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Straight A's?

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Evaluating the Success of Community/University Development Partnerships

In the last several decades, deindustrialization, suburbanization, and disinvestment have combined to undermine the economic and fiscal health of many of the nation's communities. State and local government officials have undertaken numerous strategies to reverse this trend, attempting to revitalize local economies through social services, affordable housing, and job training programs. However, as they continue to confront serious budgetary shortfalls, municipal officials recognize they cannot do it alone.



University of Pennsylvania

The University of Pennsylvania is the oldest comprehensive university in the United States. While the school has a long and distinguished history of community service, it intensified its outreach activities in the mid 1980s, when conditions in its neighborhood in West Philadelphia began to deteriorate. The effort began



when Ira Harkavy and Lee Bensen, two history professors, offered an Honors Seminar designed to engage students and faculty in a systematic analysis of West Philadelphia's decline and the ways in which the community could be turned around. The course attracted campus and community attention alike, especially when the newly appointed Penn president, Sheldon Hackney, agreed to participate in the class.

At the completion of the seminar, the participants proposed the

establishment of the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC). WEPIC's mission would be "to help transform the traditional West Philadelphia public school system into a revolutionary new system of university-assisted, community-centered, neighborhood-based, problem-solving schools." Beginning with a university course in which Penn students helped to introduce West Philadelphia youth to basic building-renovation and landscape-design skills, the proposed Corps became a reality. Since then, it has recruited dozens of Penn faculty members, who have taught a variety of courses, all of which enable Penn students to acquire knowledge while serving the community.

Inspired by his experience in the seminar, President Hackney formed the Penn Center for Community Partnerships in 1992. Part of the President's Office, the Center has four goals:

- increase participation in and enhance coordination among existing Penn service programs;
- initiate new and more effective partnerships between the community and Penn;
- promote the development of new and innovative community development programs involving local organizations and Penn; and
- strengthen regional, national, and international networks of institutions and organizations committed to constructive engagement in their community.

During the past 13 years, the Center has developed a comprehensive set of programs and supported new initiatives throughout the university to achieve these goals, from academically based service activities to community development initiatives.

Among these is Penn's housing initiative. Since 1996, Penn has offered free homeownership classes to West Philadelphia residents. Topics covered include house hunting, basic and alternative mortgage products, and application procedures, and classes help first-time home buyers navigate the credit system. In addition, the Penn Board of Trustees encourages faculty and staff to move into West Philadelphia by offering employee mortgages of up to 120 percent of a home's purchase price. These mortgages do not require down payments or mortgage insurance, and the extra 20 percent helps cover closing costs and needed home improvements.

Penn, at the suggestion of the Center, has also developed an aggressive economic inclusion program with two key elements: (1) For Penn projects costing more than \$5 million, contractors must draw a minimum of 25 percent of their workforce from women, under-represented minorities, and/or disadvantaged populations in the West Philadelphia or Greater Philadelphia region; (2) minority contractors from the area are encouraged to bid on projects, and Penn provides technical assistance to aid these contractors with the bidding process. Dr. Leroy David Nunnery II, Penn's vice president of business services, often works directly with small minority contractors to help them meet the university's bidding requirements and occasionally partners small contractors with larger, more experienced firms to help them gain expertise. Additionally, firms that need assistance in preparing business plans and securing competitive bids are referred to the Small Business Development Center at Penn's Wharton School of Business, which offers no-cost business development assistance.

Turning to the private and non-profit sectors for help, a number of communities are finding partners in local colleges and universities. In small towns, mid-sized cities, and large metropolitan areas across the country, academic institutions are increasingly engaging in local economic development efforts.

A number of compelling factors are driving the increased involvement of university presidents, provosts, and trustees:

- First, the contributions of colleges and universities to local development and regional economic competitiveness are emerging as an increasingly important rationale for public and private investment in higher education.

- Second, in the competition for talented students, faculty, and staff, campus leaders realize that the vitality, attractiveness, and safety of the local community play a critical role in an individual's decision to come to a particular school.

- Third, the pressures to expand a campus' physical boundaries necessitate improving town/gown relationships in order to gain community support for expansion plans.

- And finally, growing awareness of the impacts that a college or university can have on a community through its real estate development decisions, hiring and purchasing practices, and contracting policies has put pressure on higher education officials to be responsible stewards of the local economy.

