

# Chapter II: Undergraduate Level Education

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**T**o expand the pool of talented people who are ready to lead community-based organizations, we must create new ways to reach, prepare and recruit young people in colleges and universities. That's where fully 29% of America's youth – including the most upwardly mobile people of color and large numbers of students of all races who are committed to community service and greater equity in our society – complete their education and make career decisions. It is a talent pool which must be tapped to address the leadership crisis in the field of community change.

The very good news is that **there is considerable ferment on the campuses these days with many students heavily committed to service.** 73% of college students volunteer for service, showing commitment and energy which can represent a huge resource for organizations that are working to improve opportunities for poor people and people of color. This will, however, require a far more concerted effort to channel these energies into curricula which familiarize students with issues of poverty, race and community-building so they have a base of knowledge and experience which enables them to choose careers in community organizing, community development and community change.

Much of the student ferment has centered on the “service learning” movement – which provides opportunities for college students to provide direct services to people who need them. Sometimes this service experience has a serious learning component and is linked to courses, peer group meetings, and mentoring which enable students to reflect on their experience and study the issues on which they are working. Some programs go farther and give students an opportunity to see that the field of community organization and development exists, experience its exciting potential in providing opportunities for lifetimes of service, and begin learning lessons, approaches and skills which prepare them for possible careers in the field. They offer field placements, mentoring, closely related classwork, small groups within

which to reflect on the links between theory and practice, and participatory research or other experiential learning opportunities which supplement coursework with real life experiences with grassroots organizations. Several offer courses specifically on community organizations and community organizing. **There is great potential in expanding upon those service learning programs by providing a more robust education on community change.**

## The Current Status of Undergraduate Education on Community Change

**W**hat is the situation today concerning undergraduate education related to community change?

**There are fewer than a handful of undergraduate programs which are specifically designed to prepare people for careers at the community level.** These are based in institutions which recruit directly from low-income communities and involve academics and practitioners in preparing young people for lives of service in those communities.

**At many other institutions there are courses scattered in different departments which can be pieced together and linked to on-site experience to give students a significant grounding in community work.** However, this requires both a highly motivated and self-directed student and a rare guidance counselor who can help students find these scattered courses.

## Undergraduate Programs Designed Specifically to Prepare Students for Community Change Work

**O**nly rarely does an institution of higher education design a curriculum specifically to provide students with the knowledge and experience they need to address issues of poverty, race, and social and community change.

## *There is great potential in expanding upon those service learning programs by providing a more robust education on community change.*

One outstanding exception to this – which has been supported by the Ford Foundation and others – is based at a community college on the edge of south central Los Angeles. For two decades Los Angeles Trade Tech has offered a two year Associate of Arts degree in Community Development. The program is designed specifically to attract people of color from low-income neighborhoods, many of whom are already working with grassroots groups or other employers.

Denise Fairchild, who led the team designing the curriculum and has directed the program since its creation, saw students who came from backgrounds of poverty as essential community leaders for the future. She viewed them as having the advantages of having directly experienced poverty and racism, understanding low-income communities, being able to become important role models for others in such communities, and being more likely than other students to make long-term commitments to careers in community change. She started with the conviction that it is especially important to give these young people of color opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills for careers working with community development corporations and other grassroots community groups.

The AA program started as a vocational program rather than as the first step in a longer academic program. It was to prepare people for jobs or strengthen the skills of people already working, not to prepare them to go on to four-year institutions for further study. The program therefore has devoted relatively little time to theory-based courses. Instead it developed a series of competencies in such practical areas as real estate and economic development, financial and personnel management, and community organizing. This is changing as more AA students show their interest in being prepared for transfer to four-year col-

leges, many of which will not give credit for the more vocationally oriented courses at LA Trade Tech.

Approximately fifteen students enroll each year in the AA Program. They spend up to 40 hours per week in internships, rotating through three or four organizations or government agencies to get different experiences and perspectives. These assignments are often done in conjunction with the Community Development Technologies Center, the independent nonprofit which Ms. Fairchild and her associates established to provide faculty for LA Tech and to provide planning, technical assistance and program development services in low-income communities in the metro area.<sup>3</sup>

In order to establish the AA program at LA Tech, Ms. Fairchild had to gain approval from the California State Curriculum Committee. This official approval made it possible for LA Tech and other community colleges in California's state system to offer the program. The approved curriculum includes introductory courses on community planning, real estate development, project financing, nonprofit management, and community organizing. The faculty is largely composed of practitioners whose courses are grounded in reality and aimed at developing practical skills.

**Despite the program's strengths and official clearance for replication in the California State system, it has not yet been replicated** either in California or elsewhere. PolicyLink's Victor Rubin – who had extensive experience with university-community partnerships during his time directing HUD's Office of University Community Partnerships – attempted to replicate the program at Peralta College. However, this did not come to fruition, in large part because the effort was initiated from outside the college and lacked a strong champion on the faculty.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup>For other examples of nonprofits which provide opportunities for experiential education and service to university students, see other parts of this report on the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development and the Social Work Community Outreach Center at Maryland.

