Engagement Through University-Community Partnerships

Key Features of Successful University-Community Partnerships

David Wilson

The first group of American colleges and universities to dot the nation's landscape did not have public service, outreach, or engagement as a core component of their missions. In 1636, when Harvard University was founded, and for the institutions that were established over the next two centuries, the primary function of higher education was to produce an educated class of leaders. It was not until 1862, when Congress enacted the Morrill Act, that a different set of universities came into existence. Known as the Land-Grant Act, this sweeping piece of legislation brought into existence a cadre of institutions whose raison d'être was to provide access to higher education for common folk, and to produce research that could help America develop as a nation. These institutions, which ranged from Penn State University to the University of Florida, exist in every state in the nation and, arguably, have made higher education in America the envy of the world.

Today, from the State of Alabama to Alaska, and from Maine to California, American colleges and universities are playing active roles in creating change in their local communities, states, and regions. Many have even internationalized their mission as extending far beyond local communities; they see the world as their campuses and communities. We, at Auburn University, a land-grant University and the largest higher education institution in the State of Alabama, have devoted much effort over the last decade into crystallizing our mission and realigning the reward structure of the University to reflect the seriousness with which we take the outreach function.

Realignment of mission and rethinking of the tenure and promotion process at

Auburn did not occur overnight, but involved a nearly decade-long period of engagement among the faculty, senior administration, the governing board and citizens of the State of Alabama. We learned numerous lessons along the way, some of which I share with our colleagues across the nation who desire to place their universities at the core of efforts to promote community renewal, economic development, and social and educational policy reform.

What are some of the key features of successful university-community partnerships? And what are some of the lessons we have learned over the last decade?

Make Faculty Work Count Where it Matters Most – In the Tenure and Promotion Process

Institutions that are serious about developing university-community partnerships with faculty as the primary drivers of these initiatives must first determine how important these partnerships are in helping institutions carry out their missions. If university-community partnerships are important, the reward system must reflect the value placed on those partnerships. If faculty sense that their efforts are not valued at the university, there will not be a sustained effort given and, at best, these partnerships languish. At Auburn, as we thought about needs of the State of Alabama which were not being met, we immediately concluded that if we were going to unleash 1,200 faculty members to connect their research with the state's greatest challenges, we had to rethink what we were rewarding. In the beginning, we made it known to the entire University community that we were not interested in engaging in any efforts that would be perceived by faculty as "dumbing down" the University's research agenda.

What did we do? To further faculty understanding of outreach as an academic endeavor, I appointed a faculty-dominated committee to investigate the academic legitimacy of outreach.[28] Chaired by an associate dean (and full professor) of liberal arts, this committee provided a definition of university outreach that continues to guide our work today.

Outreach was defined as applying academic expertise to the direct benefit of external audiences in support of University and unit missions. A faculty endeavor may be regarded as outreach scholarship for purposes of tenure and promotion if all of the following conditions are met:

1. *There is a substantive link with significant human needs and societal problems, issues, or concerns;*
2. *There is a direct application of knowledge to significant human needs and societal problems, issues, or concerns;*
3. *There is utilization of the faculty member's academic and professional expertise;*
4. *The ultimate purpose is for the public or common good;*
5. *New knowledge is generated for the discipline and/or the audience or clientele; and*
6. *There is a clear link/relationship between the program/activities and an appropriate academic unit's mission.*

Outreach, the Committee concluded, is not expected of all faculty at Auburn, but those who engage in it would be subjected to the same, if not more intense, rigorous peer review process as those faculty members engaged in basic research.

The Committee further identified the lack of recognition for academic outreach in the University reward system as the primary impediment to the integration of outreach with other campus-wide missions. It called on me as the chief outreach officer to determine how best Auburn could design a peer review process to assess the quality of faculty outreach and, where appropriate, provide recognition to faculty who performed it well. The Faculty Senate adopted their report and thus set outreach on a different course at Auburn.