Support for community/university development partnerships has skyrocketed in the past 20 years. However, researchers Richard Schramm and Nancy Nye have revealed that not all campus/community partnerships are created equal. In 1999, Schramm and Nye undertook an examination of 59 community/university partnership projects. The sample represented the first set of projects to be funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Out-

reach Partnership Program (COPC), a five-year demonstration project designed to help foster university involvement in distressed communities. Their study indicated that community/university partnerships typically fall into one of three categories:

- *Paternalistic/Theory-Testing Partnerships.* Campuses use local communities as laboratories to test hypotheses regarding the operation of the local economy.

- *Professional-Expertise Partnerships.* Campuses are committed to solving problems identified by the local community, but their solutions involve little community participation and generate few skill-building opportunities for local residents.

- *Empowerment/Capacity-Building Partnerships.* Campuses involve local leaders as equal partners in each step of the revitalization process, from problem identification to project implementation to program evaluation. Typically, participatory action research, or “learning by doing,” methods serve as the foundation for this approach. These methods promote strategies that encourage outside investment while enhancing the internal capacity of community-based organizations.

Of the three, Schramm and Nye concluded that “Empowerment/Capacity-Building Partnerships” were the most effective in achieving community development goals. Moreover, these partnerships best met the needs of the participating organizations and helped to nurture positive institutional change.

A New Study

In 2001, I began an investigation of the types of community/university development partnerships that fell into Schramm and Nye’s “Empowerment/Capacity-Building” category. My aim was to identify several principles of good practice that could provide guidance to policy makers and program developers. I began by surveying colleges and universities that were operating public service programs that focused on low-income communities. I drew my list from the members of



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Campus Compact, a coalition of 950 institutions of higher education committed to civic involvement. Approximately 135 campuses responded to my invitation to complete a short web-based survey. Using five selection criteria—(1) operated for more than five years, (2) pursued resident-identified development goals, (3) produced significant new investment in low-income areas, (4) influenced municipal development priorities, and (5) enhanced the organizational capacity of participating community-based organizations—I selected a group of highly effective community/university development partnerships for further study. I pared this group down to ten partnerships that represented involvement by each of the distinct types of higher educational institutions (see table on pages 6 and 7). For each of these partnerships, detailed case studies were completed, examining the origins, evolution, accomplishments, and limitations of the partnerships’ efforts. This article presents the general

themes that emerged from the study and offers three detailed case studies. The full set of research findings will appear in *Promoting Community/University Development Partnerships that Work: News from the Community Service-Learning Front*, a book scheduled to be published in the spring 2006.

Findings from the Field

The ten case studies revealed several important findings about community/university development partnerships. First, colleges and universities are capable of making significant contributions to community-based revitalization efforts in severely distressed communities. A school’s research capacity, financial resources, land assets, management expertise, and political legitimacy can all advance redevelopment efforts in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. Additionally, while past research has emphasized the role of universities in

Table I

Ten Model Community/University Development Partnerships

Name	Type of Institution	Location	Project Name
1. Trinity College	Private, 4-year liberal arts college	Hartford, CT	The Learning Corridor
2. University of Pennsylvania	Private, Ivy League, Research I institution	Philadelphia, PA	West Philadelphia Project
3. University of South Florida	Public, urban metropolitan university	Tampa, FL	Jim Walter Partnership Center
4. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	Public, land grant, Research I institution	East St. Louis, IL	East St. Louis Action Research Project
5. Texas Southern University	Public, historically black college/university	Houston, TX	
6. Salish Kootenai College	Tribal, 2-year college with select 4-year academic programs	Pablo, MT	
7. Elizabeth City State University	Public, historically black college/university, 4-year teachers college	Elizabeth City, NC	Community Development Program
8. California State University at Fullerton, Santa Ana College, University of California at Irvine	Consortium involving 2-year community college serving Hispanics; public, 4-year teachers college; and public, 4-year Research I institution	Santa Ana, CA	Santa Ana Consortium
9. St. Lawrence University, State University of New York at Potsdam	Consortium involving private, 4-year liberal arts institution; and public, 4-year technology institution	Canton, NY	The Canton Initiative
10. University of California at Berkeley, San Francisco State University, Stanford University	Consortium involving public, Research I university; public, metropolitan university; and private, Research I university	Greater San Francisco Bay Area, CA	Joint Community Development Initiative

Source: The Engaged Scholarship Project, 2005. Cornell University and the Campus Compact.

Strategy

Comprehensive strategy emphasizing housing and commercial development, youth services, public school reform, and access to primary health care.

Economic development through university investment in housing and commercial projects and involvement in public school reform efforts.

Targeted development assistance to low-income immigrant communities.

A bottom-up, bottom-sideways approach emphasizing resident leadership, project implementation, and local capacity-building.