<sup>4</sup>Recently people inside Peralta have shown new interest in possibly replicating the Los Angeles program, so it is possible that there will be progress after all.

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Several others have consulted with Ms. Fairchild about replicating the program, but none has moved forward. This history illustrates how difficult replication is, as the model at LA Tech emerged from a unique history under a leader with the vision, credibility, skills, background, and access to support from key funders to convince a community college to adopt the program.

A much older and larger program is based at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. This program was established in the 1970s as a special initiative to provide higher education to students of color and others who were already working in neighborhood-based organizations or interested in doing so. At its height it had over 800 undergraduate students and 250 grad students. Most students come from working class and low-income backgrounds and either have begun or are considering careers in community planning and development, community organizing or social services for low-income communities.

Operating as a “college within the college”, **UMass Boston’s College for Public and Community Service operates a four year Bachelor’s degree program and several Master’s level programs as well. All are oriented toward public interest work.**

Undergraduates majoring in Community Planning must learn how to conduct needs and resource assessments, community impact assessments and program evaluations as well as to help with planning, strategy and proposal development. They can concentrate in any of six areas, including Community Studies, Organizing, Legal Advocacy, and Management. Other CPCS students can major in Criminal Justice, Gerontology, Human Services, Labor Studies, or Legal Education.

Several key elements of the CPCS design make it remarkably effective in attracting and educating students from lower-income backgrounds –

- The College for Public and Community Service was originally based in a building

### **Participatory Research and Learning at UMass Boston**

*A UMass Boston faculty-member’s work with homeless women provides a dramatic illustration of using participatory action research to educate students. She began working with six homeless women on the issues they were most concerned about, documenting how they were treated by shelters and other service providers. They became informal principal investigators, completing 150 interviews with homeless women and learning research and community organizing skills on the job. To guide and support the project their faculty supervisor created a steering committee of formerly homeless women and representatives of groups concerned with homelessness, poverty, and domestic violence who committed themselves to collaborating in seeking policy changes and to consult directly with homeless women in their decision-making processes.*

*The evaluation elicited women’s insights into how their homelessness could have been prevented, what their situations were before they became homeless, and whether they knew their housing rights. They then publicized survey findings, went to policy-makers and led successful campaigns to influence state policies and programs. The professor then helped the six women enroll in CPCS and pursue bachelor’s degrees in community planning and advocacy, with free tuition, a stipend and reimbursement for child care and transportation. They were given course credit for their experiential learning conducting the research.*

*In empowerment terms, the development of the six women investigators has been called “phenomenal.” All have done well in school, all have new jobs, all have joined boards of non-profits, and all are confident public speakers and advocates for changes in public policy to benefit the homeless. The University of Massachusetts built from this success to create a special program called Women in Community Development to educate and support low-income women in community development work.*

## *The program sees students who came from backgrounds of poverty as essential community leaders for the future.*

downtown, separate from the rest of the University and near low-income neighborhoods and the community organizations where many of its early students worked;

- It is designed specifically to encourage people to continue in or prepare for community and public service careers (and to discourage a brain drain from this field);
- It actively recruits people from nonprofits and neighborhoods, many of whom are considerably older than the average college freshman;
- Until recently, CCPS had a policy of open enrollment to reduce the barriers to enrolling for people who have had low marks in high school or on college board exams;
- It gives maximum credit for people's past experience and for experiential learning generally, either on the job or through other real life experiences;
- Practitioners as well as regular faculty teach courses, thus increasing students' exposure to learning from people who are on the front lines bringing about positive change in low-income communities; and
- Courses use participatory action research, participatory planning, internships with community groups, and other techniques to give students direct experience working with people in low-income neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, after more than three decades, the College is currently under assault. Budget cuts and a conservative state administration are taking their toll. The College is on the defensive, the Dean has stepped down under pressure and other faculty members are very concerned about the future. Tragically, it is currently uncertain that this exemplary program will survive.

This is doubly unfortunate in that no other university in the country offers a four year education which comes close to equaling UMass Boston's comprehensive approach to recruiting and educating students for careers in community service.

There are many lessons from the UMass experience. On the positive side, **it shows it is possible to create a program which primarily recruits and educates people from disadvantaged backgrounds so they are well equipped to lead positive change efforts in their own neighborhoods and similar communities.** It demonstrates the effectiveness of special measures for recruitment, combining theoretical and experiential education, involving both academics and practitioners, and gearing an overall program to careers in community service.

