

Restoring the Public Purpose of America's Urban Universities

A White Paper on
mutually beneficial
partnerships between
urban colleges/universities
and their local communities.

Produced by the Netter Center for Community
Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania
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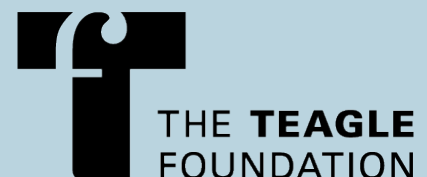
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The Teagle Foundation works to support and strengthen liberal arts education as fundamental to meaningful work, effective citizenship, and a fulfilling life. As part of this effort, the Teagle Foundation supported the University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center for Community Partnerships to produce a white paper focused on the responsibility of urban universities to their local communities and to highlight promising practices across the country.



Netter Center
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UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

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Introduction

Ira Harkavy and Rita A. Hodges

The current historical moment demands that higher education institutions dramatically increase their contributions to the public good. Among other things, they have not adequately addressed disturbing trends in society, including attacks on science, knowledge, and democracy; increasing racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia; and growing economic, political, social, educational, and health inequalities. The failure of higher education to positively contribute as it could and should is particularly clear in cities, where relatively (and in some cases extremely) well-resourced colleges and universities stand in stark contrast to the generational poverty, under-resourced schools, and inadequate healthcare in their surrounding communities.

Given the conditions cited above, a major rethinking and redoing of how higher education institutions function seems to be in order. That rethinking should begin with asking how colleges and universities can best contribute to radically reducing the pervasive, ongoing, seemingly intractable problems of America's urban communities.

To help answer this question, Penn's Netter Center for Community Partnerships, with support from the Teagle Foundation, produced this white paper on the public responsibility of higher education, particularly urban higher education, in a COVID-impacted world. In 2022, we invited colleagues from eight institutions to write brief case studies that highlight mutually beneficial partnerships between their urban college or university and its local community.

The eight case studies are:

Augsburg University

Columbia University's Freedom and
Citizenship Program

De Anza College's Vasconcellos Institute
for Democracy in Action

Rutgers University-Newark

University at Buffalo Community Health
Equity Research Institute

University of North Carolina at Charlotte's
urbanCORE

University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center
for Community Partnerships

University of San Diego

The sites intentionally reflect a diversity in institutional type, geographic location, and background of authors. We also gave careful consideration to the infrastructure for engagement, specifically where the community engagement was located within the institution (e.g., the Presidential, Provostial, or departmental/center level). All the cases highlight continuous reciprocal engagement with community partners. They are powerful examples of what colleges and universities can and should be all about—educating students to be democratic citizens and advancing knowledge for the public good.

KEY FINDINGS EMERGE FROM ACROSS THE EIGHT CASE STUDIES.¹

- Place-based engagement in an institution's local geographic community can provide an opportunity for deep, sustained partnerships that are mutually beneficial.
- Engaging and empowering community residents as genuine partners can help ensure the work is based on shared values and benefits all participants.
- A centralized infrastructure on campus can help develop and nurture such partnerships, as well as effectively coordinate college/university resources to work democratically with the community.
- Presidential support and leadership can help elevate and embed community engagement as a core value across the institution.
- Dedicated university dollars can help leverage external funding, both of which are critical for growth and sustainability.
- Embedding community-engaged scholarship into the curriculum can contribute to meaningful neighborhood change and also advance research, teaching, and learning.
- Programs that thoughtfully involve college/university students with the local community through coursework, work-study, internships, and volunteer opportunities can be mutually beneficial—making a positive impact on the community and preparing students to be civically engaged leaders now and into the future.
- Working with K-12 students in local schools and community-based organizations can serve as a successful strategy to leverage university resources and provide educational access to the local community.
- A democratic anchor institution approach can help engage and integrate a university's full range of resources (academic, human, cultural, economic) in significant, sustained, mutually transformative community partnerships.²

The eight case studies that follow help illustrate what these findings look like in practice. While the cases collectively emphasize core community partnership principles of mutuality, collaboration, democratic practice, and a commitment to social justice and equity, each institution has a unique history, structure, set of initiatives and approaches to carrying out the work with its local community. The cases are organized to help illuminate how this work can be operationalized and sustained. The authors of each case also reflect on challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for their community engagement. We conclude the White Paper with lessons learned and thoughts as to where we might go from here, with a particular emphasis on the role that foundations might play.

¹ These are common findings demonstrated across multiple sites. Not every case featured every one of these findings.

² For further definition and discussion of the role of universities and other large place-based organizations as democratic anchor institutions, see the Anchor Institution Task Force, www.margainc.com/aitf/.

Augsburg University (Minneapolis, MN)

Green Bouzard, Kathleen Clark, Tim Pippert, and Paul Pribbenow¹

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Kathleen Clark, DNP is the executive director of the Augsburg Health Commons and current chair of the Department of Nursing who has been working at Augsburg University for fifteen years.

Timothy D. Pippert, PhD serves as the Joel Torstenson Endowed Professor of Sociology and the Executive Director of Augsburg Family Scholars.

Paul C. Pribbenow, PhD is the 10th president of Augsburg University, where he has served since 2006, and former president of Rockford University.

ABSTRACT

Augsburg University is a small liberal arts institution grounded in the Lutheran faith that has continuously worked to integrate its mission with its urban location in Minneapolis. This work is guided by robust, place-based community engagement with stakeholders from across the university and neighborhood and strategic investments as an anchor institution focused on increasing equity in the local community. Augsburg has made an institutional commitment to infuse community engagement into its identity and daily operations to contribute to a healthy, robust democracy, educate students to become engaged civic leaders, and benefit the common good. The Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship is the hub for Augsburg's local engagement, leading the Campus Kitchen program, LEAD (Leaders for Equity, Action, and Democracy) Fellows Bonner program, place-based community engagement and experiential learning in the curriculum, and support for locally-owned businesses. Lessons learned from Augsburg's experiences include the importance of grounding the university's place-based work in mission and strategy; leveraging presidential leadership and advocacy; integrating community engagement across all aspects of the university's work, including curriculum, campus life, and business practices; committing to mutually beneficial relationships with neighbors; and focusing on democracy as a social ethic.

INTRODUCTION

In 1871, a small band of Norwegian settlers from Trinity Lutheran Congregation in the still tiny village of Minneapolis invited the fledgling remnant of a theological seminary in Marshall, Wisconsin, to come north to be an outpost for preparing preachers and teachers for the Lutheran immigrants of Minnesota. Little did those intrepid pioneers dream that more than 150 years later, Augsburg University would be a thriving small university, educating students of diverse backgrounds and equipping them to live out their vocations around the world as informed citizens, thoughtful stewards, critical thinkers, and responsible leaders.

Today, Augsburg is a university dedicated to the liberal arts, grounded in its Lutheran faith, and shaped by its distinctive location in the midst of an immigrant urban neighborhood, exemplifying the inextricable links between education, faith, community building, place, and service to and with the neighbor. As will be demonstrated below, Augsburg has continuously worked to integrate its mission and urban location through

¹ Material for this case study was compiled from various sources, and edited by Green Bouzard. We are grateful for the contributions from Augsburg colleagues: Tim Pippert, Chris Houlberg, Dan Ibarra, Steve Peacock, Katie Clark, and Natalie Jacobson.

robust community relationships, place-based community engagement, experiential education, democracy building, and anchor institution partnerships. In particular, the modalities of place-based community engagement (engagement with stakeholders from across the university and neighborhood, with the aim to enact real and meaningful social change through mutual partnership and co-creative work) and anchor institution partnership (strategic investments, local purchasing and hiring, facilities use, and collaboration with groups focused on equity and strengthening the local community) guide our work. At the core of all of our initiatives is the commitment to infuse all we say and do with a mission-based embrace of our place in our neighborhood, our city, and our world. It's not enough to say we are in this place, but rather: we are *of* and *with* this place.

HISTORY

While Augsburg touted the benefits of life in the city as it expanded its academic programs in the mid-twentieth century, it wasn't until the 1960s that a clear link between urban life and the curriculum began to develop. Dr. Joel Torstenson, a 1938 graduate of Augsburg from rural North Dakota, joined the Augsburg faculty in 1947. Torstenson, a social scientist, returned from a sabbatical in 1966, transformed in his thinking about the promise of "The Liberal Arts College in the Modern Metropolis." In an address to the Augsburg faculty in 1967, Torstenson argued that his decision to study the role of colleges in the modern metropolis was influenced by the emerging understanding that cities are a dominant community reality in society and that Augsburg was uniquely situated to develop an educational program responsive to this emerging reality about cities. This pivotal address included a myriad of practical recommendations for Augsburg to embrace its urban context as a "laboratory for liberal learning and research."² From the most simple and pragmatic, Torstenson's 24-page address reads like a map to Augsburg, fully embracing its location as classroom and context for a distinctive academic vision. Augsburg subsequently developed internship programs, community living experiences, research, service, experiential education, place-based collaboration, and multi-sector institutional partnerships in the following decades. Much of Torstenson's vision was ultimately implemented, fundamentally altering Augsburg's direction.

Torstenson's hand-picked successor, Garry Hesser, helped further Torstenson's vision in essential ways. Hesser, who served Augsburg from 1977 to 2017 as a member of the Department of Sociology, Urban Studies Program, and as the inaugural Martin Olav Sabo Professor of Citizenship and Democracy, worked to garner significant funding for administrative support, paid internships for students, and faculty development. Through Hesser's influence, Augsburg hired a Director of Service Learning, who not only expanded service components into Augsburg's courses but also deepened the relationships between Augsburg and the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. Initially housed in Augsburg's Center for Service, Work, and Learning (now the Strommen Center for Meaningful Work), Augsburg's place-based education and partnership work now resides in the Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship.

The Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship came about in 2014 as the result of integrating two centers at Augsburg, both with rich histories and similar goals. The former Sabo Center for Citizenship and Learning at Augsburg University included a constellation of programs that honored the legacy of Congressman Martin Olav Sabo '59, including public and community service, service learning, public policy, deliberative practices, and community development work. The Center for Democracy and Citizenship, which moved to Augsburg from the Humphrey School of Public Affairs (University of Minnesota) in 2009, located its philosophical roots and day-to-day work in the citizenship education programs of the Southern civil rights movement, in the settlement house movement and leadership of Jane Addams, and in the theory and practice of public work. Today, the Sabo

² Joel S. Torstenson, *The Liberal Arts College in the Modern Metropolis* (Unpublished position paper presented to the faculty of Augsburg College, 1967).

Center for Democracy and Citizenship is the hub for Augsburg's place-based engagement through the Campus Kitchen program, the LEAD (Leaders for Equity, Action, and Democracy) Fellows Bonner program, and place-based community engagement in courses. One of Augsburg's core champions for experiential learning, the Sabo Center is recognized for its innovative leadership in democracy education and public work philosophy. Core staff for the Sabo Center include a center director (who is a faculty member serving in a dual role), a Community Engaged Learning Program Manager, a Food Initiatives Program Manager, a Student Leadership Program Manager, a Community Relations Director, a Sustainability Officer, and AmeriCorps and Green Corps members.

We find that the examples of the place-based community engagement and anchor institution initiatives at Augsburg best illustrate the breadth of the work and the depth of our commitment to being of the city and in partnership with our neighbors. What follows are three brief deep-dives into how these commitments are actualized.

HOW IT WORKS: EXAMPLES OF PLACE-BASED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND ANCHOR INSTITUTION INITIATIVES

Campus Kitchen: Robust Community Relationships

Like many neighborhood community centers, Pillsbury United Community's Brian Coyle Center (located in Augsburg's neighborhood) provides community gathering space, social services, youth programming, advocacy, food support, and much more. If you're there during dinner time, you'll find Augsburg's Campus Kitchen students sitting down to eat with youth as they all take a break from homework to nourish their bodies and their growing relationships.

Founded as a settlement house in the 1890's, the center has gone through many changes to get to its current form, including iterations of partnership with Augsburg built on long-lasting mutual commitment and rooted in deep, communicative relationships. Amano Dube, Director of the Brian Coyle Center, sees the relationship as reciprocal. "Augsburg students learn a lot about the community from Coyle. Students also bring assets and knowledge to us. It's a two-way goal." Mary Laurel True, former Director of Service Learning and Community Engagement at Augsburg, sees the partnership's goal as "to be together in each other's lives and to mutually teach one another and share resources." True worked to connect Augsburg with Coyle "in as many ways possible and with as much depth as possible" for over 28 years. "Coyle is our neighborhood center," she explained, "The goal is to be partners in every possible way."

One of the key ways that Augsburg and the Coyle Center work together today is through The Campus Kitchen at Augsburg. The Campus Kitchens Project was a national organization with chapters on college and high school campuses across the nation. Augsburg, the fifth campus to create a Campus Kitchen, launched its program in 2003. Campus Kitchen partners with Augsburg's dining service to recover surplus, unserved food from the dining hall and incorporate that food into weekly meals to share with community partners in the three neighborhoods adjacent to Augsburg. Campus Kitchen also runs a student food pantry on campus, recovers food from local farmers' markets to distribute in Augsburg's neighborhood, runs Augsburg's community garden, and provides education on food and sustainability.

Campus Kitchen student interns and Augsburg student volunteers bring dinner to Coyle four evenings per week, ensuring that youth have access to a meal after a busy school day. Depending on the desires of staff and youth at Coyle, during some semesters and summers, Campus Kitchen provides additional food programming such as cooking in Augsburg's Food Lab, making snacks from gleaned vegetables and foraged berries, tending the garden, and organizing weekly "Top Chef" competitions.

Beyond food-related programming, Campus Kitchen interns and volunteers connect and build cross-cultural relationships with youth. For former Campus Kitchen student leader Hsinku Lay, building relationships with youth at Coyle was a powerful learning experience. He shared, “We’d sit down and enjoy food together and talk about things like soccer or basketball and find simple connections between our lives and their lives.” Lay found that he was able to share knowledge about what it’s like to be a college student and “be a role model” for youth at Coyle.

Design & Agency: Community-Engaged Learning in the Curriculum

In 2011, Art and Design faculty member Chris Houltberg worked alongside the students in his graphic design course to create a collaborative exhibition examining the complexity of the chocolate industry. Through this experiment, Houltberg saw that students’ capacity to address the political, social, and human layers of an issue not only reinforced the value of a liberal arts education but helped the students understand how they could position themselves in an active role as designers. Afterward, Houltberg began engaging staff and faculty that were already doing community-based learning and began to forge connections in the community through the staff in the Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship. Drawing on the foundation of Augsburg’s mission, the knowledge gained from the prototypes, as well as informed by the rich history of community-engaged learning at Augsburg and the vibrant surrounding community itself, Houltberg set out to design a new major around this model of education. The result was Design & Agency, a design studio embedded into Augsburg University’s Graphic Design program. The structure is defined by professors working alongside students to mentor, guide, and collaborate with them to create meaningful design solutions for local and international community partners. The philosophy and structure of this model focus on two main areas: creative problem solving with the ability to adapt to constantly changing issues and students practicing to access their own agency.

The dynamic community-based client experience of Design & Agency is demonstrated by the studio’s longtime client, Sisterhood Boutique. Located on Riverside Avenue, on the opposite side of the street from Augsburg, Sisterhood Boutique is a modest corner storefront focused on the sale and resale of girls’ and women’s clothing. Born from the Brian Coyle Center Youth Entrepreneurship Program, program participants decided they wanted to build something positive for other girls and women in the neighborhood. The Sisterhood Boutique was connected with Design & Agency after they had collaborated with Augsburg’s MBA program to write a business plan. The Sisterhood Boutique and Design & Agency teamed up and experienced together the entrepreneurial energy of starting a business. The studio created the primary brand identity for Sisterhood Boutique in the first year, expanded the interior and exterior signage, and designed the promotion for a full-scale annual fashion show the next year. All the while, students in Design & Agency were collaborating, learning alongside, and gaining real-world design experience with their clients.

Design & Agency has continued this work and has expanded to over forty community partnerships. When students and the community are placed at the center of a working studio, the learning environment becomes more dynamic. The students connect to valuable skills such as active listening and empathy while developing additional skill sets that equip them to learn from others at the table and provide unique and valuable contributions. Design & Agency extends the classroom into the community where engaged learning begins.

Augsburg Local: Supporting Local Businesses

The Augsburg Local campaign was launched in the summer of 2020 in response to the disproportionate negative impact the pandemic and the uprisings following the murder of George Floyd had on small, locally owned, and BIPOC-owned businesses located close to the Augsburg campus. At this crucial time, Augsburg Local was established to bring greater urgency, visibility, and accountability to Augsburg’s commitment as an anchor institution to mobilize institutional resources to strengthen the health, vitality, and safety of our community. Augsburg Local leverages the purchasing power of the University to support local businesses. The campaign

was co-created by staff from the Sabo Center for Democracy and Citizenship and students who took an interest in the initiative. Regular planning meetings are held to define campaign parameters, guide marketing and communications activities, and coordinate outreach to businesses. The campaign initially focused on individual purchasing done by faculty, staff, and students at businesses in close proximity to campus. Members of the Augsburg Local team walked the Franklin Avenue and Cedar/Riverside commercial corridors near campus, met business owners, listened to their ideas, and enlisted their participation in the campaign. Window clings with the Augsburg Local logo can be seen in many storefronts along these avenues. Participating businesses are being promoted through social media posts, campus events, and special projects such as the development of a catering guide. Another area of focus for Augsburg Local is institutional purchasing, or the sourcing of goods and services by the university. Work is underway to connect local and diverse businesses to Augsburg's supply chain and to identify and address internal policies and processes that are barriers to inclusive sourcing.

Augsburg Local builds on the university's role as a leader in two local cross-sector anchor collaboratives—Cedar Riverside Partnership and the Central Corridor Anchor Partnership—that are working to strategically invest institutional resources in the growth and development of the surrounding community.

These three examples are only a portion of how Augsburg has embodied its commitments to be in and of its place. But this missional work on the ground has to be supported not just philosophically but financially. Organizationally, the Sabo Center director reports to the Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs. Various Sabo Center staff members have a reporting relationship to the President, including the Director of Community Relations and the Sustainability Officer, reflecting the centrality of those roles to Augsburg's mission-based work. The core staff of the Sabo Center are funded through the university's operating budget, while AmeriCorps and Green Corps volunteers are funded from outside sources. The Center also seeks philanthropic support from foundations and individuals in cooperation with the university's Advancement office. Of particular interest to funders have been the Campus Kitchen and Sustainability efforts.

LOOKING FORWARD: CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Even with central institutional resources dedicated to staff who implement Augsburg's place-based and anchor commitments, funding for the amount of staff needed to truly cover the demands of this work is a constant challenge. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, our community partners are stretched even more thin than they were before as they try to meet the needs of our neighbors. Community disinvestment is at an all-time high, and the economic scarcity, increasing wealth disparity, and fraying social connections in our city make the work of our partners, and Augsburg's mission to collaborate with our partners, more complex and in need of material support.

In addition, one of the biggest challenges to sustaining our commitment to infuse all we say and do with a mission-based embrace of our place in our neighborhood, our city, and our world is wider society's questioning of the value of higher education and higher education institutions. We believe that our institutional commitments, especially as they are lived out via place-based community engagement and anchor partnerships, contribute to a healthy, robust democracy, educate students to become engaged civic leaders and benefit the common good. Making the case for the value of higher education's democratic purpose means helping students understand education not as a simple means to a utilitarian end, like a certain job or professional path, but as a way to affect change in their various communities, and to think of their chosen professions and vocations as woven into the life of their community and society. Responding to this challenge has prompted curricular innovation across campus to incorporate the concepts of civic agency, public work, and citizen professionals into student learning in and outside the classroom. For example, an Emerging Leaders program, offered to first year students for academic credit, is organized around the skills of democratic engagement, including public narrative and coalition-building.

