Summary of “The Community Engagement Model in Library and Information Science Education: A Case Study of a Collection Development and Management Course”

“This article presents the Community Engagement Model (CEM) in library and information science (LIS) education based on a case study of a collection development and management course taught during two semesters involving thirty graduate students” (Mehra & Robinson, 2009, p. 15). Students partnered with community agencies of their choice to develop collections to meet the needs of particular audiences in varied community-based settings. The learning experiences from the perspectives of the instructor, students, and collaborating community representatives, including discussion of the course goals, assignments, methods, and community impact were also reviewed.

The students’ assignments helped guide them in the collection development process through eight step-by-step activity modules, or building blocks. Topics of these activity modules included assessing the community agency and its parent organization; building a sound rationale for their collection; conducting needs assessment and community analysis; constructing a collection development policy; assessing agency strengths and weaknesses; evaluating the existing collection; selecting specific items for the collection; and promoting the collection.

“Experiences in this course case study provided positive evidence to support the use of building blocks as a structuring and methodological tool in the teaching of collection development and the management of community engagement practices in the classroom” (Mehra & Robinson, 2009, p. 29).

The collaboration between students and community agencies resulted in benefits for both groups. The students obtained an understanding of the challenges in applying collection development principles to specific agencies and communities. They learned how to incorporate theory in practice, thus effectively meeting the community’s needs, wants, and aspirations. The
community representatives stated that partnering with LIS students during the course made a positive difference in the success of their assistance in meeting the needs of various constituencies in a timely, cost-effective, efficient, and practical manner. Providing the right content to the right person at the right time can be a dramatic and life-changing event (Mehra & Robinson, 2009, p. 33).

I believe universities should have a vested interest in community engagement because it leads to new opportunities for learning and research; develops and maintains good relationships with the communities in which they live and work; provides learning and personal development and enrichment opportunities for students and staff; and improves recruitment, retention, and diversification of students and staff. Furthermore, community engagement benefits individuals and organizations in the community by facilitating the utilization of university resources, skills, research, and expertise by members of the public; encouraging members of the public to be aware and take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them; and providing community organizations with a source of labor and expertise.

I agree with the views stated by the authors of this article. Higher education community engagements should be mutually beneficial partnerships between universities and communities. Proactive community engagement and outreach work complements universities’ primary contribution to society – their teaching and research. Personally, I believe the integration of theory into practice is an important component of undergraduate and graduate education. In a professional school, learning in community engagement activities places students in the field where they encounter challenges that cause library and information science work to be stimulating and productive.