However, **it also vividly illustrates the vulnerability of such programs.** They have difficulty surviving through changes in institutional leadership and budget crises because they lack the backing which is automatic for traditional academic programs and seldom have the visibility, credibility, backing and constituency they need when they are challenged. Their isolation and lack of recognition by outsiders in the academic world or organized alumni or community constituencies increase their vulnerability.

**It is noteworthy that both these programs are completely unique and largely unknown. While both are ambitious, well-designed, proven programs which train the community change leaders of tomorrow, neither is widely recognized or supported, and neither has been replicated.**<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>In a parallel development, the community organizing group ACORN has adopted several schools in New York City and incorporated many elements in its curriculum to educate its students about their community, the problems and institutions it faces, and strategies for bringing about change, especially through community organizing, advocacy and development. For details, see ACORN's web-site at [www.acorn.org](http://www.acorn.org).

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## Other Exemplary Undergraduate Courses and Placements

**O**ne striking finding from the research is that there are a surprising number of creative undergraduate courses and placement opportunities which individual faculty members have developed on issues related to social and community change. At institutions as diverse as Sarah Lawrence and Connecticut College, Metro State and Portland State, Harvard and Cornell, Loyola and the University of Illinois at Chicago, the University of Southern California and UCLA, faculty have developed courses which expose students to a combination of readings, instruction, and on-the-ground experience which introduces them to social issues and strategies for bringing about significant community or policy change.

Sarah Lawrence, for example, is creating a new Institute for Policy Alternatives with the central goal of –

“Educat(ing) engaged students by establishing links between faculty scholarship, teaching, and participants in social movements that attempt to expand participation by ordinary citizens. The initiatives will provide a forum for interaction and creative thinking about goals and policy alternatives among students, faculty, activists and working class and poor residents of our region.”

Building on Sarah Lawrence's tradition of **interdisciplinary studies and independent inquiry rather than academic majors**, students learn through the Institute while working

with community groups and faculty on such issues as immigrant rights and tenant organizing.

In its Urban Studies program, Loyola University in Chicago emphasizes **community-based research** as a strategy for teaching undergrads and graduate students skills and knowledge which help them understand low-income communities and the forces behind their evolution, assess opportunities and challenges which are facing particular neighborhoods, and develop experience in working with grassroots leaders and organizations. Working with faculty members from sociology and other departments, students provide direct help to community groups which ask the University for research and technical help on community issues or broader concerns. Loyola has institutionalized this capacity by working with other universities to create a Policy Research Action Group which responds to requests from a variety of groups throughout metropolitan Chicago.

As a matter of policy Loyola will not conduct neighborhood research without a **partnership with community people**, and it emphasizes participatory approaches to research so that low-income people are directly involved in choosing issues to be studied and then in the research and analysis itself. For example, Loyola worked with the Organization of the NorthEast on a study of lessons from community struggles to preserve affordable housing in Chicago's uptown, with STRIVE on a **participatory evaluation** of its training program, and with Bethel New Life to document the impact of its community development work in West Garfield Park.

### **“Let Knowledge Serve the City” at Portland State**

*Under the leadership of former President Judith Ramaley, Portland State University in Oregon developed a remarkable commitment to working with local communities. Under the motto “Let Knowledge Serve the City” the University recast its entire general education program to include ethical and social responsibility goals. It evaluates its faculty for tenure, promotion and compensation in part on their “scholarship of community outreach”, thus turning the reward system into a major force for supporting community groups and addressing social needs, including through service learning and a new program which is structured to emphasize civic involvement from freshman seminars through to capstone projects for seniors.*

*It is possible to create a program which primarily recruits and educates people from disadvantaged backgrounds so they are well equipped to lead positive change efforts in their own neighborhoods and similar communities.*

There are dozens of examples of university/community partnerships, some of which are supported by the federal government's COPC program for support to Community Outreach Partnership Centers. Others which focus on issues of civic values and citizen engagement are described in *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility* by Tom Ehrlich, former President of the University of Indiana. Both the COPC program and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching where Ehrlich is a Senior Scholar periodically convene representatives of university programs for peer learning and discussion of common issues and concerns. Nevertheless, there still are few opportunities for exchange and network-building, limiting opportunities for peer learning, collaboration and raising the visibility and credibility of university partnerships with community groups.

### **The Service Learning Movement and Preparation for Community Change Work**

The "service learning movement" has grown enormously over the last decade. It is a response to this generation of students' strong interest in community service as well as deep concern among university leaders about student cynicism about the value of voting and participating in our nation's civic life and politics. More than 900 university presidents have joined Campus Compact to support the growth of service learning on campuses throughout the country.

Does service learning provide an opportunity to prepare large numbers of students for careers as community organizers, developers and change agents? Does its combination of direct service to low-income people and related studies provide the stimulus, knowledge, and experience which people need to become community workers?