There is insufficient space in this paper to explore the meaning of these terms and provide extensive examples, but we commend to the reader work by Augsburg faculty and staff who have written about the theory behind these ideas and their application in curriculum.³ These very concepts, married to our values of being *of* and *with* the place where we are located, were also fundamental to how the University responded in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic aftermath of the pandemic lock-downs, and to the murder of George Floyd.⁴ The future of Augsburg's commitment and responsibility to our community in a pandemic-impacted world will continue to expand on the areas of public work and civic agency. Where that work will take us, we don't know; we do know it will require continued innovation, care, and constant questions about how the actions we take align with our values, and the needs of our community partners, our students, and the wider world. We also know that our efforts to measure the outcomes of this important work—metrics that are imbedded in all aspects of our anchor institution work and that seek to measure the impact on partner communities (e.g. income levels, economic vitality of local businesses, place-making) as well as on our campus community (student engagement, local hiring and purchasing, real estate practices)—are critical for ensuring its sustainability.

As we consider the future of this work at Augsburg, we draw upon and commend to others these four fundamental lessons:

- 1. Ground this work in mission and strategy:** Find the threads of your institutional saga that inform your community-based work and then ensure that both your mission and strategic plan name this work as central to your identity and daily work.
- 2. Leadership matters, but so does what happens on the ground:** Presidential leadership and advocacy for this work is important, but it is not sufficient if the commitment and work are not integrated across all aspects of the university's work, including curriculum, campus life, business practices, and community engagement.
- 3. This work requires a commitment to mutuality with neighbors:** One of the temptations, unfortunately too often endemic to academic institutions, is the tendency to believe we know best how to respond to community challenges. This work only succeeds if it is grounded in mutually beneficial relationships with community partners. Those relationships must be built and sustained over time through consistent, intentional efforts to align our work together around shared interests and values.
- 4. Finally, this is all about democracy—not as the machinery of government but as a social ethic:** This is about living together with our neighbors, working to create more just, healthy, safe, and compassionate communities. And that only happens when we practice democracy in our words and deeds.⁵

³ Harry C. Boyte, *Reinventing Citizenship as Public Work: Citizen-Centered Democracy and the Empowerment Gap* (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2013), <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED560868.pdf>; Kathleen Clark, "Treating an Ailing Society: Citizen Nursing in an Era of Crisis," in *Higher Education Exchange 2021 Institutions and the Public: A Troubled Relationship*, eds. Derek W.M. Barker and Alex Lovit (Dayton, OH: Kettering Foundation, 2021), 36-49.

⁴ Paul Pribbenow, "Public Work and Reclaiming the Democratic Impulse of Higher Education in these Pandemic Times," in *Higher Education's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Building a More Sustainable and Democratic Future*, eds. Sjur Bergan, Tony Gallagher, Ira Harkavy, Ronaldo Munck and Hilligje van't Land (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, Higher Education Series No. 25, 2021), 121-27.

⁵ Paul Pribbenow, "Lessons on Vocation and Location: The Saga of Augsburg College as Urban Settlement," *Word and World* 34, no. 2 (Spring, 2014): 149-159, https://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/34-2_Identity_And_Community/Lessons%20on%20Vocation%20and%20Location;%20The%20Saga%20of%20Augsburg%20College%20as%20Urban%20Settlement.pdf

Columbia University's Freedom and Citizenship Program, (New York, NY)

Jessica H. Lee

Jessica H. Lee, PhD is Executive Director of Freedom and Citizenship, Co-Chair of Knowledge for Freedom, and lecturer in history at Columbia University.

ABSTRACT

Columbia University's Freedom and Citizenship program introduces dedicated, underserved high school seniors to college-level work in the humanities and prepares them for lives of active, informed citizenship. Freedom and Citizenship began in 2009 as a partnership between three centers at Columbia: the Center for the Core Curriculum, the Double Discovery Center, and the Center for American Studies. The program expanded over the years and, as of 2020, is fully operated by the Center for American Studies through funding from the Teagle Foundation and private gifts from Columbia alumni. The program requires the cooperation of several offices at Columbia alongside the support of local teachers, counselors, and community-based organizations. Columbia has also helped thirty-two campuses across the country start programs on the Freedom and Citizenship model through the Knowledge for Freedom network. Looking forward, Freedom and Citizenship leaders hope to continue growing the program through the involvement of additional undergraduate and graduate student employees, expansion to other university campuses, and further developing opportunities for alumni of the Knowledge for Freedom programs.

INTRODUCTION

Freedom and Citizenship, a program housed at Columbia University, introduces dedicated, underserved high school seniors to college-level work in the humanities and prepares them for lives of active, informed citizenship. We primarily serve students who are low-income, attend underperforming high schools, or will be the first in their families to attend college. The program gives students their first experience of college learning in a seminar setting as well as life on a university campus. The students learn what liberal arts education has to offer, develop civic skills, and acquire knowledge and self-confidence that help them succeed in college and beyond.

Columbia faculty founded Freedom and Citizenship to create a tangible link between the University's primary purpose of educating students and its longstanding support of educational access to the local community. Those faculty members represented three centers at Columbia, two of which—[The Center for the Core Curriculum](#) and the [Center for American Studies](#)—are committed to preparing undergraduate students for responsible citizenship through engagement with historical texts.¹ The third—[The Roger Lehecka Double Discovery Center \(DDC\)](#)—was established in 1965 and provides opportunities for mutual learning between undergraduates and local high school students in preparing the latter with the skills and guidance needed to achieve their academic goals.²

¹ Columbia has a substantial core requirement, which the Center for the Core Curriculum directs. The foundational course "Introduction to Contemporary Civilization in the West," aims to prepare students for active and informed citizenship by introducing them to historically significant texts that have presented "ideas of enduring importance" for human society. For more, see <https://www.college.columbia.edu/core-curriculum/classes/contemporary-civilization>; The Center for American Studies is an interdisciplinary undergraduate program that endeavors to provide a liberal education with which to prepare students for citizenship by investigating and confronting contemporary problems with historical awareness.

² The DDC was founded by Columbia and Barnard undergraduates who taught and mentored local students on campus with funding through the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. Since then, it has supported over 25,000 local students with summer and academic year programming through TRiO and College-sponsored initiatives.

Columbia University's Freedom and Citizenship Program (New York, NY)

Freedom and Citizenship brings New York City students from under-resourced communities to live on campus for one month to take a political philosophy course modeled on the curricula of American Studies and Columbia's Core. During the academic year, students continue to meet regularly on campus with undergraduate teaching assistants who lead them in a group civic leadership project and provide one-on-one college application support. Our use of transformative texts in initiating conversations about societal problems, the students' hands-on practice in civic skills, and our peer support in the pursuit of continued education, makes Freedom and Citizenship a natural connection between the college's intellectual and outreach work.

HISTORY

In 2007, the Center for American Studies created a seminar on "Equity in Higher Education" with a grant from the Teagle Foundation. The course included a service component, requiring the seminar students to serve as college mentors to high school students in the Upward Bound program housed in the Double Discovery Center. The seminar initiated a relationship with the Teagle Foundation, which offered financial support to enlarge the partnership between American Studies and DDC. The result, beginning in 2009, was a new summer seminar for Double Discovery Center seniors based on Columbia's Core. The program enrolled 15 students from DDC's Upward Bound Summer Academy in an intensive seminar taught by Roosevelt Montás, then Director of the Center for the Core Curriculum. While the DDC supervised students in the dorms, American Studies ran the morning seminars and small-group tutorial sessions, which were led by undergraduate teaching assistants in the department. Two Ph.D. students in the history department coordinated the program.

The program expanded to 30 students in 2014 with further funding from the Teagle Foundation and then to 45 students in 2016 with contributions from a private gift. To accommodate the larger cohort, students were split into two and then three seminars. Through expansion, the program began to outnumber the rising senior population of the Upward Bound Summer Academy, requiring staff to recruit students outside of the DDC. As more of the program's students came from other community-based organizations and high schools, American Studies took more responsibility for managing the program, and since 2020, it has been running the program independently of the DDC.

As Freedom and Citizenship grew internally it was also expanding on other campuses. Yale University and Carthage College each started programs in 2016, and Newberry College began in 2017. Capitalizing on widespread interest, the Teagle Foundation launched a new grant initiative to encourage the proliferation of similar programs. Two more programs launched in 2019, four in 2021, and another ten in 2022. The new Knowledge for Freedom network now counts thirty-three programs across the country.

WHAT AND HOW

Freedom and Citizenship is run by Columbia University's Center for American Studies. Dr. Roosevelt Montás (Senior Lecturer in English and American Studies) is our program's director, and our executive director (Dr. Jessica Lee) is a full-time officer of administration in American Studies and Lecturer in History. Throughout the year, the program also receives administrative support from the center's staff and part-time program support by a graduate student coordinator. Undergraduate teaching assistants work with students in the summer and academic year.

Freedom and Citizenship's eleven-month program includes (1) a residential summer seminar, (2) an academic year civic leadership project, and (3) college application support, with additional programming for alumni. High school students apply in the spring of their junior year and enter the program by moving into Columbia's dormitories in July for the summer seminar. After a four-day orientation led by undergraduate teaching assistants, students take part in a three-week humanities seminar taught by faculty and modeled on Columbia's Core Curriculum.

Columbia University's Freedom and Citizenship Program (New York, NY)

The syllabus begins in Ancient Greece with Plato and Aristotle, followed by a week of Enlightenment and early American texts, including Hobbes, Locke, and Jefferson, and ends with documents in the American civic tradition by Douglass, Du Bois, King, and others. We chose these texts because of their influence within American political thought and for their ability to inspire critical analysis of contemporary public life. The seminar brings students into dialogue with the ideas that have shaped our society and asks them to develop their own understanding and opinions about them. Personal reflection, collaborative inquiry, and animated debates are heartily encouraged in the seminar. Because the readings are challenging and the seminar is fast-paced, students are supported throughout the day by over a dozen undergraduate teaching assistants.

During the following academic year, students (who are now high school seniors) return to Columbia's campus after school to participate in civic leadership projects led by the same teaching assistants. The civic leadership curriculum serves as a bridge between the students' philosophical contemplation during the summer and their lifelong practice of citizenship. In their civic leadership groups, students are asked to first identify a societal problem they want to fix. They then research and teach others about the issue by adding educational features to the program's website, and finally call their peers to action by sharing a tangible method by which individuals can make a difference. Past civic projects can be viewed on the [Freedom and Citizenship program's website](#).

Students also receive college application support, which includes a letter of recommendation written by their summer professor, regular one-on-one college mentorship meetings with one of the program's teaching assistants, and the opportunity to enroll in professional college counseling with Columbia's Double Discovery Center or Goddard Riverside's Options Center. The undergraduate mentors act as a second layer of support and encouragement throughout the process, and are not meant to replace the professional counselors who guide students in selecting colleges that meet the students' financial and academic needs.

The program requires the cooperation of several offices at Columbia, including protection of minors, finance, human resources, conference housing, public safety, libraries, dining services, health services, the registrar, and events management. Coordinating among so many offices to safely bring minors into residence each year can be a real challenge, but in recent years, that work has been made easier by three campus groups in particular.

An essential support system is the Columbia University Collaborative of Community Programs for Youth and Families, which began in 2018 and brings the leaders of the University's youth programs together to share ideas, concerns, and best practices, and to advocate for their work at the University and in the city. In 2021, the Office of the Provost launched [Columbia University Pathways Programs](#) under the "Building Inclusive Faculty Pathways" initiative. This new network connects programs at the high school, undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate levels who work with underrepresented groups. It hosts regular leadership meetings and runs special events for program participants. Both groups have created a community of faculty and administrators who share resources and expertise, something that was of particular importance as we brought Freedom and Citizenship back to campus after two virtual years due to COVID.

Columbia's Office of Development is a third critical partner due to its recent commitment to ensuring the program's sustainability. Grants from the Teagle Foundation cover less than a quarter of operating costs, with endowments and current use gifts covering the rest. With help from development, we have cultivated a committed group of donors from among the college's alumni. These individuals, who are specifically interested in community engagement, educational equity, and the humanities, have contributed to our growing endowment and have recently provided the resources to add extra students, host special career and civic-oriented events, increase the number of nights students spend on campus, hire a student social work intern, and even offer \$1,000 stipends to our participants.

Columbia University's Freedom and Citizenship Program (New York, NY)

Outside of Columbia, Freedom and Citizenship relies on scores of teachers and counselors who assist us in student recruitment, applications, and enrollment. Because of the intensive nature of the seminar, we seek applicants who are ready for a challenge, interested in asking “big questions” about how humans live together in society, and committed to solving problems in their communities. Though there is no minimum GPA, the application asks students to reflect on those qualities in three short essays. The essays are an important tool for identifying students who understand the program’s structure and purpose and are ready for college-level work, but they can also become a barrier to application.

To increase the number of complete applications, our executive director works with at least fifteen high schools and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) each year, typically by educating the staff about the application and giving presentations directly to students. Most of our relationships with counselors, teachers, and CBOs have come about through word-of-mouth. Seniors who applied through their CBOs have asked us to present to juniors from their schools, and teachers who changed jobs have invited us to recruit at their new schools. Through our partnerships, we received applications from more than 45 high schools and six CBOs in New York City in 2023.

From 2009 to 2022, 380 high school students graduated from Freedom and Citizenship’s yearlong program. 100% received college admissions, and 98% enrolled within six months of finishing high school. 85% completed a bachelor’s degree within four years, and 97% earned a degree in six years. 25% of students who graduated college continued their education into graduate school. Though only a quarter of our entering students plan to major in the humanities or social sciences, 57% of our alumni choose majors in those disciplines, which is 1.6 times the national average.¹⁰ Many alumni report the summer program not only showed them that they were interested in philosophy, literature, and history, but gave them the confidence to take reading-intensive courses in college. Finally, our alumni are significantly more likely than their peers to engage as citizens, including more than twice as likely to volunteer, three times as likely to belong to a club or organization, and five times as likely to contact their public officials.¹¹

One student from the summer of 2016 exemplifies the broad impact of the program on his education. Neither of his parents attended college, and only 53% of students in his high school class enrolled in college. Through a Freedom and Citizenship panel, the student met a representative from the University of Rochester who encouraged him to apply. He was accepted, and received his bachelor’s degree in four years with a double major in Business and English after switching from a pre-med track based on his new intellectual interests. While in college, he held a leadership position for a volunteering program and supported Rochester’s Humanities Center in launching its version of Freedom and Citizenship, called “Experiencing Civic Life.” When he reflected on the impact of Freedom and Citizenship, the student focused on his intellectual growth rather than the resume-building advantages of the program: “In F&C I was asked a whole bunch of questions I needed to be thinking about, especially as a young teenager going into the world. I learned so much about myself, about people, about the environment, that continued to push my thinking throughout my college years.” A high school guidance counselor who has sent dozens of students to Freedom and Citizenship similarly prioritized the psychological impact of the program, stating, “Tapping into kids’ curiosity about what life is like on a university campus, having that access is life changing. It helps them get familiar to the point where they can see themselves there, thriving.”

¹⁰ 31% of bachelor’s degrees in 2018 went to humanities and social science majors, while 57% of Freedom and Citizenship alumni have majored in the same fields. National data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall 2018 and Fall 2019, Completions component. “Table 322.40. Bachelor’s degrees conferred to males by postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and field of study: 2017-18 and 2018-19,” IPEDS, accessed October 3, 2022, <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds>.

¹¹ 2018 survey of Freedom and Citizenship alumni; comparison data from Tufts Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), “Youth Voting and Civic Engagement in America,” accessed October 3 2022, <https://youthdata.circle.tufts.edu/>.

Columbia University's Freedom and Citizenship Program (New York, NY)

In addition to the high school students served by the program, more than 100 Columbia undergraduate students have worked as teaching assistants and college mentors. Among the student employees who have graduated, 46% have pursued advanced degrees and 43% work in education. Scores of undergraduates have also volunteered as near-peer mentors for the program's high school participants, particularly as a service-learning site for seminars in the Center for American Studies.

PLANS GOING FORWARD AND CONCLUSION

Columbia's Office of the Provost identifies [fourty-one programs](#) at the University that aim to support historically underrepresented students' advancement into college, graduate school, and the professoriate. Including Freedom and Citizenship, only three of the programs are in the humanities, and the other two serve just seven undergraduate students. The lack of opportunities in humanities cannot be due to the lack of enthusiasm from young students. Despite the limitations of in-school recruitment and the virtual nature of the program for two years during COVID, almost 700 high school students applied for 250 spots in Freedom and Citizenship over the last six years.

Given growing student interest and the gap in humanities outreach, there are a number of ways Freedom and Citizenship is expanding. First and foremost, we are expanding to other campuses. With financial backing from the Teagle Foundation, Columbia University is serving as the academic home for Knowledge for Freedom, a nationwide network of programs built on the Columbia model. Though each campus designs its own syllabus to meet the needs of its students and capitalize on its campus's strengths, every program incorporates an intensive humanities syllabus featuring transformative texts, civic engagement programming, and college application assistance. In 2024, thirty-three campuses ran programs with financial support from the Teagle Foundation and pedagogical support from Columbia. As the network grows, we will add more alumni programming, teacher training, and college application resources.

Secondly, and in conjunction with Knowledge for Freedom, we are expanding our alumni programming. In 2020, we launched the Teagle Humanities Fellowship to combat the problems our students were facing at the height of the pandemic: isolation and educational disengagement, learning losses that would make the already difficult transition to college harder, racial violence and injustice, and the need to earn money safely. Recent alumni from Knowledge for Freedom programs were invited to apply for the paid virtual fellowship in reading and writing. Twenty students were paired with writing mentors, hired from among the program's former undergraduate teaching assistants. Together, the pairs selected two texts to read from a list of "transformative texts," and the mentor guided the student in using the texts to write a college-level paper by the end of the summer, reflecting on the student's place in contemporary society. The final essays are published on the [Knowledge for Freedom website](#). Though conceived as a pandemic measure, the fellowship's success among students and mentors, as well as its simplicity in operation, led us to continue running the program yearly.

Our second alumni program was sponsored by the Jack Miller Center and ran virtually in 2021 before becoming residential in 2022. The program invited seven alumni to live on Columbia's campus for three days during the Freedom and Citizenship seminar. The goal of the summit was to prepare alumni to launch their own citizenship reading clubs on their college campuses, using the U.S. Constitution and related texts. Fellows in the summit observed the high school seminars, workshop leadership skills, and teaching methods, and designed their own syllabi with graduate student guidance. At the end of the summit, fellows practiced their skills by leading a text-based discussion with the current high school students. The civic leadership summit allowed us to reach students and campuses beyond the Columbia program and empower our alumni to teach and lead in their communities. Blog posts about their experience can also be found on the [Knowledge for Freedom website](#).

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We could continue to expand at Columbia by adding more students to our regular senior program, or adding special programming for younger students. Such an expansion would have benefits and drawbacks. We would need more full-time staff, which would require having more financial resources, space, and administrative support than the Center for American Studies can currently give. That investment may be worth it: by hiring program staff who are also professional social workers, admissions counselors, or writing experts, we could professionalize work that is currently done with limited supervision by graduate and undergraduate students. The student experience is another factor to consider. Having too many students could dilute the special community of scholars that is formed each year in the classrooms and the dorms, or it could enhance and diversify that community, giving more students the chance to meet like-minded scholars from across the city. There is, however, one group whose expansion is hardly ambiguous: undergraduate and graduate student staff. The need for more teaching assistants, college mentors, civic leaders, and program coordinators would pull more of Columbia's students into the orbit and offices of the Center for American Studies, and that cannot be a bad thing.

De Anza College's Vasconcellos Institute for Democracy in Action (Cupertino, CA)

Angélica Esquivel, Brenda Romero Carrillo, and Cynthia Kaufman

Angélica Esquivel is the Program Coordinator of the Vasconcellos Institute for Democracy in Action and a Professor in Ethnic Studies at De Anza College, with an M.A. from San José State University in Chicano/a Studies.

Brenda Romero Carrillo is the Program Coordinator for the California Youth Leadership Corps at De Anza College, where they received an A.A. in Liberal Arts, and an expected B.A. in Ethnic Studies from the University of California Berkeley 2024.