Created a small business development center to encourage entrepreneurship among poor and working-class African Americans.

A long-term approach to strengthening the economic health of the Salish Kootenai people through vocational education, small business assistance, design public school reform, community health programs, and the promotion of Native American-designed and manufactured goods.

A comprehensive approach emphasizing homeownership, affordable housing, fair housing, community-based drug prevention, economic development, technical assistance, and community-service learning.

Created a targeted small business assistance center, providing a range of business services to predominantly immigrant-owned start-up firms and developed a comprehensive program to encourage Latino youth to pursue higher education.

A comprehensive approach to strengthening the economy in New York's North Country region, emphasizing import substitution, sustainable manufacturing processes, regional branding, and heritage and eco-tourism.

A cooperative effort to promote sustainable development and enhance the capacity of community-based organizations serving poor and working-class neighborhoods in the Bay Area.

Outcomes

Generated approximately \$168 million in new development in Hartford's distressed Frog Hollow neighborhood.

Improved residential vacancy rates, increased commercial development, improved school attendance and performance, and increased support for minority-owned businesses.

Created one-stop training centers for business planning, micro-lending, workforce development, and college preparation assistance.

Produced 8 community plans, created a new CDC, completed a \$24 million mixed-use development, and established a charter high school.

Fostered the establishment of several new minority businesses, created stronger commercial areas, and expanded access to business education for minority youth.

Reduced reservation unemployment, fostered the sustainable use of natural resources (timber, cattle), involved local business in the of voc-ed programs, developed a tribal-owned information technology business, and provided technical assistance for firms producing Native-designed products.

Completed home repairs and provided home counseling for low-income individuals. Created a network of community-based computer facilities to provide access to web-based economic and community development resources.

Established a \$2 million endowment offering scholarships to Latino students, opened workforce development centers, and initiated several neighborhood renewal projects.

Developed several Main Street businesses, acquired land in support of a heritage tourism strategy, and established a venture capital fund for the possible purchase of a local dairy plant and the development of a diesel fuel facility.

Completed numerous community revitalization plans, increased public and private investment in targeted neighborhoods, and provided technical assistance to several community-based organizations.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) is a large land-grant university located in the heart of central Illinois. In the mid 1980s, State Representative Wyvetter Younge (D-East St. Louis) challenged UIUC's then-president, Stanley O. Ikenberry, to demonstrate his commitment to the school's public service mission by establishing an urban research and outreach program in East St. Louis. Dr. Ikenberry responded to the challenge by allocating \$100,000 per year in university funds to launch the Urban Extension and Minority Access Project. The project was designed to expand employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for the city's unemployed workers, improve access to higher education for East St. Louis residents, and promote a more equitable pattern of metropolitan development.

For the first three years, the project supported numerous UIUC student and faculty research studies that focused on various economic, fiscal, social, and environmental problems facing the city. However, the project waned as few residents, civic leaders, and municipal officials expressed interest in these academic studies. Thus, in 1990, the participating faculty decided to shift the focus and concentrate their efforts on the economic revitalization of a single residential neighborhood in East St. Louis—Emerson Park. With the encouragement of local leaders, UIUC made a commitment to support the economic and community development efforts of the recently established Emerson Park Development Corporation (EPDC). As this partnership was being formed, community leaders shared frustrations regarding the past outreach efforts of the campus. As a result, UIUC and the community agreed to the following guidelines and renamed the initiative the East St. Louis Action Research Project:

- Local residents, not the university or its funding agencies, should determine the issues to be examined.
- Community residents should be involved as equal partners with university-trained researchers at every step of the planning and research process.
- Given the severity of the problems confronting Emerson Park, the university should make a minimum five-year commitment to working with the community.
- Resources raised to support the partnership should be equally distributed between the university and the community.
- The university should assist EPDC in developing the organizational capacity required to plan and implement significant economic and community development projects.

Eager to demonstrate their ability to assist EPDC in this last goal, the participating faculty agreed to prepare a comprehensive development plan for the area using participatory action research methods. During the fall and winter of 1990, a small group of UIUC students and faculty worked together with more than 200 Emerson Park residents to formulate a five-year stabilization plan. The resulting Emerson Park Neighborhood Improvement Plan was given the 1991 "Best Student Project" award by the American Institute of Certified Planners. However, community and campus commitment to the plan was tested in the spring of 1991, when dozens of local and regional agencies refused to fund even the least costly of the plan's 52 specific revitalization projects. Neighborhood leaders, students, and faculty responded to this setback by spearheading a series of "self-help" projects to address the most significant environmental problems confronting the community. Over the next two

years, EPDC and the University mobilized hundreds of community residents and university volunteers to complete a lengthy list of open space improvements and housing repair projects.