The answer varies from campus to campus. It is clear from interviews with college faculty members and leaders in the service learning movement that **most "service learning" programs offer little "learning" in connection with their volunteer experiences.** Most programs simply provide volunteer opportunities for college students whose learning is limited to what they gain on the job. These institutions offer no courses linked to the community service experience.

At other colleges, however, faculty members link courses on issues like education or public health to placing students with organizations which are addressing those issues locally. Students thus have an opportunity to contrast what they learn on the ground and in class, mixing experiential and academic education in ways which can greatly deepen their thinking and understanding. They may also meet frequently with others involved in service learning for structured reflection on what they are learning about the issues and about working with community-based nonprofits.

One reason for service learning's impressive growth is that many in this student generation have strong social consciences and see direct

#### ***An Example of Moral and Civic Learning at California State at Monterey Bay***

*The California State University at Monterey Bay adopted a vision statement declaring that "the campus will be distinctive in serving the diverse people of California, especially the working class and historically undereducated and low income population."*

*One of its university learning requirements relates to moral and civic learning, addressing such topics as democratic participation, community participation, culture and equity. The guidelines for culture and equity, for example, require that students be able to "analyze and describe the concepts of power relations, equity, and social justice" and "plan personal and institutional strategies/processes to promote equity and social justice" – a remarkable requirement for a university program.*

## *Such programs have difficulty surviving changes in institutional leadership and budget crises.*

service as the best outlet for this commitment. In contrast to the 60s generation, they are pessimistic about the possibility of major social and institutional reform during their lifetimes and cynical about politics as a way of bringing about change. They therefore act out their commitment to making the world a better place by volunteering in record numbers.

Colleges have responded in different ways. Many have established centers to help students find placements with local nonprofits where they can tutor or mentor children, help the elderly, or work on a community improvement project. An early pioneer in helping students find good opportunities for volunteering, Stanford University – not commonly seen as a center of activism – places hundreds of students each year through its Haas Center for Public Service. While most of these are strictly opportunities for service, others are linked directly to one of over 30 service learning courses offered by different departments – including even engineering – at Stanford.

**Several universities have taken “service learning” considerably farther. The most fully developed offer students a combination of (1) volunteer experience on the ground with (2) opportunities to study the issues they are working on and (3) the chance to reflect on their experience doing community work.** Campus Compact, the national alliance of over 900 university presidents who have pledged their support for service learning, actively encourages its members to make these connections. It provides extensive teaching materials and seminars to help faculty incorporate service learning in the courses they teach in fields as diverse as economics and philosophy. Nevertheless it is clear that the great majority of service learning programs are still not very serious about “learning.”

One example of a broader, more thought through approach to service learning is Northwestern University. With leadership from Jody Kretzman and Dan Lewis, two pioneers in urban community development and asset-

building, it created a minor in service learning several years ago. It goes well beyond most service learning programs in offering an integrated approach to service learning with four components. First, Northwestern offers several courses which relate directly to students’ service experiences. While many of these courses were already included in the curriculum, others were added to supplement those courses. Second, the University provides each student with mentors and weekly small group seminars where students can reflect with their peers and faculty on their experience and the issues they are facing. Third, Northwestern provides students with guidance in selecting other courses which are relevant to their interests and service experience. Finally, students can “minor” in service learning, earning a certificate which affirms that they have participated in this integrated program.

**Some academic programs link service learning with “civic engagement”**, responding to the strong concern university presidents reflected in signing the Campus Compact on encouraging young people to become involved in civic life. They reflect growing worry that our democracy is threatened by cynicism about politics and government and prospects for building a better society. University leaders know that many young people stay away from politics and civic life because they are pessimistic about their voice being heard and their ability to achieve substantial reforms. They therefore have shaped their service learning programs to encourage students to learn about public issues and become involved in addressing them. A few of these programs are particularly outstanding models.

Drawing from Roman Catholic social teachings Notre Dame strongly emphasizes social justice, seeking –

“to cultivate in its students not only an appreciation for the great achievements of human beings but also a disciplined sensibility to the poverty, injustice, and oppression which burden the lives of so many. The aim is to create a sense

## Community-based research is an excellent strategy for teaching undergrads and graduate students skills and knowledge.

of human solidarity and concern for the common good that will bear fruit as learning becomes service to justice.”

Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island is ambitious and unique in two ways. First, Providence offers a major in service learning – the only such concentration in the country. Second, it requires that every student in the College be involved in service learning before they graduate. Its goal is to instill a service orientation throughout the entire student body by exposing all students to service opportunities and courses linking their service experience to study. It sees these goals as important to society and as a way of distinguishing Providence’s educational programs from other colleges.

**None of these service learning programs, however, is geared specifically to preparing people for careers in community change, and many of them have no “change” focus at all.** However, the strongest ones provide a good base for developing an undergraduate major or minor in community change studies as they combine rigorous coursework, experiential learning in the community, and reflection and mentoring.