Cynthia Kaufman, PhD is the director of the Vasconcellos Institute for Democracy in Action and the author of five books on social change, including *Consumerism, Sustainability, and Happiness: How to Build World Where Everyone Has Enough*.

ABSTRACT

De Anza College's Vasconcellos Institute for Democracy in Action (VIDA) works to create dedicated spaces and programs that empower students to become agents of change in their communities and beyond. The Institute provides a range of civic engagement opportunities for students on and off campus, along with providing students funding, networking opportunities, career advice, leadership development, and direct services. The California Youth Leadership Corps, for example, is part of a statewide partnership that empowers students from diverse and nontraditional backgrounds to create social change in their local communities through intensive mentorship, training in community organizing, paid social justice-centered internships in local organizations, and the opportunity to earn a Certificate in Leadership and Social Change. One critical aspect of VIDA's approach is providing a holistic network of support for its student participants, many of whom are from historically marginalized communities. VIDA recommends starting small with new initiatives, using grassroots organizing tactics to build and sustain support, building strong, authentic relationships with participants based on trust, and supporting the well-being of all constituents.

INTRODUCTION

The mission of the Vasconcellos Institute for Democracy in Action (VIDA) at De Anza College is "to empower students to become agents of change in their communities and beyond; to foster education that meets the needs of the communities we serve; and to help develop pathways to meaningful participation in local, state, and federal government decision making processes." VIDA focuses on developing civic agency and capacity in students and leveraging those capacities for community and college transformation. VIDA also prepares students for careers as agents of social change. De Anza has a large number of Asian American and Latinx students on campus who come from communities deeply impacted by systems of oppression. The college serves as an engine of social change in the lives of its students as well as in the Silicon Valley and greater San José metropolitan area. The institution sits in the U.S. mainland's only majority Asian-American congressional district, which experiences some of the highest levels of inequality in the country.

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VIDA leadership has worked to ensure that civic engagement is core to the campus as a whole. Since 2013, De Anza College's commitment to "Civic Engagement for Social Justice" has been embedded in its statement of mission and values. VIDA has several programs that advance this core value among students, such as a Certificate in Leadership and Social Change, California Youth Leadership Corps, paid internships, a training program for students to learn lobbying, an engaged learning program for students to volunteer in the community through their classes, a Social Justice Studies cohort program, and a resource center for undocumented students.

HISTORY

From its beginning in 1967, De Anza College has done an excellent job serving students who come to it already prepared to do well in college. Beginning in the early 1990s, faculty, staff, and students worked hard to shift the college's mission to prioritize meeting the needs of less prepared students from lower-income communities. That work relied on basic community organizing approaches of building power from the bottom to influence institutional priorities. In 2005, these early organizing efforts to change the narrative of the college came to a culmination with the appointment of Brian Murphy as president, who was committed to equity and civic engagement.

President Murphy formed a task force composed of students, faculty, and staff to develop a comprehensive plan for the college on civic and community engagement. This group researched the engagement efforts of other institutions and analyzed what approach would best suit De Anza College. After months of diligent work, the task force delivered its findings to Murphy in March 2006. The result was a detailed "Plan for De Anza's Institute for Community and Civic Engagement," which would guide the college's efforts to promote engagement and service in the local community.

With the support of President Murphy and the task force members, the Institute of Community and Civic Engagement (ICCE) was created, later to be renamed the Vasconcellos Institute for Democracy in Action (VIDA) in memory of the late California State Senator John Vasconcellos who was a powerful advocate for public education and student involvement in democratic processes. The Institute began with no general budget, but members of the task force got a small amount of funding from the president's office to start their first project in the Spring of 2006. Rowena Tomaneng and Mayra Cruz were appointed directors in the Fall of 2006. Over the next three years, they transformed the Institute into a highly influential force for engagement. Since 2010, the Institute has been led by faculty director Cynthia Kaufman.

In 2008, VIDA began a collaboration with Community Learning Partnership (CLP), a national organization committed to increasing the number of knowledgeable and skilled leaders from low-income communities and communities of color to promote transformative social change. The collaboration with CLP supported the development and growth of two of VIDA's signature programs, the Certificate in Leadership and Social Change and the California Youth Leadership Corps.

VIDA'S INFRASTRUCTURE, CORE PROGRAMS AND PARTNERSHIPS

VIDA is housed under the Equity and Engagement Division of Academic Services/Affairs, along with many other programs with a common goal to promote the College's mission of "equity, civic engagement, social justice, and inclusion." This was purposefully structured to emphasize the academic and career aspects of VIDA's programming.

VIDA operates as an umbrella organization for various individual programs, including paid internships, the Leadership and Social Change (LSC) certificate program, California Youth Leadership Corps (CYLC), Higher Education for AB 540 Students (HEFAS, the Undocumented Student Resource Center), Engaged Learning, the

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Social Justice Studies Associate Degree for Transfer cohort program, and Public Policy School (PPS) internship program for student-led policy research and advancement. All of VIDA's programs are designed to provide civic engagement opportunities for students on and off campus while also providing funding, networking opportunities, career advice, leadership development, and some direct services. VIDA also provides a space for students to work and hang out, which includes a meeting room, open areas, and free food through a satellite food pantry, a part of the campus-wide food pantry for students.

Over the years, VIDA's funding streams have grown and diversified. Initially, the program received a small amount of funding from the college president's office, which has gradually increased to a \$15,000 operating budget. In addition, three of the four full-time staff members—all of whom are alumni of De Anza and VIDA's programs—are now funded by the college, with the fourth being funded by a Community Learning Partnership grant to focus on the CYLC program. VIDA's internship program was launched with a three-year, \$30,000 per-year grant from the Rappaport Family Foundation, which was later replaced by funding from the student government and the Castellano Family Foundation. The Morgan Family Foundation provided funding for the Program Coordinator position for three years before the college took over the cost. Additionally, the program received grants for significant voter engagement from the county registrar of voters and the Asian Law Alliance. VIDA hired its Undocumented Student Programs coordinator in 2019 with state funding that was distributed to all 116 California community colleges.

VIDA coordinates with many faculty, students, staff, and community partners. VIDA works with faculty primarily through its Engaged Learning courses, designated classes that require 12 hours of community engagement, as well as faculty who teach the courses for VIDA's cohort programs: the Certificate in Leadership and Social Change and the Social Justice Studies program. To make the engagement process operate smoothly, VIDA provides faculty with training and support as well as manages all relationships with community partners. Faculty train with the VIDA Director and learn about how to use engaged pedagogy and how to develop relationships with community partners.

VIDA holds high expectations for faculty who want to teach in its programs; this includes openness to different forms of learning and participating, willingness to adjust and adapt, openness to feedback, willingness to use their institutional capital or privilege to be of service, knowledge of resources, desire to empower students and mentors, and most importantly, readiness to show up with empathy and understanding. All these things help students feel heard, welcomed, and understood, which is something many of them have not always had in school settings.

Although teaching faculty have the most regular contact with the students, it is the participation and dedication of counselors and staff within VIDA and other programs that help provide a holistic network of supportive educators for each student. VIDA works to address student needs inside and outside the classroom. This is important for them to be successful in their college career and inspire students to pursue their passions in social justice and community organizing on campus and beyond.

A key aspect of the Institute's work is to encourage students to take on projects that help the campus better serve the student body. VIDA hosts an internship program, through which it hires about ten students per year to spearhead and execute their own projects. Some of the projects undertaken include De Anza Renters Rights, Racial Justice, and Students for Equity and Environment at De Anza (SEED), which have had tangible impacts on the college and transformational experiences for students. VIDA's Program Coordinator, Angélica Esquivel, mentors and trains the interns in weekly meetings while intern teams meet every other week with VIDA's director, Cynthia Kaufman, to develop work strategies. Some intern teams also accept volunteers from the Engaged Learning classes.

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Community partners have always been a core component of VIDA. These partners consist of a wide range of community sites and local government offices that focus on various issues affecting marginalized communities, including adequate healthcare access, immigration legal services, and advocacy for people impacted by the criminal legal system. With all its partnerships, VIDA strives to have a collaboration that is reciprocal where both entities benefit from supporting students. These partner organizations have provided important leadership opportunities to students in VIDA programs and even employment opportunities when the students are ready to work in the field.

Two of VIDA's signature programs were developed in collaboration with Community Learning Partnership (CLP), a national non-profit organization whose mission is to build a workforce of knowledgeable and credentialed leaders to organize for change in their local communities. With CLP, VIDA developed an 18-unit curriculum for the Certificate in Leadership and Social Change program, which graduated its first cohort of students in 2011-2012. This program prepares students to become community leaders, agents of change, and responsible participants in civic life. Students completing this certificate are prepared to work as an entry-level union organizer or staff person at a non-profit organization. Faculty are heavily involved in the Certificate program, which is structured to steadily integrate specialized classes for students in cohorts, with three general education classes, six internship units, and a total of 210 hours of community engagement.

In 2021, De Anza served as the pilot site for The California Youth Leadership Corps (CYLC)—a new statewide partnership between the CLP, the California Labor and Workforce Development Agency, selected California community colleges, local non-profit organizations, the California Endowment, and other partners. This unique partnership was created to prepare a new generation of young people, particularly historically marginalized youth, to become community organizers and change agents in their local communities. The CYLC program at VIDA was largely modeled after its Leadership and Social Change program, but with increased accessibility to community members who are not already in college and with a more intensive focus on mentoring and financial opportunities. Participants can earn a stipend of up to \$10,000 for their active involvement and completion in the program. They also have their educational expenses covered up to \$2,500, as well as the chance to receive a completion bonus up to \$2,500. CYLC now has “community change learn-and-earn career pathway” programs at De Anza College, Riverside City College, Fresno City College, East Los Angeles College, and Los Angeles Trade Tech College.¹

Most of the participants in VIDA's CYLC come from nontraditional backgrounds and have not been in school in a long time or might not have graduated high school; some are undocumented, and some are formerly incarcerated and system impacted. All participants have paid internships and participate in classes held in the evening and on Zoom. They receive extensive training in the skills of community organizing, mentoring on being in college, training in interpersonal development, career advice, and a pathway to De Anza's Associate's Degree for Transfer in Social Justice Studies.

When developing CYLC internship placements, VIDA first leveraged existing relationships with community partner organizations whose work was aligned with the program mission and who were willing to host one to five interns. VIDA also reached out to new social justice-centered organizations to offer a wider range of community sites that focus on various issues affecting marginalized communities. Examples of focus areas are healthcare access, immigration legal services, criminal justice, sustainability, mental health services, and support for people previously in the foster care system. The program also works with the offices of a variety of local government officials. The partnering organizations provide students with mentoring and a site for work,

¹ For more information on CYLC, see <https://communitylearningpartnership.org/california-youth-leadership-corps/>, accessed October 10, 2023.

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while CYLC provides the organization with a stipend for each student hosted. VIDA has had graduates who have transitioned to working with their placement sites part-time or full-time after completing the program. This is a huge success for the students, the program, and the organizations.

VIDA's CYLC engages community partner placements in two ways: internal interns and external interns. External interns are new to their internship site, providing them with exposure and training opportunities they may not have otherwise had. Internal interns are already involved with the organization, and through CYLC, they can increase their capacity to dedicate more time and effort toward their passions. Both internal and external interns benefit from the program in unique ways, allowing them to grow and make a positive impact in their communities.

One of CYLC's key sites for internal interns is Silicon Valley De-Bug, which is based in San José, California. De-Bug uses community organizing to challenge incarceration and police violence and advocate for immigrants' rights and economic justice. Through their "participatory defense" model, they initiate and lead campaigns, produce community media, and support families in freeing their loved ones from incarceration by humanizing and presenting a fuller picture of the person to the courts. Executive Director of Silicon Valley De-Bug, Raj Jayadev, shares, "For the folks at De-Bug who participated, many of them never thought they would ever take a college course. Yet the CYLC and their staff have been so supportive, encouraging, emboldening, [that] by the end of the quarter, the participants see the program as the first step of their higher learning journey." Jayadev adds that "CYLC is a training ground for grassroots movement building—in which the most impacted are leading."

CYLC external intern placements have also been impactful. For example, the Indian Health Center of Santa Clara Valley (IHCSCV)'s mission is to help ensure the survival and healing of American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and the community by providing high-quality, comprehensive health care and wellness services. In the first cohort, VIDA placed an external intern, Aya Boubezari, with IHC throughout the entirety of her nine months in the program. In her work with the IHC, she was able to train and provide various services, run focus groups, and manage social media campaigns for the people IHC serves through the middle of the pandemic. Director of Development and Communications, Gerardo Laura, the intern's direct supervisor, said, "The support CYLC provided Aya was integral to her success and that of our partnership. With that support, Aya was able to confidently commit to working with our organization for three-quarters consecutively." Once Aya graduated from the CYLC, she became a student mentor for the second CYLC cohort and began part-time work with IHCSCV, as she transferred to UC Berkeley. She is majoring in public health because of her experience with IHCSCV and CYLC.

Mentorship is an integral part of the CYLC program at VIDA. Mentoring focuses on social and emotional development and support for students from marginalized communities who may have experienced trauma. Mentors are all current or former De Anza students who have graduated from the CYLC or LSC programs and are able to share their experiences and develop strong, authentic relationships with the current participants. The mentors provide technical and emotional support to help students navigate their coursework, internships, and challenges outside of the program. They are trained in nonviolent communication and facilitate empathy groups, where students can practice empathic listening and share their experiences in a safe and supportive environment. The mentor program is crucial to the success of the CYLC program as it helps students address the trauma they bring with them and develop their emotional intelligence, ultimately empowering them to be agents of change in their communities. Although VIDA's CYLC site is the only one with a mentor program currently, sharing our training developed for mentors has also helped some of the other site leads, and we hope to continue to expand this work as we implement more trauma-informed care aspects into the program.

PLANS GOING FORWARD - FURTHER DEVELOPING, SUSTAINING, AND EXPANDING THE WORK

As the VIDA team reflects on our work, we recognize the numerous challenges we have faced. One of our most significant hurdles is securing reliable funding, particularly as we expand with CYLC. Our goal is to provide comprehensive support to our marginalized population, meet them where they are, and tailor our approach to their unique needs. We understand that what works for one student may not work for others, and our responsibility is to ensure that our program is accessible to everyone. This often requires us to be creative and persistent despite institutional obstacles. Our staff members are committed to going above and beyond to make this happen. To truly foster healthy and meaningful relationships with our students, it is essential that we continue to push for funding to expand our staff capacity in a meaningful and sustainable way.

De Anza tracks equity and success numbers of all programs at the college, and VIDA looks at and reflects on this data when working to improve our program. It is difficult to measure the full impact of our work, yet we know from how many of our alums are working at good jobs and making a difference in our community that we have had a significant impact.

Some of the resources offered by the college can be, and oftentimes are, limited and exclude certain individuals by only being able to be offered during the day, by requiring someone to be enrolled full time, etc. Continuing to build relationships with allies on and off campus who can provide resources for the students we serve is one of our main goals moving forward. Being knowledgeable and resourceful will ensure that we can refer and help our participants reach out for supplemental support from these entities.

If organizations are interested in replicating our programming, we recommend, first and foremost, that starting small is key. While many express interest in this work and believe they can do it in addition to their other responsibilities, it is better to use organizing skills to advocate for institutional support before launching into programming with limited resources. This allows for growth at the pace of the support received and for the work to be sustainable.

Second, it is important to build authentic relationships based on trust and to honor the well-being of all constituents. With programs like ours, participants truly look to the program with hope, trust, and longing for it to be something that benefits their lives. Trust is something that should not be taken for granted. It is, therefore, important to make sure that participants know what the program can and cannot offer. One of our model's core beliefs is that to be agents of change and show up in a radical and more equitable manner within our communities, we need to see each other as whole beings—recognizing our humanity and the needs that come with being human. Those running the program should also be met with the same support and empathy as the participants in it. Building trust and deep relationships with students and each other requires intentional, authentic, and transparent communication.

Lastly, it is crucial to utilize grassroots organizing tactics and allies to work within the institution's systems, get creative in solving day-to-day issues, and celebrate even small wins. There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. We are investing in people who have experienced the harshness, cruelty, and reality of what it means to live within the margins of society. It is important to remember that these are real people, and our actions and efforts are going to have a ripple effect in their lives and all the lives that they touch. We are not seeing our participants as just students, and are not asking them to leave their personal lives and struggles at the door; in fact, we are encouraging them and helping them see their lived experiences as something that is an asset in community organizing and is worth sharing.

Rutgers University – Newark (Newark, NJ)

Peter Englot and Nancy Cantor

Peter Englot was named Interim Senior Vice President of Communications and External Affairs and Executive Deputy to the President at Hunter College effective August 12, 2024; from 2014-2024 he served as Senior Vice Chancellor for Public Affairs and Chief of Staff at Rutgers University – Newark.

Nancy Cantor, PhD is President of Hunter College of the City University of New York, effective August 12, 2024; she served as Chancellor of Rutgers University – Newark from 2014 to 2024.

ABSTRACT

Rutgers University – Newark’s core local engagement strategy is to convene and participate in cross-sector collaboratives focused on a range of critical areas, from educational pathways to economic development to socially engaged art and public history, to environmental justice and public safety, all tied to a broader framework of racial equity and equitable growth in Newark. Many of these flagship initiatives are guided by Rutgers-Newark’s 2014 strategic plan, which emphasized an unequivocal commitment of the university as an anchor institution. Rutgers-Newark follows a shared equity leadership model¹ that spreads this work across the entire span of academic and administrative leadership, including many centers, programs, and spaces in the institution, emphasizing community dialogue and co-creation and rewarding publicly-engaged scholarship. The work has been supported through seed funds from the Chancellor’s Strategic Funds as well as funds from deans, leveraging of external funds, and integration into the fabric of faculty and staff’s scholarship and teaching.

INTRODUCTION

At Rutgers University – Newark, our strategic plan² is a living document that calls upon us to continually ask ourselves: What does the public need from us? We believe that for a university to truly embrace its role as an anchor institution, it requires a profound and sustainable commitment to institutional transformation—a commitment to transforming ourselves, starting with who is at the table.³ We aim to do so with a diverse set of partners from our community and to assure that our own leadership team likewise brings to the table a diverse set of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. Coming from academic disciplines spanning the arts, humanities, sciences (including social, behavioral, biological, and physical), business, criminal justice, law, and public administration, our faculty, staff, and students forge collaborations with partners across the full breadth of sectors.

We have identified a set of strengths to leverage with our many partners as we collectively tackle pressing challenges facing our home community—Newark, NJ—and many communities like it. Our *modus operandi* is to form collaborative tables that are problem-focused, sometimes initiated by us, sometimes at the request of other anchors or the City, but in all cases, the partners are cross-sector, including deeply embedded community organizations, city agencies, large corporate anchors, hospitals and universities, performing arts centers,

¹ Adrianna Kezar, Elizabeth Holcombe, Darsella Vigil, and Jude Paul Matias Dizon, *Shared Equity Leadership: Making Equity Everyone’s Work* (Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles: American Council on Education and University of Southern California Pullias Center for Higher Education, 2021), <https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Shared-Equity-Leadership-Work.pdf>.

² *Rutgers University-Newark: Where Opportunity Meets Excellence, Strategic Plan 2014* (Newark, NJ: Rutgers University-Newark, 2014), https://www.newark.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/2022-11/rutgers_strategic_plan.pdf.

³ Nancy Cantor and Peter Englot, “Higher Education’s Promise and Responsibility,” in *Higher Education for Diversity, Social Inclusion and Community: A Democratic Imperative*, eds. Sjur Bergan and Ira Harkavy (Strasbourg, France: Council of Europe, 2018), 201-215.

museums, and libraries, philanthropies based in or with longstanding ties in Newark, and community residents (see below for examples). These collaborative tables cover a range of critical areas impacting equitable growth in Newark, from educational pathways to economic development to socially-engaged art and public history, to environmental justice and public health and safety—each representing a piece of the puzzle of the search for racial equity and justice in this predominantly Black and Brown city. Across all of these tables, the presence of civic voice and the recognition of local public history empower residents, businesses, and future generations to create social capital, enhance social mobility, and cultivate a thriving, equitable economy.

