than desired, however, the benefits of this type of initiative extend far beyond the actual event. The initiative facilitated dialogue between university faculty and local Haitian community leaders, paving the way for future collaborations. Unfortunately, attempts at bridging with the local African American community were not successful. The program also served as a useful experiential learning tool, providing hands-on training to students in community organizing techniques. A student noted, "Overall, involvement in the development, planning, and execution of the community project was essential to my knowledge and growth within the field of community involvement as it provided the opportunity to practically apply many of the concepts and practices presented within the classroom. Although marks were missed, the room for error proved necessary in providing room for reflection, analysis, and progression in possible future projects, as well as day-to-day community interaction." At the post-event debriefing, Haitian community leaders recognized that attendance was low, and while disappointed, acknowledged this was due to several factors for which all parties were mutually responsible. Haitian leaders recognized that the student planning teams worked hard and put forth their best efforts, and attributed low attendance due to a lack of communication between university and Haitian organizers, which led to goal migration and mixed messages during the event planning process.

Perhaps the primary factor influencing project success was effective communication among various stakeholders. Clear, consistent, and frequent communication among stakeholders is key for successful community organizing initiatives, which rely heavily on democratic processes and strong relationships (e.g., Christens, 2010; Heath, 2007). The ability of stakeholders to effectively communicate influenced the project on multiple fronts, from the process of trust-building, to goal setting, to assessing capacity to complete the project.

In order to make community collaborations successful, goals must be clearly specified, and constant check-ins are needed to ensure goals are being met (e.g., Bronstein, 2003). One challenge we faced was goal misalignment and migration of purpose, caused by inconsistent communication and initial mis-assessment of community need. Initially, the primary goal of the partnership was to register Haitian community members to vote and to encourage census participation. However, concerns about citizenship status influencing the efficacy of a voter registration drive, coupled with feedback from Haitian community members on more immediate needs (e.g., education and access to translation/interpreter services), led to re-visiting the purpose and goals of the collaboration mid-way through planning. The various stakeholder groups revisited ideas and re-negotiated goals. In order to retain common ground among all stakeholders, a voter registration drive was merged with a resource fair.

However, concerns over how the event was advertised to the lay public persisted in several ways. First, the secondary goal of bridging the local Haitian and African American communities was under-emphasized in favor of outreach and promotion to the Haitian community. Second, the change in direction of project goals led to community members hearing mixed messages regarding the purpose of the event. Some community members who heard about the project early in the planning process had initial understandings that the event was a voter registration drive. Although the planning team attempted to clarify the change in project direction, it is inevitable that the migration of goals would create confusion, suppressing day-of turnout. This was amplified by the fact that most members of the planning team were unable to get directly involved in event marketing and advertising, due to language barriers.

*Take-Away #1: Ensure goals of all partners are aligned and clearly communicated and documented. Changes in goals throughout the planning process must be discussed and agreed upon by all stakeholders.*

Goal migration occurred, in part, from a lack of inclusion of all stakeholders early on in planning. While this project mimicked some aspects of participatory action-research (PAR), this was not fully a PAR project as general members of the Haitian community had only limited involvement in informing and planning the intervention, and while many of the students were African American, there was under-representation of African American community members not affiliated with the university on the planning team. The partnering Haitian leaders served as both spokespeople and gatekeepers for their broader community, and preferred a top-down approach, in which leaders partnered with other community leaders in education, business, and political sectors to develop an effective event. Working through the Haitian leaders had substantial benefits: the leaders were clearly well-known community stakeholders with

influential outreach, which was particularly useful given the general cultural distrust many members of the Haitian community have for outsiders (e.g., Nicolas et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2014). Given the time-limited nature of the project and limited connections to the Haitian community prior to this partnership, establishing trust and relationships with general members of the Haitian community proved difficult. A wider inclusion of community members in the planning process would have resulted in a better assessment of community needs, thus reducing the goal migration that occurred. In this way, working solely through leaders-as-gatekeepers may have worked to reduce the event's impact. If working through gatekeepers, it is important that community practitioners have a strong understanding of not only the gatekeepers' role in reaching their community, but also whether and to what extent gatekeepers reflect community need.