### Placements, and the Relationship Between the University and the Community

**O**ne central problem for service learning is the difficult relationship between universities and their neighbors. Universities are focused internally on their students, faculty, facilities and programs. Many have little interest in their neighbors except when they stand in the path of university expansion or threaten the campus in some way. Furthermore, their power, resources and influence usually dwarf those of their neighbors, making any relationship uneasy.

Some critics of service learning therefore argue for major changes in the relationship between academic institutions and their neighboring organizations before these programs can

be effective. Dick Cone, the former director of USC’s Joint Education Project, for example, raises serious issues about “hit and run” assistance from students. He and others point to many placements as poor matches, made without sufficient concern about whether students would bring useful skills to the nonprofits and whether there would be sufficient continuity in the students’ assistance to be really helpful. They point to the off-and-on nature of when students are available to help and to the frequent turnover among student volunteers as presenting major obstacles. They are also critical of many academic colleagues as not being well informed about the groups where students are placed, their needs and priorities, and the extent to which the placements will be satisfactory to either the group or the student.

Some universities are overcoming these problems through more careful and intensive leadership. MIT’s planning school, for example, develops long-term contracts with specific community groups, often for as many as five years. These contracts identify a series of projects on which the groups want assistance, assuring them that students will be carefully matched with those opportunities and that faculty will also be involved. They make sure that new students are available as their predecessors move on, and are fully briefed on the organization, its needs, and the work to be done.

Cone advocates “**inreach**” rather than **outreach from the universities**. He believes there is such a strong inherent power imbalance between any major educational institution and a small nonprofit that the usual “outreach” process should be reversed. Rather than a university deciding what it needs and can offer, Cone advocates that funders first help grassroots groups (1) decide what help they need from students and faculty, and (2) get funding for tuition or contracts which enable them to reach into a university (or other institution if that would be more useful) for that specific help.

## Most “service learning” programs offer little “learning” in connection with their volunteer experiences.

*Informal* “inreach” programs are, in fact, quite common. Some result when strong grassroots groups see a need for assistance from a particular faculty member as they analyze or tackle an issue. Others emerge when a professor or instructor has the sensitivity and background to build a real partnership with a nonprofit, and then shapes service learning in response to that organization’s needs and priorities and its ability to provide a good learning experience for students.

### **Growing Concern About Civic Engagement and Democracy – Its Relationship to Preparing People for Community Change Work**

Because of concern about the need to revive civic engagement and rejuvenate our democratic institutions and activist traditions, some academics and Campus Compact are interested in helping students take another step in their service learning experience. For example, Campus Compact sometimes speaks of “service politics” as they work with students who want to **expand their learning to include action and analysis of the root causes of poverty, discrimination, and other issues which they confront in their studies and volunteering.** They work with student groups on several campuses which are **developing campaigns on social, economic and political issues which concern students.** Each spring Campus Compact runs a Raise Your Voice campaign, supporting student groups on 250 campuses as they hold town hall meetings and otherwise make their opinions known on issues ranging from hunger and homelessness to the Iraq war.

In a remarkable experiment Tufts University has introduced an ambitious program for infusing the entire institution – post-graduate as well as undergraduate – with an emphasis on developing students’ commitment and skill in civic engagement. With backing from the last two University Presidents, a “virtual college” within the university has coor-

inated a series of measures to prepare every Tufts graduate to participate in their communities. The University College of Citizenship and Public Service is a college without walls with no faculty or students of its own, but with a substantial budget for stimulating courses and student experiences which “teach activism, active citizenship, and foster debate and inquiry at the university.”<sup>6</sup> The University has formally adopted a **goal of having all Tufts graduates live lives of civic engagement,** eventually serving as employees or board members of nonprofits, being in electoral politics or other government service, or, as professionals, working with a keen sense of civic obligation and public service.

Tufts follows an “infusion” strategy which has several components, each of which is backed with funding from a grant of \$10 million in flexible support for civic engagement activities. The multifaceted strategy includes:

- financial support for faculty who modify existing courses to include attention to current social problems, analysis of their root causes, assessment of the key tools of civic engagement needed to tackle those root causes effectively, and development of the civic skills needed to bring about change;
- financing for new courses which faculty members develop to address civic engagement issues in these ways;
- support for undergraduate groups which add civic engagement to their programs and “offer systematic, high quality programs to critically examine the root causes and public policy implications of the issue, and to teach advocacy and give them experience using those techniques;”<sup>7</sup> and
- awards to give high visibility to students who exemplify high standards of civic engagement and service through their volunteer work.

<sup>6</sup>Interview with Rob Hollister, Dean, College of Citizenship and Public Service, Tufts University

<sup>7</sup>Hollister

## Several universities have taken service learning considerably farther.

As this new emphasis grows in visibility and recognition, it will give Tufts a competitive advantage in attracting applicants who are interested in civic and social issues. This, in turn, will lead to a student body which is increasingly involved in civic life and community.