EPDC's success with these efforts attracted the attention of a number of federal agencies. Soon, newly submitted proposals resulted in several grants. One, from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, established a shade tree farm and a pumpkin patch to teach Emerson Park youth about the environment, and a second grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development funded the rehabilitation of the homes of seven low- and moderate-income families.

The organization's effectiveness in managing these projects placed it in a position to convince local and regional transportation officials to re-route a light rail line that was being planned between St. Louis International Airport in Missouri and Scott Air Force Base in southwestern Illinois. The new route resulted in the construction of a major commuter rail station in Emerson Park. Developer interest in the community subsequently soared. Leveraging its ownership of several strategically located parcels, EPDC entered into an agreement with developer McCormack-Baron Associates to construct the mixed-use, mixed-income Parsons Place development, featuring 250 new housing units, a professionally designed park, and a Montessori school. Through the collaboration of the developer, the local carpenters' union, and UIUC, EPDC secured a \$900,000 YouthBuild Grant, and during construction, Parsons Place became a training site for unemployed workers to learn construction trades. After the project was completed, EPDC established a YouthBuild Charter School nearby, dedicated to helping students at risk of dropping out of school.

The effectiveness of the Emerson Park community/university development partnership encouraged several other East St. Louis neighborhoods to initiate similar projects in cooperation with the University of Illinois. The success of these efforts in turning around a severely-distressed area has

encouraged communities throughout the country to embrace the East St. Louis model. This model of "empowerment planning" integrates the principles and methods of participatory action research, direct action organizing, and public education to achieve community transformation. The East St. Louis model is currently being applied in communities across the nation, including Cleveland, Ohio; Rochester, New York; and Honolulu, Hawaii.



the redevelopment of inner-city neighborhoods, the case studies demonstrated that community/university development partnerships are also making contributions in suburban and rural communities. The research also found that most partnerships emerge in response to a crisis that affects both the community and the campus, such as a violent crime or a plant closing.

The case studies also demonstrated the wide variety of activities being

undertaken by higher educational institutions to support local economic and community-building efforts. For example, the University of South Florida works with new immigrant communities, offering a comprehensive set of educational, vocational, and entrepreneurial programs through a network of social service centers. The University of Pennsylvania, on the other hand, has focused its attention on minority- and women-owned small businesses in West

Philadelphia and requires that 25 percent of campus construction work be undertaken by such firms.

Despite the range of strategies, the studied partnerships shared some commonalities. They tended to concentrate on efforts to expand employment, entrepreneurial, and investment opportunities, and they focused on a broader spectrum of stakeholders than most traditional economic development partnerships. For example, many

Salish Kootenai College

Located in Pablo, Montana, Salish Kootenai College was established in 1974 to meet the higher educational and economic development needs of the Flathead Indian Reservation, a community of 26,172 persons that had long struggled with high rates of unemployment and poverty. When it opened, the community college began working with the area's industry leaders to develop vocationally oriented training programs to help residents secure jobs in the timber, cattle, transportation, education, construction, and health care sectors. The programs were a success, and the college decided to expand its involvement in the local economy of the Salish-Kootenai tribe. Over the next 30 years, a number of partnership initiatives emerged.

First, the college began working with tribal leaders to establish native-owned businesses that could take advantage of the federal government's minority set-aside programs, which ensure access to federal contracts for qualified minority vendors. With the college's assistance, the tribe established an electronics firm and an information technology firm. Soon, both firms secured a number of federal contracts and began recruiting and training a new crop of workers, supervisors, and managers. Today, the electronics firm employs approximately 110 workers and last year generated \$10 million in sales, while the information technology firm employs 350 workers and saw sales reach \$60 million last year.

In the mid 1980s, the college established a Small Business Information Center to support the entrepreneurial efforts of reservation residents. The Center offers a series of courses to assist fledgling businesspersons through the planning, start-up, marketing, merchandising, and operations phases of their ventures. The Center also provides ongoing technical assistance to entrepreneurs to help them establish, maintain, and grow their businesses. Among the Center's most successful ventures is Grey Wolf Tradition Company, specializing in the design and construction of teepees. With the Center's assistance, this small start-up expanded its business to the Internet and helped to trademark, produce, and popularize crafts boasting the native-inspired designs of local artists.