HISTORY

From its founding, Rutgers-Newark has been an institution whose reason for being is to increase access to higher education for members of our community—a community which has long been substantially shaped by waves of immigration. A watershed moment in the university's history was the Newark Rebellion of 1967, rooted in frustration over lack of progress in eradicating racial discrimination. The rebellion catalyzed a movement among our law school's faculty and students to adopt measures to diversify their student body, attune the curriculum better to social justice issues, and create new avenues for research and clinical work to advance racial equity. In 1969, the Black Organization of Students took over the administration building at Rutgers-Newark to demand similar change across the university. That set the university on the trajectory on which it remains today as one of the nation's most diverse universities—in terms of student body, faculty, and staff—and an engine of social mobility.

Under the leadership of Chancellor Steven J. Diner from 2002 to 2011, the institution emphasized its growing identity as an urban research university and expanded its local engagement. Building on this history and progress, the next stage of development emerged from the Rutgers-Newark 2014 strategic plan and the leadership of Chancellor Nancy Cantor. The strategic planning process, which was sweeping in its breadth and depth of democratic involvement by stakeholders at all levels within the university and across the community, surfaced a very clear desire across constituencies for the university to fully and unapologetically embrace its multi-faceted identity as an anchor institution. Today, Rutgers-Newark's commitment to its mission as an anchor institution, including publicly engaged scholarship, is manifest in every one of the university's schools and supported at the highest levels of the institution.

SPREADING THE ANCHOR MISSION

In light of the centrality of our anchor mission to our campus-wide identity, we very much follow a shared equity leadership model in spreading this work across many centers, programs, and spaces in the institution, even as the members of the leadership team in the Chancellor's Office are all very much engaged with the faculty and community partners who lead the various community-engaged anchor work. We convene faculty and key community partners focusing on education, public safety, equitable economic development, and the arts in regular discussions of their work with the leadership team, and individual members of the leadership team have direct oversight with some of the key anchor projects described below. Additionally, there are several key centers directed by faculty and supported with strategic funds that play particularly important roles in our city-wide anchor work, producing publicly engaged scholarship and reports that feed the work of the major anchor collaboratives.

Our undergraduate, graduate, and professional school students are deeply engaged in all of these projects, often as researchers and/or as part of their curriculum. Particularly gratifying is the engagement of our alumni, especially those situated in some of our community partner organizations. For example, alumni of our prison education and re-entry program (described below) work on justice advocacy with our partners at the New

Jersey Institute for Social Justice, while a growing number of alumni who are Newark residents and worked as students with our entrepreneurship faculty and staff in the Center for Urban Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (CUEED) go on to start their own local businesses, building on CUEED's decade-long record of expanding the map of equitable growth in Newark and statewide.⁴

COLLABORATIVE ANCHOR TABLES

While we recognize that the strengths Rutgers-Newark can bring to bear on the challenges facing Newark—always in collaboration with community partners—may morph over time, some are enduring, reflecting the ways in which many of the priorities of Newark and cities like it endure over time. The following are broad, thematic areas in which we are collaborating strategically with local partners.

- **Equitable Growth.** We are working with public, private, and nonprofit partners to leverage the heft of the city's cross-sector anchors in the service of growing the capacity of local Minority- and Women-owned Business Enterprises (MWBES) and recruiting new businesses to fill gaps in the local supply chain. A recent example of this work was the Hire-Buy-Local initiative,⁵ Newark 2020, through which Newark's anchors held each other accountable for increasing local procurement and local hiring, all over a three-year period, starting in 2017, and tallying progress by 2020, and then continuing to this day. At Rutgers-Newark during that three-year period, we hired 444 Newarkers, more than doubling our goal, and increased local procurement by 20%. This work continues as faculty and students from our business school's Local Supply Chain Resiliency Center provide critical data to all of the members of the Newark Anchor Collaborative, a unique cross-sector collaboration of 18 anchor institutions in Newark committed to equitable economic growth with a racial equity lens that includes all the major corporations, cultural institutions, and universities and hospitals.⁶
- **Housing Affordability.** Our Center on Law, Inequality and Metropolitan Equity (CLIME), based in our law school, has been a locus for research by faculty, staff, and students on manifestations of structural inequality in Newark, such as trauma resulting from neighborhood violence and housing affordability. In more recent years, we have strategically expanded this work in partnership with the administration of Mayor Ras J. Baraka through his Equitable Growth Advisory Commission and community organizations under the umbrella of the Newark Community Development Network. This broad partnership has yielded groundbreaking new work on housing affordability and the risks of displacement for Newark Residents. For example, in a recent report, *Who Owns Newark?*⁷ CLIME traced the increase of corporate buying of residential properties in Newark that is effectively transferring wealth from community members to large-scale, private speculators. Mayor Baraka cites the importance of this report to informing the city's

⁴ Lyneir Richardson, "Rutgers Center for Urban Entrepreneurship Raises \$110K to Support 1,000 Urban Business Owners," *InsiderNJ*, October 30, 2019, <https://www.insidernj.com/press-release/rutgers-center-urban-entrepreneurship-raises-110k-support-1000-urban-business-owners/>.

⁵ Kevin Lyons and Steve Aduabato, "Hire.Buy.Live.Newark is Changing Lives for Local Residents," State of Affairs with Steve Aduabato, July 28, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/video/hirebuylive-newark-changing-lives-local-residents-k3vi2d/>

⁶ Marga, Inc., *Newark Anchor Collaborative: Promoting Racial Equity and Equitable Growth* (New York: Marga, Inc., May 2022), <https://www.margainc.com/aitf>.

⁷ David D. Troutt and Katharine Nelson, *Who Owns Newark? Transferring Wealth from Newark Homeowners to Corporate Buyers* (Newark, NJ: Rutgers Law School Center on Law, Inequality and Metropolitan Equity, May 2022), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b996f553917ee5e584ba742/t/626fd98bb8357d201cb8dcb5/1651497359130/Who+Owns+Newark+Final+1.pdf>.

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efforts to improve housing affordability: “In Newark, where we have worked hard for years to expand homeownership, we will do everything possible to combat this dangerous trend. The CLiME report signals that Newark must create stronger and more equitable laws, regulations, and policies to ensure that residents share in the growth of our city.”⁸

- **Public Safety.** Faculty in the School of Criminal Justice use their *Risk Terrain Model*⁹ to provide critical data on the places where crime occurs that then inform community-based interventions such as safe walks to school, lighting near vacant lots and ATMs, anti-car theft campaigns, and more. The interventions are collectively designed through the Newark Public Safety Collaborative (NPSC), a broad partnership convened by our faculty that includes local law enforcement agencies, the mayor’s office, community groups including the Newark Community Street Team and anti-violence coalitions, local medical centers, corporations, and the Newark Opportunity Youth Network. Warren Thompson, a community organizer for the Lincoln Park Coast Cultural District, an NPSC community partner organization, says the collaborative has made a difference: “The public safety collaborative started sending me individual reports so that I was able to strategize on where are the [crime] hotspots and why.”¹⁰
- **Socially-Engaged Art.** We catalyze collaboration among university and community creatives to generate socially engaged art and expression across media (murals, spoken word, jazz-poetry, oral history, journalism) in city neighborhoods and on campus to cultivate new and diverse voices. A hub for this work is Express Newark, a 50,000 square foot center for socially engaged art and design in which faculty, staff, students, artists, and community members create art together, learn collaboratively, and build coalitions to advocate for change. Critically, it gives local creators access to resources to facilitate their creativity. Newark resident, artist, and media business owner Matt Williams is a community partner in the facility’s Community Media Center, which he says “enhances our business and organization.... We can use the editing stations, editing labs loaded with software we use.... Now we can have interns from Essex Community College and Rutgers-Newark work with us here.... We can exchange ideas, go out into the street and capture images and stories.... There’s a wealth of resources.”¹¹ In Express Newark and elsewhere, we draw upon the holdings and faculty associated with the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers-Newark, the world’s most comprehensive archive of jazz materials; the engaged story-telling of the Humanities Action Lab on pressing issues for frontline communities like ours, including mass incarceration and climate justice; and the provocative work of the Newest Americans, as their story bus travels our city and records the stories of diverse immigrant families.
- **Community Health.** Many of our science faculty focus research on salient issues in our local community, such as remediating toxic soils in community gardens and mitigating disparities in brain and heart health. We also have built a robust network of programs to broaden and strengthen pathways to STEM careers for diverse new generations that includes NSF-funded Garden State Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority

⁸ “Mayor Baraka Announces Wide-Ranging Response to Combat Corporate Purchase of Owner-Occupied Homes and Their Conversion into Rentals,” City of Newark, May 4, 2022, <https://www.newarknj.gov/news/mayor-baraka-announces-wide-ranging-response-to-combat-corporate-purchase-of-owner-occupied-homes-and-their-conversion-into-rentals>.

⁹ Joel Caplan, Les Kennedy, and Alejandro Gimenez-Santana, “Risk Terrain Modeling,” Newark Public Safety Collaborative, January 1, 2022, <https://newarkcollaborative.org/rtm>.

¹⁰ Marc Schwartz, “Rutgers-Newark Public Safety Collaborative Strengthens Work during Pandemic,” Rutgers University - Newark, March 23, 2023, <https://www.newark.rutgers.edu/news/rutgers-newark-public-safety-collaborative-strengthens-work-during-pandemic>.

¹¹ “7 Questions With A Resident with Matt DV Williams,” Express Newark, March 9, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/259347906>.

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Participation, Bridges to the Baccalaureate, and Bridge to Doctorate programs that connect institutions across the state of New Jersey.

- **School Desegregation.** The Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies provides support for community coalitions working to desegregate New Jersey’s schools,¹² which are the sixth most segregated in the U.S., through research that digests the systems, policies, and practices that drive racial and class inequality. They work in partnership with stakeholders to “pressure test” what we’ve learned through conversations with affected communities, and collaboratively use a variety of tools to press for change, including direct policy and legislative advocacy and litigation.
- **Post-Secondary Attainment.** The Newark City of Learning Collaborative (NCLC), a partnership of dozens of local colleges, community organizations, school leaders, and the Newark Public Library, seeks to strengthen Newark’s college-going culture, especially through “college knowledge” programming across the city, with a focus on FAFSA completion, and pre-college dual enrollment programming. Likewise, our Center for PreCollege Programs administers pre-college and career readiness pathway programs serving more than 2,000 students and parents annually across Greater Newark. They are complemented by innovative programs to facilitate college and post-college success, including: RU-N Talent and Opportunity Pathway, a “last-in” scholarship program assuring college affordability across a wide range of incomes and covering full tuition and mandatory fees for students from families making \$65,000 or less; the Honors Living-Learning Community, an intergenerational learning and residential community enrolling scholars ranging in age from 18 to 60, recognized nationally for reimagining honors programs,¹³ including the use of an in-depth holistic admissions process to identify talent, especially locally, and focusing on local citizenship in a global world, with half of its students coming from Newark;¹⁴ and a partnership with national nonprofit Braven that provides professional development to our diverse student body that prepares them to thrive in business settings.
- **Diversifying Industries.** We forge innovative connections with the private sector to collaborate on diversifying workplaces and building wealth among members of our community. Major corporate partners include Prudential, which supports a pathway program in the Honors Living-Learning Community; Apple, Inc., which supports programming in data science aimed at diversifying the technology fields; and Fiserv, which is creating a research and incubation space for the Rutgers-Newark community and local businesses, providing annual scholarships for undergraduate students, and supporting career modules to prepare students for internships and jobs in financial technology.
- **Prison Education and Re-Entry.** We are the hub for The New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons (NJ STEP) Program, one of the largest and most successful of its kind in the nation, providing access to associate’s and bachelor’s degrees in prison and post-incarceration in partnership with a network of higher education institutions statewide. Meanwhile, RU Flourishing, based in our business school, prepares formerly incarcerated students to conceive, plan, launch, and maintain their own businesses.

¹² Vandeen A. Campbell and Charles M. Payne, *Segregated Schooling in New Jersey: The Distribution of Opportunities to Learn by Race, Ethnicity and Class* (Newark, NJ: Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies, Rutgers University – Newark, February 2023), <https://rutgers.app.box.com/s/wyzbzyrt42jabifa0fp7vqw9fg0rpmjb>.

¹³ David L. Kirp, “An Honors College that Honors Grit,” *The New York Times*, May 22, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/22/opinion/honors-college-rutgers.html>.

¹⁴ LaMont Jones, “Rutgers-Newark Honors Program Takes New Approach to Developing Citizen Leaders,” *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.diverseeducation.com/students/article/15104345/rutgers-newark-honors-program-takes-new-approach-to-developing-citizen-leaders>.

- **Reparative Justice.** We are partners in the national, Mellon-funded initiative based at the University of Michigan titled Crafting Democratic Futures, through which a coalition of nine colleges and universities is collaborating with local community partners in a public history reckoning designed to yield tangible, community-based racial reparations solutions that reflect the specific histories and contemporary circumstances of each community. Key community partners for us include the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, the Newark Community Development Network, and the Newark NAACP.¹⁵

As our anchor work has evolved over the last decade, it has been important that we support the engagement of faculty and staff, sometimes with initial seed funding from the Chancellor Strategic Funds or by relieving them of some teaching or other duties or by enabling the external collaboration to become intertwined with our curriculum. The more the anchor work is integrated into the fabric of faculty’s and staff’s scholarship (for example, in academic centers) and teaching, the more the funding becomes sustainable and shared (for example, involving not only the chancellor funds but support from deans). At the same time, the more the anchor collaborations engage us with key partners in Newark, the more success we have had raising funds from external foundations, the State legislature, and federal agencies.

SUSTAINING COLLABORATIVE TABLES FOR THE FUTURE

As we go forward, it becomes ever more important that we focus as much on sustaining the collaborative tables and partnerships as on the particular projects that they come together to work on initially. Simultaneously, a critical aspect of sustainability is ensuring that: the faculty engaged in this work are rewarded, promoted, and retained; the substance of the work is integrated throughout the curriculum; the deans and leadership consistently demonstrate commitment to this endeavor; and the community partners maintain trust in the institution’s flexibility and perseverance, as anchoring collaborations typically follow a non-linear path to progress.

As we think about a path to progress for this work, the question of metrics and assessment dashboards inevitably comes forward. There are some collaboratives that can easily assess progress, at least for some of their work; as for example, the Newark Anchor Collaborative keeps track of growth in the percentage of local hiring and procurement of our member anchors, while the Newark Public Safety Collaborative tracks reductions in crime rates and the Newark City of Learning Collaborative follows post-secondary attainment rates. On the other hand, other key aspects of this work involve a more formative assessment approach (versus a summative dashboard), where anchors look at themselves over time in terms of institutional transformation (for example, members of the Newark Anchor Collaborative are each doing yearly assessments of institutional progress using a racial equity framework tool). Additionally, there are institution-specific practices that deserve monitoring, such as in our case, we continuously watch how faculty promotion committees reward publicly-engaged scholarship and include anchor work in their assessment of excellence. More broadly, in terms of community impact, it is rewarding to see when specific reports and proposals find their way into public policy, as for example, our faculty’s work on housing affordability has triggered conversations with the Mayor’s Equitable Growth Advisory Commission and the Newark Community Development Network that in turn has resulted in various policies adopted by the city, including work on land banks, eviction protection, and restrictions on outside investors raising rents.

¹⁵ Peter Enlot, “Rutgers-Newark, Community Partners Join University of Michigan Center on Social Solutions to Explore Racial Reparation,” Rutgers University - Newark, January 26, 2021, <https://www.newark.rutgers.edu/news/rutgers-newark-community-partners-join-university-michigan-center-social-solutions-explore>.

In many respects, the key lesson of this work is that collaboration must outpace competition if we are to galvanize the range of voices and talent that is needed to pierce through the walls around opportunity, as Gary Orfield¹⁶ labels the sequelae of so-called colorblind policies in education that have defined the haves and the have nots in this country and in our communities for so long. Moreover, as a function of those long-standing walls, we should always expect that anchor work will result in twenty steps backward for every one step of progress, and so we need to be humble and patient, even as our external funders often look for ready-made results.

One of the most important and rewarding ways that we are able to grow our anchor work is through our involvement in the Anchor Institutions Task Force (AITF) and its various subgroups, including the newly formed Anchor Partnership Subgroup in which several of us in the Newark Anchor Collaborative participate. Active engagement with AITF and its subgroups allows us to share best practices across the country and then to bring ideas back to Rutgers-Newark and to Newark. Through various dialogues in AITF and then back at our institution, we have come to focus back on how critical it has been to have embedded the anchor mission directly in the strategic agenda of Rutgers-Newark and then to spread it through the shared equity leadership model¹⁷ across so many schools, departments, and areas, and simultaneously to commit to working with and sustaining partnerships with numerous community anchors and institutions and organizations that span many sectors of life in Newark. As they say, it takes a village, and in this case, it takes a city, to bend the arc toward some justice.

¹⁶ Gary Orfield, *The Walls Around Opportunity: The Failure of Colorblind Policy for Higher Education* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2022).

¹⁷ Elizabeth Holcombe, Adrianna Kezar, Jude Paul Matias Dizon, Darsella Vigil, and Natsumi Ueda, *Organizing Shared Equity Leadership: Four Approaches to Structuring the Work* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 2022).



University at Buffalo Community Health Equity Research Institute (Buffalo, NY)

Henry-Louis Taylor, Jr., Timothy Murphy, Heather Orom, Susan Grinslade, Rita Hubbard-Robinson, and George Nicholas

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ABSTRACT

The University at Buffalo's Community Health Equity Research Institute (Institute) is a community-centered, university-based research institute focused on abolishing race-based health inequities in Buffalo. Building the Institute has been challenging. Community engagement was a core value at the University at Buffalo, but the rise of neoliberalism had caused the University to waiver in its commitment. Black community leaders and faculty representing the Schools of Medicine, Public Health, Nursing, and Architecture and Planning successfully advocated for a community-centered research institute in 2019, helping to resurrect UB's engaged university. The Institute, which now functions as a university-wide unit, aims to participate in the fight to abolish health inequities by performing research to advance understanding of the *root causes* of race-based health inequities and develop, test, and implement innovative solutions to the health and neighborhood challenges facing Black Buffalo. The overarching goal is to work with others to turn the East Side into a community of *good neighborhoods* where Blacks across the class divide live in prosperous, safe, and healthy places. To realize these aims, the Institute bases community engagement on the principles of shared leadership, interactive bidirectional partnerships, and community participatory research.

INTRODUCTION

This report is a case study of the founding and development of the University at Buffalo (UB) Community Health Equity Research Institute (Institute). UB is in Metropolitan Buffalo, a transnational region in the Niagara Frontier situated on the edge of Lake Erie, across from Southern Ontario, Canada. Buffalo is a historic industrial rust belt city that is shrinking while transitioning to a knowledge city based on service, finance, and high technology. The city follows a neoliberal urbanism strategy centered on the redevelopment model forged by Richard Florida in *Rise of the Creative Class*.¹ This approach emphasizes low taxes, market-centric development and White reclamation of the urban core. Thus, it prioritizes developments that will make the city attractive to middle- and higher-income Whites. Most significantly, neoliberal urbanism stresses profit maximization and economic growth over social welfare and community development. It intensifies the underdevelopment of communities by worsening housing and neighborhood conditions, intensifying predatory entrepreneurial activities, and exacerbating other social determinants of adverse socioeconomic and health outcomes among African Americans.²

Over three decades ago, UB made community engagement a core value but has struggled to remain committed to this mission. The reason is that neoliberal economic policies cause state legislatures to spend less and less on higher education, forcing colleges and universities to become increasingly entrepreneurial to survive.³ In this setting, colleges and universities, wittingly or unwittingly, minimize activities that do not generate revenue. For example, over a decade ago, UB eliminated the Vice-President for Public Affairs and no longer has an office, center, or administrator to coordinate engagement activities and build community partnerships.⁴ This *disconnected* approach to community engagement makes it impossible to focus strategically on specific city geographies and populations or build a critical mass of logically connected projects in a targeted locality. The University at Buffalo established the Community Health Equity Research Institute in 2019, which is helping to resurrect the engaged university.