### **Undergraduate Programs Which Focus on Neighboring Communities**

The University of Pennsylvania has a very different approach to undergraduate studies related to poverty, race and community. It has focused on its adjacent neighborhoods and, over two decades, developed more than fifty courses for undergraduate and graduate students which relate to one or another aspect of these low-income communities.

These courses are not seen as creating an educational track to prepare people for working for or with low-income community organizations. That has not been a priority at Penn.<sup>8</sup> Instead they are viewed as distinct courses which enable students and faculty to focus on the adjacent neighborhoods to learn about a wide variety of subjects (e.g. the religions of West Philadelphia), while creating more positive relationships between the university and its neighbors.

In addition, Penn offers several sets of services to adjacent communities through partnerships with schools and other key institutions. Many of these are part of WEPIC, the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps, a partnership in which the University plays a leading role in providing services to local schools and groups. It is the largest university/community partnership in the country, involving large numbers of students and community people with the school system and nonprofits in efforts to improve education and services in West Philadelphia. It has also been an effective

strategy for enhancing the Penn's relationship with its low-income neighbors and reducing "town/gown" friction.

While Penn offers a course in Community Organizing: History and Theory, it is not connected to field work and experience, and the overall curriculum does not stress participation by residents and the development of community groups as critical approaches to approaching community issues.

Occidental College in Los Angeles is in the early stages of devising new courses and focusing on building partnerships with its neighboring community. Its Center for Community-Based Learning, which is directed by Maria Avila who was trained by the IAF as a community organizer, is spearheading this effort. Ms. Avila stresses "community based learning" instead of "service learning." She argues that learning can and should happen in reciprocal relationships with community groups, not just one-way relationships of service. For example, instead of assuming that the college should mentor local teachers, she structured a more reciprocal relationship where the faculty learned from teachers about the common issues they face, and then entered a dialogue about how best to address those issues. Similarly Ms. Avila sees community groups as being able to help educate students and vice versa.<sup>9</sup>

The Community Outreach Partnership Center program and sister programs of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development have supported dozens of partnerships across the country. These have often benefited local communities, but they have seldom been seen as part of the academic side of their host universities or had any impact on the curricula, according to Armand Carriere, Director of the COPC program.<sup>10</sup> Instead they

<sup>8</sup>Interview with Ira Harkavy, Director of Office of Community Partnerships, University of Pennsylvania

<sup>9</sup>Interview with Maria Avila and Professor Peter Dreier, Occidental University

<sup>10</sup>Interview with Armand Carriere, Director, Office of Campus-Community Partnerships, US Department of Housing and Urban Development

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are seen as helping bridge the town/gown divide and providing needed services to low-income neighborhoods.

**Undergraduate Programs Which Focus on Community Organizing and Organizational Development**

Several colleges offer one or more undergraduate courses directly related to community organizing and building grassroots organizations. These are, however, remarkably rare. Few have, in fact, developed any new courses to help students prepare for this work, and those which link courses to service usually focus on the issues which are being addressed (e.g. public health or education) and not on the organizations which exist in those communities or the ways those groups can be built, staffed, and supported.

Exceptions to this general rule are often lodged in such undergraduate areas of concentration as social work and sociology. At Trinity College in Hartford, for example, undergraduates can take courses in community organizing and organizational development, and can link these courses to field work, thus benefiting from both theoretical and experiential education through real service learning.<sup>11</sup>

Another exception to this rule is Harvard College. Undergraduates at Harvard College can join graduate students at the Kennedy School and other postgraduate students from Harvard and other nearby universities, as well as community organizers and other practitioners from outside academe, for a course in community organizing. That course is taught by Marshall Ganz, an Associate Professor at the Kennedy School and former Director of Organizing for the United Farmworkers Union.

Ganz's course interweaves theoretical and experiential education seamlessly. It includes extensive readings from such intellectual and philosophical leaders as Plato, deTocqueville and Arendt, and such community organizing pioneers as Alinsky, Ross, Chavez and Wiley.

Ganz involves students in devising and launching organizing campaigns around issues the students select as they work with existing groups or create new ones to pursue systemic change. Recent field experiences included organizing residents of subsidized housing, organizing non-unionized university employees and launching a campaign to reverse current Presbyterian church policy concerning the ordination of gays and lesbians.