*Take-Away #2: Make sure either all stakeholders are involved in all stages of the process, or that gatekeepers are reflective of the larger community you are trying to reach.*

Communication also influenced stakeholder abilities to engage in building social capital via influencing trust. Building social capital is an important component of community organizing (e.g., Gittel & Vidal, 1998). Although bridging is often touted as an effective way to enhance social capital (e.g., Coffe & Geys, 2007), the bridging process itself relies on significant mutual trust. And, building trust takes considerable time, effort, and energy from stakeholders, particularly when engaging in multiracial organizing (Gittel & Vidal, 1998; Rusch, 2010). In a project with many stakeholders, such as this one, multiple dimensions of trust needed to be developed and sustained, including but not limited to: trust between local Haitian community leaders and university partners, trust between two groups of students who differed in discipline, age, and educational and life experience, trust between local community leaders and members of the broader Haitian community, and trust between partnering university faculty involved with the project. In the words of one student, "I learned how important trust and building a relationship off of trust is." Building trust while simultaneously engaging in the time-intensive process of community organizing proved challenging. Trust-building is dependent on time and repeated positive interactions (Gittel & Vidal, 1998), both of which conflict with the demands of organizing a time-sensitive event. And, general feelings of mistrust for others, present in Haitian culture (Nicolas et al., 2009; Schwartz et al., 2014), presented obstacles particular to multiracial organizing. During the course of the project, we attempted to address trust-building in multiple ways, including but not limited to frequent meetings and frank discussions among stakeholders, and working in collaboration with the Haitian leadership team when

drafting and disseminating advertising. Nevertheless, the tight timeline and lack of previously-established trust bonds made organizing difficult, and worked against the project's success. Ultimately, trust and relationship bonds were built, but remain fragile: at the conclusion of the project, the partnership between university organizers and Haitian community leaders largely dissolved, although the parties remain in contact. One undergraduate student reflected on the development of trust:

"The experience of planning and executing the Educated and Empowered event opened my eyes to the importance of balancing trust between the organizers and the community in partnership. Goals were met with mixed success and I believe that this stemmed from the amount of trust given to the university community from the Haitian community and vice versa. Elaborating on the former, it became clear during debrief (with the Haitian leaders) that vital information, such as the work schedule of the majority of the community, was not conveyed... Additionally, during some of the Street Team's outreach attempts, the Haitian leaders preferred to distribute literature and spread the word without the help of both undergraduate and graduate students."

*Take-Away #3: Carefully attend to trust-building throughout the organizing process; if possible, work to establish trust among all stakeholders prior to initiating organizing work.*

The mismatch between the project goals and the capacity of team members to accomplish them presented an additional challenge. There were plenty of people planning the *Educated and Empowered* event, however, the stakeholder groups did not as a collective have the capacity to complete the project as envisioned. For instance, the graduate student class was more knowledgeable and more connected to the community, but buy-in among this stakeholder group was low; further, most of the graduate students worked during the day, limiting their abilities to engage in on-the-ground organizing during work hours. The undergraduate students, while having greater buy-in and greater daytime availability, had fewer professional skills with which to accomplish organizing tasks, and in many instances lacked reliable transportation. Further, the fact that none of the university-affiliated stakeholders were Haitian meant that the partnering Haitian leaders were responsible for all translation and the bulk of recruitment. This was a learning process for students. One undergraduate student Street Team member stated:

"we kind of had this idea of possibly going door-to-door to deliver the flyers for the event, and raising awareness and get people out, and somebody

from the social work class as well as someone from the Haitian community had to let us know that people probably wouldn't respond well to that because some of them aren't citizens; so they may think that we are immigrants or they may be more hesitant to open the door."

When engaging in collaborations of this nature, many have recommended assessment of capacity to complete the work as an initial starting point. This can include assessment of multiple aspects critical to successful project planning and implementation, such as "traditional" assessment of organizing capacity, decision-making, and evaluation (e.g., see Beckley et al., 2008), as well as of factors such as compatibility of resources (e.g., Stockdale et al., 2006). A capacity assessment would have also identified early on the differential goals of the various stakeholders. Time limitations, including the semester timeline, and resource limitations led our teams to overlook this step; however, in retrospect, even an informal capacity assessment could have helped us foresee and avoid potential barriers.

*Take-away #4: Assess the capacity of team members to complete the project early on, and modify as necessary.*

## OVERALL GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Our initial goals and outcomes in the *Educated and Empowered* event were four-fold: (1) foster connection and integration between the immigrant Haitian and local African American communities; (2) encourage community empowerment and civic participation; and (3) better connect the university and local Haitian communities, and (4) prior to provide university students with a hands-on experience developing community practice skills. Whereas we had mixed success on our first two goals and lower-than-desired attendance, the third and fourth outcomes were successfully met.

The Haitian leaders previously did not have connections to the partnering departments, and thus the process of planning the event provided additional entry points into the university. Although relationships remain fragile, the connections that were established could be re-instituted as the Haitian community continues to grow and gain additional community power. Students involved in the project experienced strong development of community practice skill sets. For instance, an undergraduate student said, "With this, when I leave this class, I will always remember the cycle of social changes or multicultural competencies, I will always remember this stuff because we actually practiced it." A graduate student continued, "The Haitian community is an integral part of the community and their voices should be heard at the same caliber as other residents. Seeing the passion behind the community leaders who came to our class and who attended the event created interest of my own.

I became invested in this project and because of this exposure I have a better understanding of the Haitian community." While not all goals were achieved, students left the experience feeling *educated and empowered*.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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