HISTORY OF THE UB COMMUNITY HEALTH EQUITY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The Community Health Equity Institute is rooted in UB's rich legacy of community engagement. The University intentionally modeled itself as an engaged university in 1987, when Provost William R. Greiner recruited Professor Henry-Louis Taylor, Jr. to establish the U.B Center for Urban Studies⁵ to popularize public service on UB's campus, and forge interactive linkages between the University and the Black community. Greiner established the Center as a university-wide unit based on state dollars that reported to the Associate Provost and Vice-Provost for Student Affairs.

In 1990, the Center released a landmark report, *African Americans and the Rise of Buffalo's Post-Industrial City, 1940 to Present*, that analyzed Blacks' socioeconomic conditions and outlined a policy agenda to attack those conditions. Taylor used what became known as the Black Buffalo Project to unite scholars across campus and construct a bridge between faculty and the Black community. The project, funded by the Buffalo Urban League

¹ Richard L. Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Book, 2002).

² Jamie Peck, "Uneven and combined neoliberalism: Geographies, logics, and contradictions," *Environment and Planning A, Economy and Space* 48, no. 12 (2016): 2385-2408.

³ Jing Yan, Catherine Armwood-Gordon, and Lin Li, "Assessing the Impact of State Funding on Higher Education in the United States: Trends, Allocations, and Implications," *International Journal of Research Publications* 139, no. 1 (2023): 204-209.

⁴ Christine Vidal, "Mary Harley Gresham Named Dean of Graduate School of Education at UB," University of Buffalo, April 26, 2001, <https://www.buffalo.edu/news/releases/2001/04/5158.html>.

⁵ Arthur Page, "Moore Names Vice President at University at Buffalo," University of Buffalo, December 7, 1992, <https://www.buffalo.edu/news/releases/1992/12/5483.html>.

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and Buffalo Common Council, drew research team members from the UB departments of History, Economics, Black Studies, Sociology, Education, and Urban and Regional Planning. Scholars from Buffalo State College, The Ohio State University, and Fordham University also participated.

The *Black Buffalo Project* led to the establishment of both the Office of Urban Initiative in 1990, funded by the City of Buffalo and housed at UB, and the Vice-President for Urban Affairs and Public Service at UB in December 1992.⁶ Greiner, then president, named Dr. Muriel Moore, an African American, to the new post. Moore's appointment illustrated the importance of public service within the Greiner administration and created a framework for developing community partnerships and facilitating the growth of service learning and community engagement activities across campus. Then, Greiner launched the *University-Community Initiative* to revitalize the University Heights community, which housed UB's South Campus. Greiner boldly stated at a national conference on University-Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania that "the great universities of the twenty-first century will be judged by their ability to help solve our most urgent social problems."⁷

However, as neoliberal urbanism gained hegemony, state support for higher education waned as the ascending entrepreneurial university model contested the engaged university model for dominance. In 2001, UB's Vice-President for Public Service and Urban Affairs position was phased out when Vice-President Dr. Mary Gresham was named dean of the Graduate School of Education. Gresham retained the title Vice-President for Public Service and Urban Affairs, but the office was gone. So, community engagement devolved to the schools, departments, centers, and institutes. Meanwhile, a few years earlier, the UB Center for Urban Studies moved its operations to the UB School of Architecture and Planning, ending its tenure as a university-wide catalyst for community engagement. These changes signaled a wavering of the University's commitment to community engagement.

The establishment of the Community Health Equity Research Institute and the brutal murder of George Floyd in 2020 reignited a quest to revive the engaged university model. After the Floyd murder, the University took an avowedly anti-racist stance. UB's current president, Satish K. Tripathi, established the *President's Advisory Council on Race* to provide counsel and guidance on race and University life and culture, including engagement with the broader community, and he established a subcommittee on community engagement within his Administration. Every school at UB issued statements condemning incidents of violence and police brutality and formulated anti-racist programs.

The UB Community Health Equity Research Institute (Institute) was established in December 2019. It was a spinoff of the African American Health Equity Task Force (AAHETF), a collaboration of community leaders, public health professionals, social service workers, and university faculty and staff, which evolved out of a growing movement to meet the health challenges and inequities facing Black Buffalo. After three years of work on the medical care front, the AAHETF concluded that to advance Buffalo's *abolition of health inequities movement*, it needed to build a university-based research institute focused on the Black community and a community-based institute that advocated for public policies and implemented projects and programs on the East Side.

The AAHETF established a committee of community and university members to ask the University at Buffalo to create such a research institute. The request came from Black community leaders and university faculty representing the Schools of Medicine, Public Health, Nursing, and Architecture and Planning. Impressed,

⁶ Henry L. David and Jerry Zremski, "New Post Makes Moore Highest Ranking Woman at UB," *Buffalo News*, December 2, 1992, https://buffalonews.com/news/new-post-makes-moore-highest-ranking-woman-at-ub/article_1658d9d7-8504-517b-8595-85c71bce0539.html.

⁷ William R. Greiner, "'In the Total of All These Acts': How Can American Universities Address the Urban Agenda?," *Universities and Community Schools* 4, no. 1-2 (January 1994).

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Provost Charles Zukoski, UB administrators, and the UB president, Satish K. Tripathi, moved on the project with unprecedented haste. The Institute was established in December 2019, and Dr. Timothy Murphy, MD, SUNY Distinguished Professor and senior associate dean for clinical and translational research in the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences and Director of the Clinical and Translational Science Institute, was named director. To our knowledge, this was the first time UB had positively responded to a direct request from the Black community to establish an initiative focused on the East Side.

The Institute aims to participate in the fight to abolish health inequities by performing research to advance understanding of the *root causes* of race-based health inequities and develop, test, and implement innovative solutions to the health and neighborhood challenges facing Black Buffalo. The overarching goal is to improve health outcomes by working with others to turn the East Side into a community of *good neighborhoods* where Blacks across the class divide live in prosperous, safe, and healthy places. To realize these aims, the Institute bases its engagement activities on the principles of shared leadership, interactive bidirectional partnerships, and community participatory research.

The Institute established itself as a university-wide unit that reports to the Vice-President for Research and Economic Development, facilitating its ability to break down institutional silos by attracting faculty, staff, and students from across the campus to work on the health challenges facing Black Buffalo. The Institute created a Board of Directors with representatives from UB's twelve schools to reinforce its role as a university-wide research unit. The Institute not only gave voice to the Black community at every level of the governance structure—the board, steering committee, and executive committee—but also set up a community advisory committee consisting of Black workers and neighborhood activists. The Institute forged an interactive collaboration with the African American Health Equity Task Force and the Buffalo Center for Health Equity to connect with Black Buffalo and implement its programs down on the ground in East Side neighborhoods.

Strategically, the Institute was established as a university-wide unit with a reporting line to the Administration. Yet, at the same time, the Institute's establishment revealed the *neoliberal context* that university-based community engagement now occurs. The Institute received a five-year commitment of \$100,000 from UB, stipulating that it must become self-supporting over this time. So, the Institute's long-term viability depends on securing external funding. This *dependency* on sponsored projects is the new contextual reality of university-based community engagement. Even more significantly, neoliberalism spawns the entrepreneurial spirit that makes it difficult to build teams of researchers from various schools because deans do not want revenue from their decanal units to escape.

In contrast, in 1987, the UB Center for Urban Studies was funded by State dollars, but that day is over. Thus, to build its university-wide research agenda, the Institute must negotiate with various schools on allocating financial credit for research projects. Within this context, to strengthen the Institute's capacity, the UB Center for Urban Studies relocated to the Institute. The University will establish an endowed chair to lead it, and through a generous donation from Dr. Timothy Murphy's family, a program for community-based pilot projects has been established with the aim of developing larger grant-funded initiatives. To facilitate the building of a network of scholars and community activists concerned with health inequities, the Institute is establishing a research fellows program for faculty, staff, students and community activists.

PROGRAM OF ACTION

The University at Buffalo founded the Community Health Equity Research Institute to conduct research that addresses the root causes of health inequities among Blacks on Buffalo's East Side. The Institute's activities are inseparable from the actions of its lead collaborators, the African American Health Equity Task Force and the

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Buffalo Center for Health Equity. These three units work interactively as a *team*, and the collaboration is best understood as a *systems approach* to attacking the root causes of health inequities in the Black community. The Institute's role in this system is to produce and disseminate scientific knowledge and to use our knowledge, technical skills, and expertise to collaborate with our team to eliminate health inequities and build *good neighborhoods* on Buffalo's East Side.

The Institute was born at the dawn of the COVID-19 epidemic, and our rootedness in Jacobs Medical School and Biomedical Science and the health professions facilitated the Institute's work with its *team* to mitigate the COVID-19 impact on the Black community. The Institute, working with the African American Health Equity Task Force, played a role in the Black community's battle against COVID-19. The AAHETF centered testing and messaging in the Black community and secured over \$2 million of funding to establish call centers in 15 local churches. They employed parishioners and college students to phone their neighbors, connecting them with health providers and encouraging them to seek testing.⁸ The results were dramatic. On April 9, 2020, Blacks comprised 67% of the deaths in Buffalo but only 39% of the population. By the end of May, Blacks constituted only 45% of Buffalo's deaths. Pastor George Nicholas and the task force team completed over 50,000 calls. The outreach effort revealed that many residents struggled to obtain healthy food and health supplies. This discovery led to a program that delivered meals, personal protective equipment, and cleaning products to over 400 households per week.⁹

The AAHETF had also determined that a community dialogue was needed to focus research and advocacy on the root causes of health inequities in Buffalo. The group took multiple approaches, including meetings with elected officials, social media, interviews with local media, and a weekly talk show on health equity, "Igniting Hope Radio," hosted by Rita Hubbard Robinson and Kelly Wofford, along with others. Against this backdrop, the Task Force decided to host an annual *Igniting Hope* Conference series to educate the community at large about race-based health inequities, engage with national experts on the topic, and use the conference as a springboard for initiatives to address health inequities and social determinants of health in Buffalo.¹⁰

In 2019, a team of three UB faculty and three community-based leaders designed and submitted an R13 conference grant funded by the National Center for Advancing Translational Science to support *Igniting Hope* conferences from 2020 through 2022. One of the most significant outcomes of the first conference was the Working Group on Fines and Fees, which partnered with the Western New York Law Center to address the problem of Black Buffalo being targeted with excessive fines and fees, particularly disparate traffic ticketing that caused many to have their drivers' licenses suspended and created a cycle of debt and punishment in the Black community.¹¹

The Task Force's working group engaged in various activities to raise awareness on the issue, and their efforts resulted in the co-sponsoring of a bill (Senate Bill S5348B) that was passed in the 2019-2020 legislative session and signed by the governor in 2020 to reform the law related to driver's license suspension. Community residents also reported reduced traffic stops in their neighborhoods—one small victory in the long battle against socioeconomic injustice.

Pastor George Nicholas asked Professor Taylor and the Institute to determine what progress had been made in eliminating adverse neighborhood-based social determinants since the UB Center for Urban Studies' 1990 report

⁸ Callie McQuilkin, "Remembering the Lessons of Crisis: How Erie County, NY endured COVID-19," ArcGIS StoryMaps, November 6, 2021, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/59be8c450f9546f99779ede6d1d1de8b>.

⁹ McQuilkin, "Remembering."

¹⁰ McQuilkin, "Remembering."

¹¹ Timothy F. Murphy, Rita Hubbard Robinson, Kelly M. Wofford, Alan J. Lesse, Susan Grinslade, Henry L. Taylor, Kinzer M. Pointer, George F. Nicholas, and Heather Orom, "A Community-University Run Conference as a Catalyst for Addressing Health Disparities in an Urban Community," *Journal of Clinical and Translational Science* 6, no. 1 (2022): e67.

on Black Buffalo. In September 2021, Taylor and his team released the report, *The Harder We Run*, which argued that Black Buffalo had not progressed over the past thirty-one years.¹² Most significantly, Taylor indicated that deplorable neighborhood conditions cause existing social determinants of adverse health outcomes in the Black community. The report pinpointed the critical root causes of Black oppression and exploitation, especially the substandard housing problem and the link between neighborhood underdevelopment and health inequities between Blacks and Whites. *The Harder We Run* became a call to arms in Black Buffalo.¹³

Lastly, in 2021, the Institute established Research Day to generate interest among university faculty, staff, students, and community members in health disparities research and spotlight the health challenges faced by African Americans. The First Annual Research Day of the Community Health Equity Research Institute was a huge success. The event generated significant interest throughout the UB campus and community. The Institute received fifty-one abstracts from university and community teams; over 80 people attended. The attendees heard presentations by faculty, community members, and students within the systemic racism framework and focused on innovative research and projects on health equity and the social determinants of health.

In spring 2022, the Institute's Research Day focused on violence as a public health issue. This theme reflected the horrific Tops Super Market shooting that killed ten African Americans. The Institute decided to expand the Tops tragedy into a community discussion of violence in the Black community and the adverse social determinants of health. Along with a keynote by Robert Gore—an emergency physician, founder of the Kings Against Violence Initiative, and a clinical associate professor of emergency medicine at Kings County Hospital—SUNY Downstate Medical Center—were community talks on health inequities and poster presentations featuring research done by faculty and community members.¹⁴ The research day and other activities promoted by the Institute have increased interest in research on Buffalo's East Side and laid a solid foundation for building research partnerships across disciplines.

LESSONS LEARNED

The Community Health Equity Research Institute is only a few years into existence, but it has nevertheless generated lessons that other universities can use in building partnerships with the community. First, at UB, we learned the importance of reconceptualizing *university-community* partnerships as *community-university* partnerships to reflect the hard reality that during the age of *neoliberal urbanism*, underdeveloped communities of color rarely “mutually benefit” from partnerships with universities. Therefore, the university should intentionally aim to create a *shared value* involving desirable social, health, economic, and political outcomes that help the community meet its urgent needs and challenges without considering the immediate impact on the university.¹⁵ The conceptualization of a “community-university” partnership captures the sentiment of placing the community first and understanding the unequal power dynamic between the university and underdeveloped communities of color. For example, the strategy behind the design of the Institute's governance structure was to empower residents to be authentic partners in shaping policy and guiding the Institute's development.

¹² Henry L. Taylor, Jin-Kyu Jung, and Evan Dash, *The Harder We Run: The State of Black Buffalo 1990 and the Present* (Buffalo, NY: U.B. Center for Urban Studies, 2021).

¹³ Henry L. Taylor, *This Time It Will Be Different: The Good Neighborhood Demonstration Project—A Concept Paper* (Buffalo, NY: U.B. Center for Urban Studies, 2023).

¹⁴ Dirk Hoffman, “Virtues of Community-Based Participatory Research Lauded,” Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences - University at Buffalo, November 18, 2022, https://medicine.buffalo.edu/news_and_events/news/2022/11/murphy-gore-cheri-16011.html.

¹⁵ Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer, “Creating shared value: Redefining capitalism and the role of the corporation in society,” *Harvard Business Review* 89, no. 1/2 (2011): 62-77. The idea is not to duplicate but to creatively apply the shared value concept in a different context.

Second, research agendas should be deeply tied to the community's needs and interests and involve community members in their work. For instance, researchers can respond to requests from the community to investigate specific issues. For example, a request from Pastor George Nicholas led to the *Harder We Run* report by the Center for Urban Studies. Later, again Nicholas asked for the UB Center to examine the impact of Blizzard 2022 on the Black East Side. In this instance, the collaboration involved a partnership with the National Witness Project, which organized a series of focus groups while researchers at *HEALTHeLINK* assisted in gathering health data on common illnesses acquired during cold weather.

Researchers should use a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) model when possible. The CBPR approach involves a collective, reflective, and systematic inquiry in which researchers and community stakeholders engage as equal partners in all stages of the research process.¹⁶ This approach allocates decision-making power in the research process and resources to the community, including seed grants, fellowships for community leaders, and opportunities for community groups to showcase their work. For example, in developing a federal grant on vaccine hesitancy in the Black community, the Institute formed three working groups of UB faculty, staff, and community members: the *Community Outreach Group*, the *Data and Testing Working Group*, and the *Marketing and Communications Working Group*. A member of the community and a university faculty member co-chaired every working group. For instance, Pastor Kinzer Pointer co-chaired the Data and Testing Working Group with Dr. John Tomazewski of the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. We did not get the grant, but we did learn how to build multidisciplinary research teams that included community members in leadership positions.¹⁷ Regardless of the circumstance, the researchers should focus on root problems and issues important to the Black community. In this framework, it is also necessary to develop workshops that teach community residents about research methodologies and build capacity for engaging in research.

Fourth, we learned the value of viewing underdeveloped neighborhood conditions through a health lens. The reason is that adverse social determinants of health are spatially concentrated in the neighborhoods where African Americans reside. These neighborhood-based determinants include substandard housing, rent gauging, predatory investments, decayed infrastructure, joblessness, low incomes, inadequate schools, under-resourced health institutions, etc. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation states that access to quality medical care accounts for 20 percent of a person's health outcomes, while neighborhood conditions account for 80 percent. Of course, quality medical care and good neighborhood conditions are essential, but the more significant issue is that race-based health inequities cannot be abolished without transforming underdeveloped Black communities into *good neighborhoods*.

Lastly, perhaps the most important lesson we learned is that it takes time to build a research institute. This *hard reality* means that the Institute and the University must be patient. Building an effective university-wide research program is protracted. This task requires raising faculty consciousness about race-based inequities and getting them to cross their department and school lines to work with the Institute. At the same time, the Institute will need to develop expertise in building multidisciplinary teams to engage in community-scaled research. And it will take time to translate these research findings into projects and programs that bring about change in underdeveloped neighborhoods. It will also take time to develop staff. The Institute requires a unique talent to administer its office daily. It took three years to find a stable administrator, get the University to invest in an endowed chair, and support the relocation of the UB Center of Urban Studies.

¹⁶ Marie-Claude Tremblay, Debbie H. Martin, Alex M. McComber, Amelia McGregor, and Ann C. Macaulay, "Understanding community-based participatory research through a social movement framework: a case study of the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project," *BMC Public Health* 18, 487 (2018): 1-17.

¹⁷ Timothy F. Murphy, RADx grant – first draft, personal communication, UB Center for Urban Studies files, July 14, 2020.

University of North Carolina at Charlotte's urbanCORE (Charlotte, NC)

Byron P. White and Tamara Johnson

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ABSTRACT

Over the last decade, the University of North Carolina at Charlotte has intentionally sought to advance its own distinctive identity and civic contribution by focusing on its engagement with the growing Charlotte region. In an effort to take its civic and community engagement work to the next level, the university established in 2020 its Office of Urban Research and Community Engagement, now known as urbanCORE (Community-Oriented Research and Engagement), as a centralized infrastructure to facilitate, align, and sustain existing cross-campus engagement work. urbanCORE incorporated existing staff and programs and reprioritized the University's engagement work under three interdependent functions: 1. Policy & Data support, equipping faculty, students and community stakeholders to apply relevant data to address critical social issues and policies; 2. Faculty & Student Engagement through participatory action research and real-world learning; and 3. Community Partnerships for social impact. Lessons learned include maintaining integrity to core engaged scholarship principles such as a focus on equity, social impact, and shared authority with the community; improving the assessment and sharing of quantifiable impacts; and being cautious about establishing new initiatives just to generate new resources.

INTRODUCTION

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte is North Carolina's "urban research university." It sits in the state's most populous city, the 16th largest in the United States and the 8th fastest growing. With about 30,000 students, it is one of the largest universities in the state. As a relatively new university, founded in 1946, UNC Charlotte does not have the prominence of other more nationally known institutions in the state and Southeast region. Regardless of its size, the academic and research accomplishments of Charlotte—as the University is known—are often overshadowed by the well-known Research Triangle two hours east made up of UNC Chapel Hill, the UNC System's flagship university; North Carolina State University, a land-grant university; and Duke University, a private institution.