**The entire course is designed like a training program for organizers in the "real world."** Students are screened to identify those who have the passion and motivation to be good organizers. Each section leader is trained to give special attention to particularly promising potential organizers as the course proceeds. The curriculum includes education on such key organizing techniques as conducting "one on one" interviews to surface people's concerns, create relationships and identify potential leaders and bringing people together to discuss the issues they share and plan campaigns to address them.<sup>12</sup>

**Students develop their skills in critical reflection and strengthen their practice** by reflecting weekly on-line on their organizing experiences and discuss these issues with their peers and section leaders during weekly seminars. They also share their victories and defeats, looking for constructive feedback from which they can learn. Like real community organizers, they learn and are toughened through forthright critiques by their peers and instructors. These include sharper criticism than is common in the academic world but which organizers (and law professors) have found to be effective in pushing people to strengthen their analysis, planning and actions. Students end each year with a thorough assessment of their experience and learning.

This course is now being replicated at Wellesley, Spring Hill College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Ganz wants to see it replicated, with appropriate

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Alta Lash, Director, Trinity Center for Neighborhoods

<sup>12</sup>Interview with Associate Professor Marshall Ganz

## MIT's planning school develops long-term contracts with specific community groups.

adjustments, at many other colleges across the country. He therefore has developed unusually detailed course materials and made them accessible to others on the web. Ganz also has given special attention to selecting and training his Teaching Assistants so they will be fully prepared to teach the course elsewhere in the future, and has created a list serve linking his former students together to stimulate continuing interest in organizing.

Other colleges offer courses in community organizing to undergraduates, perhaps in sociology, social work or urban studies programs. Randy Stoecker at the University of Toledo hosts the [www.comm.org](http://www.comm.org) web site which features the course outlines for several different undergraduate courses in organizing, helping faculty identify topics and readings which may be useful when they plan their own courses.

### Conclusion on the Potential for Developing Community Change Studies for Undergraduates

As this survey illustrates, scattered throughout the U.S. there is quite a rich panoply of university courses and programs which relate to America's low-income neighborhoods, people of color, and others who are often left behind. While many of these are isolated and vulnerable, **the best of them provide students with some of the knowledge and skills they will need for careers in social and community change. If these courses and best practices were co-located in a coherent curriculum, they would provide a particularly strong background for that work.**

**Considering the students' strong interest in service, the colleges' concern about the need for greater civic engagement and a rejuvenation of our democratic institutions, and the crying need for talented leadership for the next generation of community change organizations, it is a particularly good time to consider what steps could be taken to ratchet up the level of undergraduate programs. The unifying goal should be**

**to equip an increasing number of college students with the inspiration, academic knowledge, analytic skills, initial experience and practical help to be good candidates for jobs in community change.**

### Developing a Model Community Studies Curriculum

What should an undergraduate major or minor in community studies include? What course of study and experience would best enable students to understand how poverty and race play out in America's neighborhoods and the broader public and private sector arenas? How can they learn how people experiencing poverty and racism can, with their allies, most effectively counter discrimination and injustice and promote greater opportunity?

During the scan of current university-based programs and interviews with academics and practitioners, five key components for such a program emerged.

First, to be of maximum value a **program should make meaningful links between service and learning** – combining experience on the ground in disadvantaged communities, reflection on that experience, and rigorous study of the issues such communities face. This study should include analysis of the root causes of those problems as well as exploration of how they might be tackled most effectively.

Second, to prepare students to understand the deeper issues they will encounter in low-income community work, the program should include serious **study of issues of race, class, opportunity and democratic participation** in America. The prisms of economics, social psychology, sociology, political science, and the history of social movements and change in the US all can give students new and enlightening perspectives on these issues.

Third, a program should teach students **how to analyze neighborhoods and their residents and institutions as well as the**

*Because of concern about the need for reviving and rejuvenating our democratic institutions, some expand their learning to include action as well as analysis.*

**broader demographic, economic, social and political trends** which influence them. This will give them knowledge and skills which would be invaluable in future work on community issues. It would also provide them with a uniquely well-grounded and insightful understanding of how academic disciplines like economics, sociology, and political science can be applied in the “real world.”

Fourth, it should include **study of the roles and functioning of community-based nonprofits, the broader nonprofit sector, and the public and for-profit sectors** on these issues. Students should emerge from this analysis understanding the different strategies which social groups use to bring about change at the community and societal levels, including the roles of movements, formal and informal organizations and megainstitutions. Since a central goal of this new field of study will be to familiarize students with career opportunities in community change, it will be especially important that – through on-site experience, exposure to social change leaders and other practitioners, readings and lectures – they gain a realistic picture of how community groups function and the particular challenges and opportunities they face. They should also understand how people with careers in the public, for profit and larger nonprofit sectors can play important roles in promoting community change and development.

Fifth, in addition to guidance for students as they negotiate the maze of relevant courses which are scattered throughout a university, there should be **extensive assistance for graduates as they seek jobs or opportunities for postgraduate study** which further prepare them for community change work.<sup>13</sup>

**No institution of higher learning currently offers such a strong, coherent, multidisciplinary background in community studies, incorporating all five elements of a model program. However, the scan revealed that there is fertile ground for more com-**

**prehensive community studies programs. It also identified the seeds of model courses, excellent field placement strategies, and effective approaches to the practical issues of coordination, teaching and mentoring.**

## **Moving Forward on Undergraduate Education**

There are several alternative strategies for bringing these different approaches together and growing increasingly robust and productive programs to broaden student interest in and preparation for careers in community organizing and development.