The success of the college's vocation-education programs, its support of native-owned enterprises, and its small business assistance efforts have all helped to boost enrollment at Salish Kootenai College and to enhance its standing among other tribal and community colleges. While proud of the college's accomplishments, administrators are now turning their focus towards breaking down the barriers that prevent some reservation residents from taking advantage of the college's programs. In cooperation with senior tribal offi-



cial, the school has established a regional bus system to provide access for those living in remote areas of the reservation. The college is also assisting area secondary schools, helping them to provide more culturally appropriate and pedagogically advanced instruction and better prepare their students for college. Aware of the adverse impact that substance abuse is having on Native-American individuals and their families, the college is working to establish the first Master of Social Work Program to be based on traditional Salish Kootenai values. This degree program will focus on substance abuse prevention, intervention, and treatment strategies.

The combined initiatives of Salish Kootenai College and its Tribal Council partners have dramatically improved living conditions on the Flathead Indian Reservation. Their efforts have built a healthier economic base, strengthened the political leadership, and fostered the tribe's traditional ways and values. Moreover, they have encouraged the reservation community to resist the "quick-fix" plans promoted by outside interests, such as industrial timbering, commercial cattle-raising and farming, casino gaming, and tourism. For example, believing it would lead to environmental degradation and unwanted sprawl, local leaders, with the assistance of Salish Kootenai-trained ecologists, foresters, and business professionals, recently opposed the widening of the main highway through the reservation. These leaders are now working together to promote regional development plans that emphasize their goals of environmental protection and social equity.

of these efforts gave explicit attention to small businesses, women and minority entrepreneurs, organized labor, and both younger and older workers. Additionally, the partnerships tended to prefer “buy local” and “import substitution” strategies over business recruitment strategies. This choice suggests a greater interest in enhancing the capacity of local businesses that are committed to the community, rather than recruiting larger firms that may be motivated primarily by tax abatements.

In all of the case studies, the community/university partnerships initially encountered significant institutional and community obstacles. Often, the partnerships involved scholars from a number of academic disciplines that had worked infrequently together. These academics then had to collaborate with community leaders whose past relationships with the university had been fraught with conflict. Together, the two parties tried to undertake challenging development efforts. Moreover, the “system of city trenches” described by scholar Ira Katznelson, which makes cooperation among communities and institutions difficult, had to be navigated, and all of the case studies revealed that significant racial, class, and cultural barriers had to be overcome.

Additionally, the case studies illustrated the deep skepticism that many community residents maintain regarding an institution’s commitment to resident-led revitalization. Frequently, the community’s attitudes required university faculty to initiate outreach efforts to first earn the trust of their community partners. Trust was then sustained when the institution competently and enthusiastically completed the work to which it had committed, and when it supported resident-driven planning and development processes. Many of the studied partnerships thus started small, such as university faculty participating in small business assistance efforts. This first level of involvement enabled the institutions to build rela-

tionships with community leaders, laying the foundation for more ambitious forms of cooperative development.

Elements of Success

While the challenges faced by the studied community/university development partnerships were often great, their case studies identify several elements that seem to contribute to the success of a community/university development partnership. The following are the most striking:

1. Partnerships that do not allow both parties to achieve their institutional self-interests do not survive. Both the community and the campus must be clear about their respective institutional self-interests, and comparable benefits for both the academic and the community partners must be gained.

2. Successful partnerships require significant executive leadership and often visible support from the university president, the mayor, the Chamber of Commerce director, respected members of the labor community, and elders from the community’s major religious denominations.

3. Skilled staff who can understand both the nature of higher education politics and the fundamentals of community organizing are critical. “Organizational boundary-crossers,” in particular, seem to play a pivotal role. These individuals occupy key leadership positions within their own organizations but also understand the history, culture, structure, and operation of their partnering organizations.

4. Successful partnerships develop slowly, and significant time is required to move from the initial relationship-building stage to the program implementation stage, often five to ten years. The case studies confirmed the wisdom of Henry Mintzberg’s “ready, fire, aim” approach to organizational change, which stresses the importance of small victories in building the momentum required to sustain systemic reform efforts.

5. Finally, the willingness of both community and campus leaders to

reflect upon, learn from, and adjust to challenges and mistakes appears to be a central requirement of a successful partnership.

The case studies highlight the significant contributions that colleges and universities are making to the economic recovery of many communities. The variations in the history, structure, policies, and programs of the community/university development partnerships also illustrate that there is no uniform approach to success. Instead, the study suggests that a flexible partnership—one that can respond to the unique history and nature of the community and the collaborating organizations, as well as the specific economic challenges and the political landscape of the region—will be the most successful.

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