Over the past decade, UNC Charlotte has deliberately sought to advance its distinctive identity and civic contribution by focusing on its engagement with the growing Charlotte region. One of many U.S. institutions founded just after World War II to serve returning veterans, Charlotte has always had a commitment to the local community as its core mission. For more than 50 years, its Urban Institute has provided applied research and policy direction to civic leaders and local governments to better understand the rapidly changing region

and address its emerging challenges. Under the 15-year tenure of Chancellor Philip Dubois (2005-2020), the University expanded physically in its location on the northern edge of the city, while improving its connectivity to the vibrancy of "Uptown," Charlotte's central city and home to the financial services, health and information technology industries that have driven the economy and the region's subsequent residential growth. Dubois, for instance, led the construction of the University's Center City facility and collaborated with elected officials to develop a light rail line connecting it to the main campus.

Since arriving in 2020, Chancellor Sharon L. Gaber has sought to build on these physical assets by aligning the University's research, teaching and outreach capacity more directly to solve social problems, including chronic racial and economic disparity, which have demanded greater collective civic attention in recent years. One of her first accomplishments was to commission a new 10-year strategic plan, titled [Shaping What's Next](#), which lays out a new vision for the University as a globally recognized top-tier (R1) research university while also advancing student access and social mobility. The plan declares as one of four signature goals: "Fulfill our role as North Carolina's urban research university to benefit our city, region and beyond by co-producing transformative solutions to societal issues and challenges." The University's intentional identification with the benefits and challenges of its urban surroundings has solidified Charlotte's standing as a community-centric university. The challenge it now faces is building an organizational structure, with staff capacity, operational policies and practices, and administrative tools that enable it to live up to its aspirational goals.

HISTORY

In response to UNC Charlotte's heightened commitment to its local community, urbanCORE was established within the Division of Academic Affairs in 2020 just as the COVID-19 global pandemic was gaining full steam. It was not established to create and lead new engagement programs and projects. Rather, the objective was to create an infrastructure that would advance successful engaged-learning initiatives across campus. The function is the outgrowth of a 2018 [Civic Action Plan](#)¹ commissioned by then-Provost Joan Lorden. The plan provided a strategy for the University to support collective impact efforts to improve social outcomes in the region by organizing University resources, community-based research, and community collaboration.

Developed by a working group of about 30 faculty and staff, the plan affirmed that a strong foundation for civic engagement and adequate resources existed at the University, but it identified a lack of a centralized infrastructure to coordinate work across disciplinary and organizational silos, to set priorities, and to facilitate alignment between student and staff volunteerism and community-based research projects. One of two key recommendations from the plan called for the University to: "Establish a centralized structure, with dedicated staff, to coordinate and support the University's community engagement efforts and assess collective impact." To fulfill this charge, the Division of Academic Affairs established in July 2020 the Office of Urban Research and Community Engagement, which later was called urbanCORE. A national search was conducted to hire an Associate Provost to lead it.

The new office was not created from scratch. It evolved from Metropolitan Studies, a division within Academic Affairs that was home to a number of interdisciplinary applied research centers (the UNC Charlotte Urban

¹ The Civic Action Plan grew out of two driving forces. As part of its 30th anniversary, Campus Compact encouraged presidents and chancellors nationwide to sign an Action Statement affirming civic engagement and for their campuses to create action plans to activate those commitments. Charlotte was one of 15 institutions in North Carolina to do so. The second driver was the public release in 2013 of a study led by Harvard economist Raj Chetty that ranked Charlotte 50th out of 50 major U.S. cities in generating economic upward mobility for its poorest residents. In response, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force was created to mobilize the community for collective action to address the disparities in economic mobility, which disproportionately affect Black and Latino families. UNC Charlotte's Civic Action Plan articulated the University's contribution to this effort.

Institute, the Women + Girls Research Alliance, and the Charlotte Action Research Project), two student outreach programs (the Bonner Leaders Program and the 49er Democracy Experience), and the continuing education program. Metropolitan Studies served more to provide administrative oversight to these largely independent programs than to generate the strategic collaboration called for by the Civic Action Plan. To address this, Provost Lorden moved continuing education into its own unit, now the School of Professional Studies. Metropolitan Studies was dissolved and transitioned into the Office of Urban Research and Community Engagement upon the arrival of a new, permanent Associate Provost. The person hired, Byron White, brought administrative experience from leading a collective impact organization and overseeing functions at other universities devoted to university-community engagement.

However, Dr. White came from outside the region and assumed the role at the start of the pandemic with few staff on campus and limited opportunities to build external connections, all of which made establishing a new organizational structure difficult. Fortunately, he was able to tap into a long-standing relationship between the University and executives in corporate philanthropy at Bank of America Charlotte. Bank of America agreed to assign three members of its operations excellence team to work pro bono with the new leadership of the Office of Urban Research and Community Engagement “to help define an operating model that will provide a framework for continued efficient, measurable and sustainable realization of the strategy as set forth.” Several weeks into the effort, the vice chancellor for advancement proposed that three positions from the division’s community engagement team, including its senior director, report instead to the new Office of Urban Research and Community Engagement, determining that the staff’s talent would bring greater value to the University if aligned to the goals of the new office. The new staff brought immediate capacity to deliver on the office’s goal of fostering collaborative community partnerships.

One obstacle to building awareness and credibility within the institution was its name. The “Office of Urban Research and Community Engagement” sounded like a number of other outreach functions across campus, which impeded its ability to distinguish its unique role on campus. White was able to enlist focused assistance from a brand marketing firm that was doing work for the University, which, after a thorough review, recommended a new name—urbanCORE—and a brand statement:

urbanCORE is the hub of UNC Charlotte’s engaged scholarship ecosystem. It mobilizes, assesses and advances efforts that connect the University’s interdisciplinary, urban research resources to community assets in order to “co-produce transformative solutions to societal issues and challenges.”

A promotional video was created as part of the branding effort.

WHAT AND HOW

The structure of the new urbanCORE unit that emerged through the operations consulting work was based on three interdependent functions, each led by an existing director: 1. Policy & Data; 2. Faculty & Student Engagement; and 3. Community Partnerships. Two entities that were part of the old Metropolitan Studies—the Urban Institute and the Women + Girls Research Alliance—were incorporated as features of the new structure. About 75% of urbanCORE’s budget comes from University operating funds. Another 13% comes from grants and 12% from philanthropic gifts.

Policy & Data

This purpose of urbanCORE’s Policy & Data function is designed to equip faculty, students and community stakeholders to apply relevant data to address critical social issues and policies. The work is fueled largely by staff researchers for the University’s Urban Institute, an applied research center that for five decades has sought solutions

University of North Carolina at Charlotte's urbanCORE (Charlotte, NC)

to complex social, economic, and environmental challenges facing the region. The Institute enlists expertise across a diverse set of disciplines and life experiences to curate data, conduct actionable research, and provide relevant policy analysis to inform better decisions that benefit a wide range of practitioners, from policymakers and government administrators to non-profits and grassroots organizations. Funded mostly by grants and fees for service, the Institute provides community research services, regional policy and issue analysis, and research outreach.



UrbanCORE's Policy & Data function is led by the executive director of the Urban Institute and a team of about 15 staff, most of whom are funded by "soft money" grants. They are assisted by two powerful data engines: the Charlotte Regional Data Trust, an integrated data system of some 40 public and non-profit sources, and the Quality of Life Explorer, an online GPS tool that allows users to explore housing, economic, environmental, and safety conditions at the neighborhood level. While the Urban Institute draws upon these data sources and original research to provide research support to community clients, it was also called upon as part of urbanCORE to assist other engaged research efforts more deliberately across campus. The University and local foundations, public entities, and corporate philanthropic funds have committed more than \$3 million to upgrade web-based platforms and processes for the Charlotte Regional Data Trust and the Quality of Life Explorer. This will improve access and support for community practitioners, researchers, and students, as well as expand the number of data partners and sources. In addition, an Equity Indicators Dashboard is under development to track University engagement and community progress in nine focus areas that enhance social, physical and economic well-being. The dashboard will include context and measures informed by the lived experiences of residents from marginalized communities who are typically excluded in the development of formal metrics.

Faculty & Student Engagement

The objective of the unit's Faculty & Student Engagement function is to be a proactive resource for helping faculty, researchers, and students navigate practices of community-engaged research and real-world learning. The Director of Engaged Scholarship oversees the function and supports efforts across campus by facilitating the Community Engagement Advisory Council, coordinating a community orientation for new faculty and staff each fall, and hosting an Engaged Scholarship Symposium every other year. Recently, funds were reallocated to hire an Associate Director for Faculty Engagement. In addition, the Provost's office appoints the recipient of the annual Bonnie E. Cone Professorship in Civic Engagement award to serve as urbanCORE's Senior Fellow for

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Faculty Engagement to advise Faculty & Student Engagement and lend credibility among faculty. The Provost also made a three-year commitment to fund a full-time Fellow for Student Engagement position.

The primary purpose of this function is to promote, enrich, and expand existing engaged scholarship efforts on campus. An initiative is underway, for instance, to provide administrative support to several interdisciplinary research collaboratives—tied to various academic departments—that are outward facing in their research agenda and practices. These include the Charlotte Action Research Project in geography, City Building Lab in urban design, and Social Aspects of Health Initiative in psychology. Faculty & Student Engagement also is working with the College of Arts + Architecture and the College of Computing and Informatics to identify and support relevant and impactful “Broader Impacts” components of research grants to the National Science Foundation. Introduced in Fall 2023, the CORE (Community-Oriented Research Engagement) Series is designed to support faculty conducting community-engaged research or teaching by helping faculty build communities of practice and meet targeted goals. Inaugural activities include engaged scholarship workshops, writing retreats, and mentorship conversations.

In addition, a study has been commissioned under the leadership of the Senior Fellow for Faculty Engagement to assess progress that has been made in the College of Humanities & Earth and Social Sciences since it is the only college on campus to integrate engaged scholarship language into its promotion and tenure guidelines. The study also will examine faculty perceptions of support for community-engaged scholarship. The results are expected to allow faculty and administrators to highlight and enhance successes and strategically address challenges.

Undergirding the faculty engagement work are two student outreach initiatives that have evolved since the establishment of urbanCORE to align student engagement more closely with the university's student success and experiential learning priorities and strategies. In Fall 2023, Faculty & Student Engagement developed the Community Resource Unit (CRU), a one-year program aimed at expanding awareness of social impact work in the city for first-year students as well as understanding how those experiences connect to their academic, civic, and career aspirations. CRU students are not only offered placements with local community organizations, which include schools, health clinics, museums, and food security nonprofits, they are also connected to social change experiences with on-campus partners, including the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, the Office of Undergraduate Research, and the University Career Center. The program partners with the University Transition and Opportunities Program, a summer bridge operation for underrepresented enrolling students, to recruit students into the one-year program and leverage work study awards to encourage their participation.

Also launching in Fall 2023 was the Charlotte Impact Corps, a network of UNC Charlotte undergraduate student programs and organizations—within and outside Academic Affairs—that have an interest in engaging with local organizations to address the economic, educational, environmental, health, and social needs of the greater Charlotte region. The Corps supports campus units with a community-based learning curriculum, engagement opportunities, and an orientation to create meaningful and reciprocal relationships with community partners.

Both initiatives evolved out of previous, more traditional approaches to student-engaged learning. One was the Bonner Leaders Program, a four-year civic engagement program for undergraduate students developed as a partnership between the Provost's Office and the Dean of Students Office. The program recruited students during the summer before entering college, engaged them in two three-credit courses on community engagement during their first year, and assigned them for 10 hours a week to established community organizations. During their second and third years, students were assigned to the Optimist Park Neighborhood Association, which serves a community located near the “Uptown” central business district. Students worked with Optimist Park residents to create strategies addressing the pressures of gentrification and displacement that created stronger connections between municipal and nonprofit resources and the neighborhood and articulated the neighborhood's rich history.

While the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the recruitment and partnership process of the Bonner Leaders program, it also provided an opportunity to restructure the program to serve more students efficiently and to explore how community engagement might be incorporated as a tool to encourage academic persistence and success, particularly for traditionally underserved students. Another student-focused civic engagement initiative, the 49er Democracy Experience, which promotes democratic practices among students, including voter participation, continues to function as part of the Faculty & Student Engagement portfolio.

As part of the effort to develop the infrastructure for Faculty and Student Engagement, the ed tech company Instructure is helping to develop a student e-portfolio system that will allow undergraduate students to chronicle and navigate their various community engagement experience, whether curricular, co-curricular, experiential learning, or student-led. This "Community Engagement Pathway" system will incentivize students to move along a continuum of increasingly sophisticated engagement activities, from volunteering to research and internships. The Community Engagement Pathway in Canvas guides students through a series of video learning modules and encourages students to complete 20 hours of community engagement as well as a semester-long community engagement project. After completing five learning modules, 20 hours of community engagement, and a semester-long project, students will receive the urbanCORE Community Engagement badge, credentialed through Charlotte's School for Professional Studies.

Community Partnerships

The new urbanCORE unit created a Community Partnerships function that is overseen by the Senior Director for Strategic Community Partnerships and includes an Associate Director who manages events, workshops and conferences, as well as a Director for Community Impact who serves in a community organizer role and interacts closely with community-based partners. This includes fielding community requests and directing them to researchers and engagement efforts that can support them, as well as connecting researchers who are seeking community partners to compatible organizations.

To facilitate this work, a digital platform called "urbanCORE Explore" is being developed to inventory university-community partnerships and allow campus and community stakeholders to navigate University resources. The virtual tool sorts out partnerships by type, intensity of engagement, equity focus area, and other factors, while an AI-driven "knowledgebase" points users to resources to help create and enhance partnerships.

A Community Innovation Incubator project has also been launched to facilitate long-term action research projects that engage local residents and community leaders as peers with researchers, students, and experts to co-design data-driven solutions to systemic community problems. First implemented in 2021-22 with funding from Mecklenburg County to develop a food retail solution along Charlotte's West Boulevard corridor, the initiative will create future incubator projects along each of the City's five other "Corridors of Opportunity" with funding from Bank of America.

GOING FORWARD

Over the past three years, urbanCORE has followed a fairly rapid evolution from concept to organizational structure to strategic implementation. It has stimulated University investment, attracted outside funding, mobilized institutional allies, reconstituted staff roles and agendas, and gained some prominence in the community. However, challenges to sustaining the unit through its growing pains already have become apparent. Three have proven the most demanding:

- **Maintaining operational integrity while broadening institutional influence.** Part of urbanCORE's value proposition to UNC Charlotte, and justification for institutional investment, is that its efforts indirectly

support various goals beyond teaching and research, including recruiting students, fundraising, industry and government relations, marketing and promotions, and alumni relations. All these functions are needed as urban universities claim their places as “anchor institutions” that leverage not only their scholarship but also their economic impact and civic networks to improve their communities. At the same time, it will take disciplined execution to ensure the University's self-interests do not compromise core engaged scholarship principles, such as shared authority with community and an unwavering focus on equity and social impact.

- **Assessing impact.** UNC Charlotte's strategic imperative to “co-produce transformative solutions” is bold and inspiring and has become a central tenet for urbanCORE. However, it raises a key question: How will the University know if it has succeeded? The traditional evidence of community impact for universities has been either some monetary calculation of economic benefit or a list of programs and their requisite outputs: number of students participating, hours of volunteer service, number of projects underway. These are inadequate responses to the current strategic imperative, especially as community stakeholders, increasingly mistrustful of institutions in general, are demanding more tangible evidence of social impact from the civic sector. True accountability will require that the University choose initiatives, geographic targets, or issues of focus for which the institution will publicly collect and share quantifiable data that clarifies its impact.

The new digital inventory tool, urbanCORE Explore, will be a key tool in providing this accountability. In addition, there is consideration as a University of measuring change in the surrounding University City neighborhood as a means of tracking social and economic outcomes and possibly targeting three of the nine equity impact areas as a means of measuring impact.

- **Avoiding the programming trap.** From the outset, urbanCORE has been tasked with building an operational infrastructure to support community engagement across campus rather than generating new engagement projects. The latter agenda, however, creates a more compelling narrative for generating attention and raising money, even if it does not ensure sustainability for years to come. While it is necessary from time to time to selectively create an initiative—such as the Community Innovation Incubator—to model foundational principles and practices and to generate resources, urbanCORE leaders are determined to avoid the distraction of chasing programs primarily to attract funds and attention.

CONCLUSION

Higher education is dramatically shifting and so is UNC Charlotte. Since urbanCORE was established in 2020, the University has seen a new chancellor come aboard, the retirement of its provost of 18 years, transition of eight of the University's 10 deans, and new vice chancellors of research, advancement, and business affairs. The social, economic, and political volatility of the Charlotte region and the State of North Carolina brings its own demands. Undoubtedly, urbanCORE will need to adapt to these changes. Still, in its short tenure, it has established itself as an essential contributor to what UNC Charlotte aspires to be for the well-being of its community as well as its long-term relevance and progress.



University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center for Community Partnerships (Philadelphia, PA)

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ABSTRACT

The University of Pennsylvania's Netter Center for Community Partnerships serves as the primary vehicle for advancing civic and community engagement at Penn. The Netter Center develops and helps implement democratic, mutually transformative partnerships between Penn and the University's local geographic community of West Philadelphia. University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS) is a key Netter Center strategy for engaging with the community. It is a comprehensive, place-based approach to neighborhood and school improvement that aggregates and integrates university resources within local schools and neighborhoods. A second key Netter strategy is Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) and other forms of community-engaged scholarship that bring together university and community expertise to improve community wellbeing and advance research, teaching, and learning (K-16+). The Netter Center's third strategy is to advance a comprehensive, democratic anchor institution approach, in which ABCS and UACS are core components of Penn's efforts to engage its full range of resources in sustained, mutually beneficial partnerships with the local community. In addition, the Center has helped develop regional, national, and global networks designed to advance cooperation and mutual learning, stimulate change in and across localities, and contribute to a movement to transform universities, schools, and communities for the better.

INTRODUCTION

The Barbara and Edward Netter Center for Community Partnerships was established in 1992 to build mutually beneficial partnerships between Penn and West Philadelphia. The Netter Center's work was particularly inspired by Benjamin Franklin's vision for Penn in the 18th century, as a secular institution dedicated to learning and knowledge for the betterment of humanity, and the education of students with the "an Inclination join'd with an Ability to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends, and Family."¹ Netter Center founding director Ira Harkavy and distinguished Penn historian Lee Benson also came to see the Netter Center's work as a concrete example of the educator and pragmatic philosopher John Dewey's general theory of learning through

¹ Meyer Reinhold, "Opponents of Classical Learning in America during the Revolutionary Period," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 112, no. 4 (August 15, 1968): 221-234.

collaboratively solving real-world problems.² Harkavy and Benson claimed that by focusing strategically on locally manifested universal problems (such as poverty, unequal schooling, environmental degradation, and health inequities) and effectively integrating theory and practice, Penn would simultaneously improve both the quality of life in its urban ecological community and its research and teaching.

During its early years, the Netter Center developed two key strategies that continue to underpin its work today. The first strategy is Academically Based Community Service (ABCS): community engagement rooted in and intrinsically connected to research, teaching, and learning. The second, University-Assisted Community Schools (UACS), is a comprehensive approach to neighborhood and school improvement that educates and engages students, their families, and other members of the community, and provides an organizing framework for bringing university resources, including ABCS courses, to West Philadelphia schools and neighborhoods. The Netter Center later developed a third key strategy, a democratic anchor institution approach, in which ABCS and UACS are core components of Penn's efforts to engage its full range of resources (academic, human, economic, cultural) in sustained, mutually beneficial partnerships with the local community.³

HISTORY

When the Netter Center first began its work on university-community relationships in 1985, what immediately concerned its founders was that West Philadelphia was rapidly and visibly deteriorating, with devastating consequences for community residents, as well as the university. In part motivated by this concern, Harkavy and Benson designed an honors seminar aimed at stimulating undergraduates to think critically about what Penn could and should do to help improve its local environment. Penn President Sheldon Hackney, also a professor of history, joined them in teaching that seminar in spring 1985. The project the students proposed, known as the West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC), became an after-school program at a local elementary school. Over the next several years, WEPIC grew, evolved and thrived.