### **1. "Networking and Seed Money"**

A “networking and seed money” approach could **reinforce the programs which already exist and support their efforts to broaden and gradually become more multidimensional.** This would entail **supporting learning communities which link academics who teach courses related to community change and engage in related research and assistance to grassroots groups.** The goals would be to help them learn from their peers and use that learning to strengthen their own programs and gradually broaden them so they offer students a more multifaceted background in community studies, closer to the five-point model set forth above.

It would be particularly useful if this networking strategy developed three sets of linkages. The first, and easiest to accomplish, would be to strengthen communications and sharing among people in the **same discipline**, e.g. undergraduate social work faculty-members.

The second would be to **include practitioners** with the academics so that theory and practice are brought together across the usual “town/gown” gulf. This would enrich teaching and research by grounding them more firmly

<sup>13</sup>There is a great need for stronger job placement services as well as a solid entry route into MA programs which build on students’ undergraduate experience.

## *Programs critically examine the root causes and public policy implications of the issues, and teach advocacy.*

in reality. It would also inform practitioners with the new insights which come with greater understanding of useful concepts and theory.

The third linkage would be **across disciplines**. This is against the grain in most universities, as the entire reward system usually revolves around separate academic disciplines – appointment, supervision, course and research assignments, opportunities to publish, speaking and consulting opportunities, promotion, and tenure. Rewards for collaborating across these lines are rare. In fact, because it may take time away from work in the department, narrowly defined, such collaboration frequently is a negative.

Nevertheless it is abundantly clear that many different disciplines can contribute to an understanding of communities, how they function, and how to bring about progress, and that the most helpful curricula therefore must be multidisciplinary. Furthermore, though it is seldom recognized, academics who are teaching community-oriented courses have a strong self-interest in overcoming these divisions: it is clear that the constituency for all such teaching and service would be much stronger if it were united across disciplinary lines and if there were growing recognition of the already quite impressive aggregate scale and scope of university-based community studies programs.

### **2. Model Curriculum for Community Studies**

A second strategy would be to **develop a model undergraduate curriculum for a major or minor in community studies. This model would build on the energies and involvement which emanate from a robust service learning program.** This strategy could be pursued by providing resources to a multidisciplinary team of academics and practitioners to design a program which has all five components of the comprehensive undergraduate program described above. They could draw from their different disciplines and experiences to design that curriculum, develop required and optional courses, identify potential reading materials, and think through alternative

approaches to field placements and experiential learning including service, participatory research, and other models.

**Such a strategy should include concerted efforts to encourage four year colleges to adopt all or parts of the model curriculum.** This should include approaching administrators concerned about civic engagement and service learning, faculty teaching community-oriented courses in different academic disciplines and people involved in university/community partnerships to interest them in building on their current work to offer more far-reaching and comprehensive approaches. Such an effort should enlist the involvement of such important potential allies as Campus Compact, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and other academic associations, including the informal and formal networks of social work, planning, public health, applied sociologists and other academics who already are most heavily committed to community studies.

A core planning team of 6-10 people could bring together experts in each element of a model curriculum – for example, social work and planning, sociology and economics, public policy and political science, course work and field placement, organizing and community organizational development – to develop a unified curriculum which draws from all their experience and techniques. They, in turn, could involve others from their fields and other disciplines in thinking through particular courses or strategic issues. Furthermore, if they were from different universities themselves, each person on the team would bring contacts which could be instrumental in advancing the model curriculum.

### **3. Expand Current Programs**

A third strategy would be to **select one or more universities which already have many of the ingredients for a full-scale community studies program and provide them with resources to fill the gaps and expand their programs.** These could then serve as models for other universities. This strategy would be

*Learning can and should happen in reciprocal relationships with community groups, not just one-way relationships of service.*

enhanced if it included an active program for disseminating lessons from these models and seeding similar efforts at a second set of institutions.

**The AA degree which LA Trade Tech offers in Community Economic Development provides such a model for the community college world. While efforts to replicate it have not yet paid off, there is great potential for replicating this pioneering program** which is almost unique in its focus on reaching and educating poor and working class people of color for increasing responsibilities in community-based organizations. Forty percent of all university students are now enrolled in community colleges – about six million students. Many of them come from low-income backgrounds and/or are people of color. **Funding and other resources should be targeted on a strategy for starting AA programs in community change and development at other community colleges,** and then linking it with entry into four year institutions for students who want further education and experience. That approach has added potential in California where the AA program is already accredited statewide by the state university system.