Most unwittingly, during the course of the seminar's work, Harkavy and colleagues reinvented the community school idea. They developed a strategy based on the following proposition: universities can best improve their local environment if they mobilize and integrate their great resources, particularly the "human capital" embodied in their students, to help develop and maintain community schools that function as focal points for creating healthy urban environments. This first Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) course helped inspire the development of ABCS courses in a wide range of Penn schools and departments.

In 1992, with WEPIC indicating the potential for engagement with West Philadelphia, the university announced a commitment to focus resources and energy on the revitalization of West Philadelphia. The Center for Community Partnerships (which, in 2007, the University renamed the Netter Center in recognition of a generous endowment from Edward and Barbara Netter, a Penn alumnus and his spouse) was formed to direct this large and important effort. Establishment of this university-wide center was a significant turning point in Penn-West Philadelphia relations.⁴

² Ira Harkavy and Lee Benson, "Progressing beyond the Welfare State," *Universities and Community Schools* 2, no. 1-2 (1991): 2-28.

³ The Netter Center also works in partnership with Penn's Office of Executive Vice President on issues of community economic development that help advance Penn's role as an anchor institution. This currently includes a focus on internships, employment, and training programs for local youth, as well as procurement with local and diverse businesses.

⁴ "History of the Netter Center," Netter Center for Community Partnerships, accessed February 1, 2023, <http://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu/about-center/history-netter-center>. For a full historical recounting, see Lee Benson, Ira Harkavy, John Puckett, Matthew Hartley, Rita A. Hodges, Francis E. Johnston, & Joann Weeks, *Knowledge for Social Change: Bacon, Dewey, and the Revolutionary Transformation of Research Universities in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2017).

HOW WE DO THIS WORK

Staffing and Infrastructure

The Netter Center for Community Partnerships has, since its inception in 1992, been institutionalized within the University of Pennsylvania's administrative structure. The director of the Netter Center reports to both the President's Office and the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences and holds the university title of associate vice president. The director also has a strong dotted-line report to the Provost's Office.

The Center's staff work to galvanize and engage the broad range of Penn resources, particularly its students, faculty, staff, and alumni, in sustained, democratic, mutually beneficial, place-based partnerships with the West Philadelphia community. The senior leadership team includes the founder and Barbara and Edward Netter Director, Ira Harkavy, three associate directors, an assistant director, and an executive director of university-assisted community schools. Over time, Netter's programming has expanded by employing a growing and diverse staff who are based primarily in local K-12 schools and who work daily with community and university partners to implement programming. Netter prioritizes hiring its school-based staff from the local community.

Integrated funding streams support the Center's programs, with an operating budget of approximately 20% university funds (President's Office and School of Arts and Sciences), 20% private gifts (primarily from Penn alumni), and 60% grants (primarily local and state governmental dollars). Most of Netter's 50 full-time staff are funded on grants or private gifts, and all 125+ part-time staff who help operate university-assisted community school programming are grant supported. All staff, save the director (who is an employee of the president's office), are School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) employees. Various operational activities, such as human resources, IT, business services, and grants management, are supported through SAS.

Approximately 1,800 Penn undergraduate and graduate students enroll in Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) courses each year. Well over 200 such courses in more than 40 departments have been developed at Penn that focus on collaborative local problem-solving to improve the quality of life and learning in the community and on campus. For the 2023-24 academic year, 82 ABCS courses are being offered in a wide range of disciplines. In addition, Netter employs approximately 400 students annually (primarily through work-study awards) who help to develop, support, and operate a range of community-based programs. Many more get involved as volunteers.

The Netter Center has increasingly focused on doctoral student development. For example, the Provost's Graduate Academic Engagement Fellowship at the Netter Center (PGAEF) launched in 2019 as a two-year fellowship. Open to PhD students across all schools and fields at Penn, PGAEF is designed to support graduate students whose work centers on ABCS and other forms of community-engaged scholarship, as well as to elevate the education and training of the next generation of academics. The fellowship involves participation in an interdisciplinary faculty-student seminar on community-engaged research and teaching, the opportunity to design and teach an ABCS course or engage in other kinds of research and teaching in connection with the Netter Center, a \$5,000 research fund, full fellowship funding for one academic year, and additional support to attend and present at conferences.

The Netter Center places significant value in building, maintaining, and supporting democratic partnerships. The relationship itself and the welfare of the various partners are the preeminent value, not simply developing a specified program or completing a research project. One of the Center's strengths is its inclusive participatory governance structure, which utilizes the input and ideas of its diverse staff and its Community Advisory Board, Faculty Advisory Board, National Advisory Board, and Student Advisory Board. These four boards create formal and consistent avenues for core partners to provide input and guidance for the Center.

University-Assisted Community Schools and Academically Based Community Service in Action

A major component of the Netter Center's work is mobilizing the university's vast resources to help traditional public schools serve as innovative University-Assisted Community Schools. A University-Assisted Community School (UACS) is a comprehensive neighborhood center that educates, engages, activates and serves students, their families, and all other members of the community, with a university serving as the lead partner in providing broadly based, sustained support. Academic partnerships connect the university's and school's curricula through a common focus on helping to solve community-identified problems, which simultaneously improves community wellbeing and advances research, teaching, and learning (K-16+).

The Netter Center's work in recent years has included approximately 3,700 children and their families at eight UACS sites in West Philadelphia, where programs are implemented during the school day, afterschool, weekend, and summer. Selection of new school sites results from interest and requests from local principals, as well as funding opportunities that provide support for new partnerships.

Netter Center site coordinators are based at a particular site full-time and collaborate closely with that school and its community to determine activities that best serve their specific needs and interests. Additional UACS staff focus on thematic programs such as college access and career readiness, environment and sustainability, health and wellness (mental health, nutrition, sports, fitness), humanities (arts, culture, literacy), and STEM education. At each site, Netter's UACS staff work as part of a team under the leadership of the school principal and teachers, who set the tone for collaborative learning and practice. UACS staff serve as liaisons between the university and the school, as well as between schoolteachers and the after-school program. The work is further supported by the efforts of Penn faculty and students in ABCS classes, as well as by Penn student interns and volunteers.

Two specific examples help illustrate the democratic partnerships and collaborative real-world problem solving that are at the heart of UACS and ABCS.

The first concrete example is the development of an edible school garden at Andrew Hamilton Elementary School (Hamilton). Located two miles west of Penn, Hamilton is a public K-8 school in West Philadelphia with a student body that is 93% African American and 81% economically disadvantaged.⁵ The Netter Center developed a partnership at Hamilton in 1988 with modest UACS activities. By 2017, the Center had developed the capacity to bring on a full-time UACS site coordinator and a wide range of activities, including: school-day programs such as literacy tutoring, physical education and recess support, mental health support services, and STEM education; afterschool programs such as animal sciences, arts, coding, gardening, health sciences, nutrition, and sports; summer academic and enrichment programs; and activities for families and community members.

The Netter Center brings numerous university and community partners to Hamilton, such as Penn Veterinary Medicine, Penn Athletics, and The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. Like all UACS sites, Hamilton serves as a hub for many diverse ABCS courses that support school day and after school programs. In Earth and Environmental Science ABCS courses, for example, Penn and Hamilton students conduct research on local environmental conditions and utilize their knowledge and resources to create and distribute practical information on topics such as lead safety and air pollution reduction.

It was during an environmental studies activity in Spring 2020, a month into the pandemic, that a sixth grade teacher showed her class a video of Ron Finley, the "Gangsta Gardener" who built a community garden in Los

⁵ The School District's data on economically disadvantaged students is based on the percentage of students whose families participate in state and/or federal public assistance programs. These figures reflect Hamilton's demographics for the 2023-2024 school year. "School Profiles," School District of Philadelphia, accessed January 10, 2024, <https://www.philasd.org>.

Angeles. Inspired, the students shared that they wanted the unused, muddy, trash-filled plots of grass by the Hamilton parking lot transformed into a beautiful, safe, edible community garden. The teacher partner and Netter staff spoke to Hamilton Principal Torrence Rothmiller, who enthusiastically agreed to reimagine the space. The redesign of the school grounds had the potential to mitigate multiple environmental injustices impacting the neighborhood, including high levels of heat, stormwater flooding, a lack of safe outdoor spaces, and a scarcity of accessible healthy food. Being located at a school, however, its greatest impact would be its ability to educate and empower students with the skills to combat these injustices.

Penn faculty, staff, and graduate and undergraduate students from the School of Arts and Sciences, Wharton School of Business, Weitzman School of Design, and Graduate School of Education worked with Hamilton School leadership, the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Water Department, the Philadelphia Orchard Project, and local engineering firms to create a design and implementation plan for the school's outdoor space.⁶ Hamilton middle school teachers, with support from Penn students, revised their curricula to include lessons connected to garden development. For example, students in math classes employed real-world data to make watering plans based on predicted monthly rainfall.

Garden construction began in Summer 2021, spearheaded by a Penn graduate student employed by Netter. The Philadelphia Orchard Project, a local nonprofit, led the development of the orchard and food forest surrounding the school building. Middle school students in Netter's UACS summer programs helped build beds, mix soil, weed, and plant seeds. With one 50 ft. by 20 ft. plot completed by Fall 2021, the afterschool Gardening Club began. Penn students enrolled in ABCS courses in Nursing, Arts and Sciences, and Education focused on afterschool garden projects. By the Fall 2022 season, with all three plots developed, the garden produced over 450 pounds of produce. "The kids love it," says Principal Rothmiller. "They love seeing the things they've planted grow, and not only that, that they can eat it. We're looking to expand on that, to show them what kind of changes something like this can have in the community they live in."⁷

A second concrete example illustrating the key strategies of UACS and ABCS is the robust partnership between Associate Professor of Psychology Loretta Flanagan-Cato and Paul Robeson High School. Robeson, another UACS site located just a few blocks from Penn's campus, has a student body that is 96% African American and 81% economically disadvantaged.⁸ The ABCS course "Everyday Neuroscience" was initiated in 2018 to support the school-identified need for improved STEM education. In this course, Penn students design and implement ten hands-on, small-group biology and neuroscience activities with Robeson High School students throughout the semester. These inquiry-based labs strengthen the high school students' foundational STEM skills and build scientific curiosity while also preparing them for the statewide standardized exams. At the same time, Penn students, through designing and facilitating weekly STEM activities, increase their understanding of the disciplinary content while developing their science communication and teaching skills. "It's fulfilling to see the impact our work has on the [high school] students," said Sizzy Lawton, a fourth-year health and societies major.

⁶ The Hamilton Garden Project's design and implementation plan won the Demonstration Project Category of the Environmental Protection Agency's 2020 Campus RainWorks Challenge, a national green stormwater infrastructure design competition. See Katherine Unger Baillie, "Penn group wins EPA Campus RainWorks Challenge," *Penn Today*, April 20, 2021, <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/penn-group-wins-epa-campus-rainworks-challenge>.

⁷ For original quote and further information on the Hamilton UACS partnership, see Katherine Unger Baillie, "Green solutions are transforming a West Philadelphia grade school," *Penn Today*, March 7, 2023, <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/netter-center-green-solutions-are-transforming-west-philadelphia-grade-school>.

⁸ These figures reflect Robeson's demographics for the 2023-2024 school year. "School Profiles," School District of Philadelphia, accessed January 10, 2024, <https://www.philasd.org>.

"This has been a class I consistently look forward to each week because we really get to know the students and better understand their learning styles for designing lesson plans." The Penn students additionally learn about education disparities and complete a final project connected to their experience, such as creating education policy recommendations. Importantly, the Penn students develop personal relationships with the Robeson students, as they provide support, not only in academics but in other areas of life. According to Richard Gordon, Robeson's principal from 2012-2023, "The social development that comes with interacting with individuals whose backgrounds are different from yours, having those very candid conversations can lead to a better understanding, both socially and academically. The program can fill learning gaps, but also give our students learning experiences they generally would not have had.... Penn students understand the importance of being able to offer life experiences to our students and offer them a different perspective."

When creating the course, Netter staff brought Dr. Flanagan-Cato and Robeson teachers together for conversations on the needs of the high school and Penn students, as well as on scheduling, the roles of school teachers and staff, and classroom norms. Each semester, the students in Dr. Flanagan-Cato's course improve lab activities by creatively incorporating feedback from the Robeson teachers and students. Robeson leadership largely attributes the significant growth in Robeson students' scores on the state standardized exams in recent years to Penn-Robeson STEM partnerships. For their outstanding work, Dr. Flanagan-Cato and the Robeson science teachers received the 2022 Provost-Netter Center Faculty-Community Partnership Award. This is an annual award that recognizes sustained and productive faculty-community partnership projects with a \$10,000 prize (\$5,000 to the faculty member and \$5,000 to the community partner) in order to further develop the partnership projects.⁹

The Neuroscience ABCS course is one of approximately thirteen courses that have partnered with Robeson over the last few years, in which Penn faculty, Netter staff, and Robeson teachers work together to develop innovative and effective ways to improve teaching and learning in a range of disciplines. As a UACS site, the Robeson students also participate in a number of other programs facilitated by Netter staff and student volunteers and interns. This includes Moelis Access Science Fellows who support STEM classrooms; undergraduate and graduate student writing coaches; and hands-on nutrition and garden education lessons. It also includes post-secondary readiness activities. In the educational pipeline program, for example, Penn Medicine, Penn Veterinary Medicine, Life Sciences Management, and the Netter Center collaborate to provide mentorship and exposure to high school students around the variety of careers in medicine and healthcare. And through the employment pathway program, students are prepared for direct entry into careers at Penn and Penn Medicine upon high school graduation. Work-study and ABCS students also provide one-on-one college exploration and application support.

From Local to Regional, National, and Global

Since the Netter Center's inception, one of its objectives has been to help develop regional, national, and international networks. This has included, for example, the Philadelphia Higher Education Network for Neighborhood Development (PHENND); the national UACS Network and UACS Regional Training Centers; the Anchor Institutions Task Force; and the International Consortium for Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Democracy.¹⁰

In particular, from the early 1990s, institutions across the U.S. began to express interest in the model of university-community-school collaboration being developed by the Netter Center and its school and community

⁹ For original quotes, further data and information on this partnership, see Erin M. Purvis, Richard M. Gordon IV, Louis Lozzi Jr., and Loretta M. Flanagan-Cato, "A University and Public High School Partnership for Personalized, Accelerated Science Learning," *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship* 16, no. 2 (January 2024): 1-5; Loretta M. Flanagan-Cato, "Everyday Neuroscience: A Community Engagement Course," *The Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education* 18, no. 1 (Fall 2019): A44-A50; and Kristina Garcia and Nathi Magubane, "Science and Service," *Penn Today*, January 26, 2023, <https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/penn-netter-center-science-and-service>.

¹⁰ More information on these networks is available at www.phennd.org; www.nettercenter.upenn.edu/what-we-do/national-and-global-outreach; www.margainc.com/aitf; and www.internationalconsortium.org, accessed May 23, 2022.

partners. With private and governmental support, twenty-three adaptation sites were funded and provided with technical assistance. Foundation support encouraged another seventy-five teams of university-community-school partners to come to Penn for training. An informal network grew through meetings and conferences hosted by the Netter Center, as well as numerous site visits to Penn. The work occurring around the country was documented in Netter's *Universities and Community Schools* journal.

With the 2007 naming gift from Edward and Barbara Netter, the Netter Center's strategy for UACS adaptation shifted to creating regional training centers based at higher educational institutions that have demonstrated significant experience in and commitment to the work. Regional centers have been supported on three-year cycles at the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa (2008); Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis (2011); the University of Connecticut (2014); the University of California, Los Angeles (2017); Binghamton University, part of the State University of New York (2020); and Duke University, North Carolina Central University, and East Carolina University who formed the Southeast Regional Coalition for University-Assisted Community Schools (2023). Support of the regional centers have helped lead to nationally significant developments.¹¹ A national UACS network was also formed in 2015, with over 70 colleges and universities now participating and sharing resources and best practices to advance UACS policy and practice.

For the Netter Center, sharing our work and building these networks enables us to advance cooperation and mutual learning, stimulate change in and across localities, and contribute to a movement to transform universities, schools, and communities for the better.

PLANS GOING FORWARD - FURTHER DEVELOPING, SUSTAINING, AND EXPANDING THE WORK

Looking forward, the Netter Center aims to strengthen and expand university-assisted community schools in West Philadelphia through increased partnerships, deeper collaborations, and more academic and non-academic resources. This includes cultivating new ABCS courses and advancing community-engaged scholarship across Penn. It also includes expanding the numbers of engaged alumni. Penn alumni currently engage in a variety of ways in Netter programs, particularly volunteering in short- or long-term capacities and/or providing philanthropic support. More than a dozen alumni have joined the Netter team as full-time staff upon completing their Penn degree. Netter additionally works to engage graduates of its K-12 UACS programs through paid internships and employment. The Netter Center also looks forward to expanding its evaluation efforts. Netter's full-time director of evaluation and research conducts evaluation of ABCS courses and programs, carries out grant-required evaluation of community partnership programs (particularly UACS programs), and supports faculty and students in developing research and evaluation projects connected to their community partnerships and ABCS courses. Netter plans to grow a more robust evaluation and research enterprise that can assess school, community, and institutional change.

Meeting these goals will require additional fundraising, staff, and partners. Ultimately, the Netter Center hopes to involve every University school, department, and center in local, sustained, democratic community partnerships, helping Penn to significantly contribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of the "Beloved Community" being realized in West Philadelphia.

¹¹ For example, Binghamton created what are, we believe, the first three tenure track faculty positions dedicated to university-assisted community schools. In May 2022, UCLA's Center for Community Schooling was unanimously approved by the California State Board of Education to serve (with the Alameda County Office of Education) as the Lead Technical Assistance Center for the \$4.2 billion California Community Schools Partnership Program (see May 18, 2022 announcement, <https://seis.ucla.edu/news/alameda-county-office-of-education-ucla-center-for>).

University of San Diego (San Diego, CA)

Chris Nayve and James T. Harris III

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ABSTRACT

The University of San Diego's engagement in its local community of Linda Vista in San Diego County builds on the university's historical mission and the longstanding work of its Mulvaney Center for Community, Awareness, and Social Action. The work has centered democratic, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial partnerships. It has been elevated through a commitment from senior leadership, including embedding community engagement and an anchor institution framework into the institution's core values, mission, and current strategic plan; making institutional investments; and building out the organizational infrastructure with direct ties to the president's office. These efforts have helped increase campus-wide interdisciplinary collaboration and deepen connections with the local community. The Mulvaney Center's Youth Engagement Initiative provides an example of sustained, mutually beneficial engagement between USD students and local K-12 students and partners. Lessons learned at USD include the importance of blending internal and external funding streams, building infrastructure for campus-wide engagement, achieving national recognition, using data to communicate impact, and engaging in reflexive practice.

INTRODUCTION: A FOUNDATIONAL COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The University of San Diego (USD) has a long history of public service and the development of civically engaged individuals. Since its founding in 1949, USD has embraced socially responsible action that improves the human condition, with a recognized ecosystem that generates knowledge for the good of society. All of which reflect the institution's focus on liberal arts education, its commitment to social justice, and its faith-based identity in the Catholic intellectual tradition.¹ Its mission statement identifies USD as "a contemporary Catholic university, grounded in the liberal arts and anchored along an international border, advancing academic excellence to create a more inclusive, sustainable and hopeful world."

USD President, Dr. James T. Harris III, during his inauguration speech in 2015 stated, "to be a great global university, you have to be a great local university."² Since then, Dr. Harris has continued to build upon the legacy of commitment to social responsibility at USD by integrating the goal of being a leading anchor institution into USD's current strategic plan—*Envisioning 2024*. This plan was co-created by on and off campus stakeholders and

¹ Kevin Guerrieri, Sandra Sgoutas-Emch, Chris Nayve, Judith Liu, Juan Carlos Rivas, and Mike Williams, "Community Engagement, Social Innovation, and Anchor Institutions: A Case Study for Converging Paradigms of Social Justice Education," in *Connecting Civic Engagement and Social Innovation: Toward Higher Education's Democratic Promise*, ed. Amanda Moore McBride and Eric Mlyn (Boston: Campus Compact, Stylus, 2020), 110-131.

² "Inaugural Address," Office of the President - University of San Diego, December 4, 2014, <https://www.sandiego.edu/president/writings-addresses/2015/three-es-of-citizenship.php>.

uses a community engagement framework to establish six interconnected pathways toward achieving USD's strategic goals by 2024. Those pathways are: 1) a commitment to foster engagement through equitable and democratic partnerships, 2) utilizing innovation for positive change, 3) creating and maintaining opportunities devoted to equity, access, and inclusion, 4) promoting and supporting engaged scholarship, 5) prioritizing care for our common home in all university relationships and policies, and 6) providing a liberal arts education that equips students to engage ethically and effectively in our rapidly changing world.

A key vehicle for achieving these goals is the Karen and Tom Mulvaney Center for Community, Awareness, and Social Action (The Mulvaney Center). Known for being a national model of community engagement and anchor institution practices, founded in 1987, the Mulvaney Center focuses on academic community engagement, applied research, social innovation, and local and global partnerships that are democratic, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial.

During President Harris' first week at USD in August 2015, he met with then Assistant Provost for Community Engagement, Chris Nayve. For over two decades, Chris has been involved with shaping USD's community engagement and public service mission. Chris recalls his first meeting with USD's new president during that warm August day—"Despite the heat of the day, Jim and I walked several miles through the local neighborhood, discussing the history and context of the community. It was toward the end of our walk when he expressed support and leadership toward developing a strategic approach to deepening our community engagement and anchor efforts." Within a year, Chris was selected to serve on the president's cabinet as USD's inaugural Associate Vice President for Community Engagement and Anchor Initiatives. The elevated role, coupled with the integration of an anchor mission into the campus strategic plan, demonstrated the commitment from senior leadership to prioritize community engagement. As a result of these intentional human and social capital investments, USD has seen increased interdisciplinary and intercampus collaboration with anchor partners and has provided strategic funds to support innovative campus-community ideas.

HISTORY OF ENGAGEMENT AT USD

USD is located in the community of Linda Vista, California in San Diego County—seven miles north of downtown and 22 miles north of the Tijuana, Mexico border. Since 1938, Linda Vista has been a socioeconomically and ethnically diverse community with refugee and migrant worker populations resettling during several waves of immigration. The first migrants arrived as low-wage defense contract workers during the military buildup for World War II.³ Immigration through Linda Vista also included resettlement by refugees from Vietnam after the fall of Saigon, refugees from South Sudan in the early 1990's, and refugees from Iran and Iraq. Linda Vista is home to many distinct cultures with a total population over 33,000 with 66% of the residents identifying as people of color.⁴ The 2024 average median income in San Diego is \$119,500.⁵ However, the median income in Linda Vista in 2022 was \$80,364 with over 60% of households identified as low to moderate income.⁶ Additionally, the students eligible for free and reduced lunch remain higher than the San Diego County average of 50%. The four K-8 serving neighborhood schools are Title 1 schools with over 80% of the student population eligible for free and reduced lunch.⁷

³ Christine Killory, "Temporary Suburbs; The Lost Opportunity of San Diego's National Defense Housing Projects," *The Journal of San Diego History* 39, no. 1-2 (1993): 1-6.

⁴ "Community Planning Group Demographic Data," SANDAG Open Data Portal, January 1, 2022, <https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/2024-03/cpg-demographic-data-2022.pdf>.

⁵ "San Diego County Area Median Income (AMI) and Income Limits," SanDiegoCounty.gov, April 17, 2024, <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/sdhcd/rental-assistance/income-limits-ami/>.

⁶ "Community Planning Group," January 1, 2022, p. 53; "Addressing Housing Insecurity in Linda Vista," Bayside Community Center, April 28, 2021, <https://www.baysidecc.org/social-action-blog/2021/4/28/addressing-housing-insecurity-in-linda-vista>.

⁷ San Diego Unified School District and Ed-Data, accessed November 30, 2023, <https://www.ed-data.org/>.

Recognizing the imperative for a deeper connection and partnership between USD and its neighborhood, USD hired Dr. Judy Rauner in 1986 to lead campus community engagement and partnership efforts. Her work led to the Center for Community Service Learning (later renamed The Mulvaney Center), which was housed under Academic Affairs in the Provost Office.⁸ Despite the acceleration of service learning and community engagement initiatives through the rise of Campus Compact in 1985 and the Corporation for National Service in 1993, it was not common for service learning and community engagement units to report directly to the provost or a chief academic officer. The decision to position service-learning and community engagement under Academic Affairs indicated to faculty and staff at USD that the Mulvaney Center would be a curricular and co-curricular hub serving the entire institution. Reporting to Academic Affairs served as an important structural innovation that established decades of trust and stability crucial for growing and expanding community engagement and anchor efforts at USD.

One of the first major programs The Mulvaney Center established was the Youth Engagement Initiative (YEI) founded in 1991 through a campus-community coalition that designed and implemented wide ranging cradle-to-career programs for families and youth in partnership with educational and community leaders. To support USD's developing role as a cradle-to-career education hub, The Mulvaney Center received a three-year Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) grant in 1996 funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The COPC funding further developed USD's capacity to coordinate campus resources and programs as well as leveraged USD's regional networks to support community identified educational goals. These early efforts strengthened USD's anchor institution mission by deepening and broadening the partnership between USD and neighborhood partners in Linda Vista and throughout the San Diego border region.

USD's COPC grant provided funding for a space co-located in a local non-profit that served as a critical site for USD faculty, students, and staff to provide human and social capital support. The community-based space also was important in bridging the "town and gown" divide by creating a third space for campus and community relationship building. COPC was formative in strengthening the foundation for USD to serve as a neighborhood hub with the capacity to facilitate resources, training, and programs. Co-locating in the neighborhood with a community based organization exponentially increased the ability for residents and community members to access faculty and staff from USD.

COPC was critical in demonstrating the institution's commitment to partnering with local leaders to address issues of educational access, public health, immigration, economic development and workforce development. The COPC funding and neighborhood hub ultimately informed and inspired the university's commitment to becoming an anchor institution nearly thirty years later, and continues to serve as the bedrock and foundation for the community partnerships USD has within the San Diego border region.

HOW IT WORKS: ENGAGEMENT ON CAMPUS AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Operationalizing community engagement at a university requires commitment and investment on a variety of levels. As mentioned earlier, The Mulvaney Center at USD was founded in 1986 under Academic Affairs in the Provost Office, where the Center enjoyed decades of support, growth, and success. In 2017, with the board approval and campus-wide adoption of the *Envisioning 2024* strategic plan, a new Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Initiatives (IESI) was established in order to ensure the success of this new strategic plan. The Provost was then asked to serve as the inaugural Vice President of the IESI office, which signified a fiscal and organizational commitment to prioritize and grow the university's outreach and engagement efforts.

⁸ "CSL [Center for Community Service-Learning] History," University of San Diego, accessed November 30, 2023, <https://www.sandiego.edu/mccasa/documents/history.pdf>

The Mulvaney Center's evolution is reflective of a broader trend in higher education where community engagement work is seen as a part of the culture and fabric of higher education institutions. Rather than the traditional binary option of Academic or Student Affairs, outreach and engagement centers increasingly report to strategic vice presidents or have their own vice presidents for engagement.

USD substantiated their commitment to community engagement work by organizationally moving the Center to the IESI office and promoting the director's role to Associate Vice President for Community Engagement and Anchor Initiatives. The AVP works with a team of full-time Center directors and associate directors, senior faculty advisors, program managers, coordinators, and student workers. Senior faculty advisors are compensated with stipends, faculty release time, and professional development funds. One of the Center's faculty advisors is currently the president of the Faculty Senate. Members of The Mulvaney Center team serve not only at the university's cabinet level, but also on the Faculty Senate and its Academic and Student Affairs committees. Having leaders of the Center engaged with these significant and visible organizations has been instrumental in ensuring that the work of community engagement is not marginalized or limited to a singular space or department at the university.

The Mulvaney Center is able to sustain, grow, and expand key partnerships both on campus and in the community due to the institution's strong organizational and staffing support of the Center. Key partners at the university include academic centers and departments that have a publicly engaged mission. Collaborating with a range of institutes, departments, and centers at USD that seek democratic, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial partnerships in the community is a cornerstone of The Mulvaney Center's work. Cross-campus collaboration also results in the creation of on-campus programming that reflects and upholds the university's commitment to justice and equity for all members of both USD and the local community.

Establishing and growing key internal campus partners is directly tied to the quality and quantity of external partnerships fostered by The Mulvaney Center. The vast array of community partnerships that the Center enjoys and maintains are the result of decades spent being present in the local community, developing relationships in a variety of sectors to ensure that the community's voice and vision are core to USD's strategic vision. Since the Mulvaney Center's inception, the community engagement team created governing and advisory structures that prioritize partners who are part of key community organizations, civic associations, foundations, and local/state/national government offices. USD also found it critical to establish partnerships and relationships with community leaders who were identified as thought leaders but may not have held a formal position or title in a community organization. Attending and participating in community collaborative meetings provided the university opportunity to find such individuals. Connecting with formal and informal community leaders was vital to the creation of the university's civic action plan. Working in deep collaboration with community partners is both the privilege and responsibility of being a genuine anchor institution.

Funding for The Mulvaney Center comes from several sources: state and federal grants, individual donors, foundations, and institutional funding that covers the majority of the center's full and part-time staff. Additional fiscal support comes from generous donor endowment funds as well as federal and state grants secured by the Center's staff. All of these funding streams contribute to sustaining and expanding the university's civic engagement efforts. One major lesson learned over the center's 30 year history is the importance of diverse funding streams. Annual fiscal support from the university's budget is critical, especially as leadership and campus priorities evolve. The Mulvaney Center's long-standing success and support at USD is the result of center leadership acquiring substantial endowment funds, grants, and serving in leadership roles across campus which assists the center in their effort to be of service to all areas of the university.

Another key fiscal lesson The Mulvaney Center learned throughout the years is that one of the main components to secure funds and fiscal stability is pursuing well-deserved national honors and recognitions for the work happening both on campus and in the community. For example, USD was part of the first round of initial campuses in 2006 to receive the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification as well as the reclassification in 2015. In 2011, USD was designated a Changemaker Campus by Ashoka University and as reported by Sandra Enos in 2015, USD was one of ten campuses classified by both Carnegie and Ashoka U. USD was also awarded the Washington Center's Higher Education Civic Award in 2016. These honors have assisted the Center in securing external funding as well as maintaining institutional support for USD's local, bi-national, and international programs and commitments.

The program that has most benefited from consistent funding streams and campus support is The Mulvaney Center's Youth Engagement Initiative (YEI). Employing USD Federal Work-Study students through this program enables the Center to fulfill its partnership commitments and grow programs as community interests and needs change over time.

The Mulvaney Center employs between 50-70 Federal Work-Study students each year to support and run YEI. The work-study students coordinate educational and community programming with over 1,200 USD undergraduate and graduate students to provide tutoring, mentoring, and peer-advised counseling. Students are driven to their sites by Mulvaney Center student van drivers to over 25 neighborhood schools, after-school sites, and community-based organizations throughout San Diego and Tijuana. Annually, between 10% - 14% of all of USD's work study students work through the YEI program supporting all of USD's regional and bi-national partners. USD students and staff also collaborate with neighboring students from San Diego State University (SDSU), UC San Diego, Mesa Community College, Mira Costa Community College, San Diego City College, and Point Loma Nazarene University on a range of educational initiatives including the successful SDSU Afrikan Student Union High School Conference attended by over 1,000 San Diego youth.

The YEI partnership with work-study students is a premier example of how institutions can mobilize campus resources to provide meaningful and fulfilling employment opportunities for students. Shayla Rodriguez, a senior at USD double majoring in Political Science and Business Marketing, exemplifies the impact of work-study students taking on leadership roles and developing programs in the community. Shayla is a first-generation college student from an immigrant background who is the co-chair of AChA and Vice President of Creative Design with USD Women in Business. As a work-study student in The Mulvaney Center, Shayla coordinates the Beyond Borders program which facilitates immersive experiences with neighbors on both sides of the U.S./ Mexico border. In a recent interview, Shayla shared the following reflection: "The Mulvaney Center taught me that communities are not just people you are here to help, and that was a shift that I had to make very quickly. They taught me that we are here to build relationships, and now I advocate for that. When first-timers come into The Center my top advice to them is that when they need to make decisions for their programs, make the decision as if they are part of the community they are working with because they are."

Connecting work-study students like Shayla with these immersive programs and leadership opportunities makes a tremendous impact both on the lives of USD students and in the community both through curricular and co-curricular engagement. Work-study student leaders collaborate with students and faculty who are creative, critical thinkers, and whose compassion calls upon them to form a more just society. The faculty members serving on The Mulvaney Center's Faculty Council directly engage with student work-study leaders through training, mentoring, and overall governance of the center.

Of the USD students participating in YEI, more than 80% are first generation college students, students of color, and/or low-income students. As a result, YEI is also crucial in the retention of underrepresented students at

USD as it deepens their connections to the university and community. For K-12, the personal impact of USD's student mentors cannot be overstated; through the relationships built and stories shared, K-12 students see that college is accessible. Some examples of USD partnerships with other universities to share and expand the YEI model include USD's involvement with 48 other universities in the College Corps program, our MICAH Summer Fellowship Program with Saint Mary's University, and our community immersion partnerships in Jamaica and New Orleans.

WHERE WE ARE GOING FROM HERE

Being an anchor institution that honors hyperlocal community engagement is the embodiment of USD's values and mission in practice. While USD's engagement initiatives have enjoyed decades of institutionalized support, The Mulvaney Center continues to engage with practitioners in the field in order to learn with and from other institutions of higher education that face similar challenges and opportunities in growing and deepening this work.

One of the biggest challenges to building and sustaining a program in the current climate is the post-COVID competition for resources. The pandemic created a myriad of financial disruptions at institutions of higher education which caused the elimination of programs and major reprioritization of funds. Fortunately, USD's commitment to community engagement had been so entrenched and institutionalized at the university that the funding and support for this work did not take a major hit. However, the leadership from The Mulvaney Center did not take their fiscal support for granted during those years of uncertainty. They prioritized collaborative work within the field and actively sought out ways to increase resources through grants and individual foundations to continue programs and initiatives even in times of scarcity and scaling back. One major lesson of these trying years is that community engagement efforts at institutions of higher education must look beyond institutional funding.

As institutions pursue both internal and external funding, it is important to have data to demonstrate scope and impact. The Mulvaney Center tracks engagement by collecting data on how many students, faculty, and staff work with community partners and in what capacity. Beyond quantitative data noting how many people are involved in these programs from both the university and community, qualitative data is collected through written reflections and interviews. Honoring and sharing the stories of all who are involved in these efforts often makes the greatest impact.

USD uses the comprehensive data it collects to deepen relationships with key faculty, staff, and administrators, and to assist with the advancement of initiatives, the university's mission, and resources. Tracking this data also assists in Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accreditation, Carnegie Classification, publications, research, and the pursuit of external funding, acknowledgements, and honors.

Looking ahead at upcoming opportunities in the field, The Mulvaney Center is excited to embark on a new public/private partnership with the Office of the Governor in the State of California. USD was one of 48 colleges in California selected to participate in College Corps, an initiative to provide over 6,500 students statewide an opportunity to engage and serve in their local communities focusing on K-12 education, climate action, and food insecurity. In exchange for their time and service, College Corps Fellows will receive educational stipends and a living allowance to offset the financial burden of higher education. This groundbreaking initiative is an investment in students and in communities statewide to address pressing social challenges and amplify student social mobility.

Collaborating as broadly and intentionally as possible leverages the full breadth of a university's internal and external resources to deepen relationships and impact in the community. Recently, USD codified the work

of community engagement by integrating an anchor institution framework and commitment to community engagement into the institution’s mission and core values.⁹ The work of community engagement is collective as much as it is collaborative—success and progress are often experienced alongside setbacks and challenges. However, the values-based commitments of anchor institutions provide enduring stability to meet societal challenges. Justice, equity, and honoring the dignity of all are inextricable core values of community engagement and anchor work. Not add on or performative signaling, they are central tenets. While the work is always changing, a core lesson remains—community engagement is critical to a university’s ability to fulfill its promise and mission to its students, staff, faculty, and local community.

⁹ “Mission,” University of San Diego, May 5, 2023, <https://www.sandiego.edu/about/mission-vision-values.php>.

Conclusion

Ira Harkavy and Rita A. Hodges

The eight case studies in this White Paper provide innovative practices that get us closer to the change we believe is needed. They demonstrate that an increased focus on local, democratic community partnerships is an extraordinarily promising strategy for realizing a higher education institution's public purpose. More specifically, they demonstrate that higher education institutions, particularly urban colleges and universities, can make meaningful contributions to knowledge and better educate the next generation for civic leadership by working with their neighbors to help solve locally manifested universal problems such as poor and unequal education, healthcare, and economic development.

As the cases make clear, significant, sustained, reciprocal partnerships between a university and its local community require institutional commitment and support at various levels. Colleges and universities need to direct their own academic, human, financial, and cultural resources to work with local communities. The case studies also clearly demonstrate the importance of leveraging external funding if university-community partnerships are to grow and endure. Government at all levels can obviously make a difference through financial support and the bully pulpit. Philanthropy also can help to catalyze and develop this work.

Specifically, philanthropy can play a major role in providing incentives and resources for higher education institutions to engage with their communities. Foundations can grow the work by building on existing promising partnerships, convening local stakeholders, and supporting movement-building activities. We will briefly elaborate on each of these ideas.

First, funders can build on successes. They could, for example, support higher education–community partnerships that have demonstrated transparent and democratic collaborations with local partners, as well as genuine community benefit, not simply benefit to the college or university. In effect, this philanthropic support would be based on the “Noah Principle”—funding given for building arks (producing real change), not for predicting rain (describing the problems that exist and will develop if actions are not taken).¹ Rewarding promising partnerships that are producing real change could involve both deepening and sustaining the work at existing institutions and encouraging the expansion to other colleges and universities. Expansion would, of course, include adaptation to local contexts, based on the unique needs, strengths, and goals of each higher education institution and its community partners.

Applying the Noah Principle would reward education for citizenship and the public good. This would, however, have only limited impact if colleges and universities largely treat community engagement as a mere add-on and fail to connect it to teaching and research. To the contrary, they would need to do things differently, including identifying and reducing obstacles to effective university–community partnerships and raising up community-engaged scholarship as a powerful means for advancing knowledge.

Second, funders can serve as conveners. The convening power of foundations can bring academics, institutional leaders, community members, and other neighborhood stakeholders together to facilitate learning, planning, and development around shared interests. This would help strengthen local partnerships that create more equitable democratic communities.

¹ Ira Harkavy first became acquainted with the Noah Principle through a statement by Lewis V. Gerstner, Jr. (then President of American Express and later CEO of RJR Nabisco and IBM) at an education summit convened by *Fortune* magazine in 1988. Nancy J. Perry, “Saving the Schools: How Business Can Help,” *Fortune*, November 7, 1988, https://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune_archive/1988/11/07/71249/index.htm.

Foundations can also support associations and movement-building organizations that are focused on university-community partnerships and the democratic purposes of higher education—such as American Association of Colleges & Universities, Anchor Institutions Task Force, Campus Compact, Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities, and Imagining America, among others. Support for such organizations would enhance information exchange, problem solving, and skill and capacity building across institutions. Strengthening networks also results in improving the field of university civic and community engagement as a whole through conferences, webinars, publications, learning communities, and policy recommendations. The more universities combine insights, ideas, and resources to focus on and help solve multifaceted community and societal problems with their local partners, the greater the likelihood of advances in learning and well-being.

We hope that this White Paper stimulates discussion and action among and between academics, practitioners, higher education administrators, and government and foundation officials on realizing the public purpose of urban colleges and universities through local democratic partnerships.



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