Given this recognition of outreach as an academic endeavor, a subsequent committee, chaired by a distinguished University professor, with several titled professors as members, was charged with developing a model whereby faculty outreach work could be recognized in the reward system.[29] That committee refined the conditions under which faculty work could be regarded as outreach and provided models for assessment, making clear that the process would need to work at the departmental level, and noting that the faculty handbook would have to be revised to provide for inclusion of outreach scholarship as coequal with teaching and research. The committee made it explicitly clear that this was not an effort to "dumb down" the faculty. Finally, the committee charged each academic department with developing guidelines for measuring outreach in which some faculty members perform below the benchmark, some reach it, others exceed it, and a few become models of excellence with national and even international reputations.

The leadership of the University Outreach Committee, joined by others throughout the University, is committed to the ideal of an engaged institution. Engagement, as defined by the Kellogg Commission, is a philosophical view about the nature and responsibilities of the American university in the present time. Engagement suggests that a vital, close, and reciprocal relationship must exist between a university and its various constituencies. This relationship goes beyond traditional extension, continuing education, and public service. According to the Commission, it embraces intentional institutional redesign of "teaching, research, and extension and service functions to become even more...productively involved with their communities, however community may be defined...Embedded in the engagement ideal is a commitment to sharing and reciprocity."

The groundwork has been laid at Auburn so that the intellectual resources of the University can be effectively applied to the needs of society and the University can reaffirm its land-grant mission in the context of "new and demanding" times. Through this reaffirmation, the intellectual work of the University has become more informed and more effective, whether in the form of undergraduate and graduate education, research, or outreach.

Understand and Appreciate a Community's History and Culture

Too often universities venture into communities like a bull in a china shop. We posture ourselves as "know-it-alls," having all the expertise that communities need and hell-bent on applying it with little or no regard for the history and culture of communities. This is a recipe for a bad marriage.

We have promoted a perspective at Auburn over the last decade or so to immerse ourselves into communities as deeply as we can when seeking to develop alliances and partnerships. Two exemplars of this approach are Auburn's Rural Studio and our Uniontown Cares program. Both of theses initiatives are set in the Alabama Black Belt region, a 12-county area of the state with some of the highest poverty rates in America.

Recognized as one of the most innovative contextual-based learning programs in the nation, the Rural Studio was founded by late Auburn University Professor Samuel Mockbee and former School of Architecture Department Head D.K. Ruth. Approximately thirty second-year architecture students spend an entire semester living in rural Hale County, Alabama, which is a three and one-half hour drive from Auburn's main campus. While there, they learn of the history of the region and come face-to-face with issues of poverty, institutional racism and its remnants, economic inequality, and environmental injustice. Under the guidance of University professors, these students have completed over thirty design/build projects ranging from homes to community centers. The students, the vast majority of them White and middle class, have rarely, if ever, lived in a community with poor Blacks who are eking out a living the best way they can. Our students undergo a paradigm shift after living in Hale County. They understand and respect the contributions Blacks in Alabama have made to the State's economic growth while simultaneously recognizing that their hard work on behalf of the State has returned little benefit to them. These architecture students come away from the Rural Studio experience with a deeper view of community challenges.

In Uniontown, Alabama, an area 15 miles from Hale County, Auburn University undertook another initiative to create local partnerships to revitalize an area that was once a thriving market center. Most of the plants had closed, unemployment was in the high double-digits, and sub-standard housing was the norm. The town was polarized around race, and many residents were disengaged from civic activities and local government. With support from the Kettering Foundation, a diverse team of Auburn University professors and outreach staff began to work with numerous partners in Uniontown, including elected officials, the private sector, and faith-based organizations, to create a strategic plan for the community. We also learned a great deal in Uniontown. Joe Sumners, Auburn's Director of the Economic Development Institute and one of the team members, described our efforts in Uniontown in this way:

"In the first phase of the Uniontown project, Auburn focused on working through an existing institution (the city government) and attempted to create a new one (a community development corporation) to help strengthen the community. This approach met with only modest success. It was not until Auburn changed its approach that we began to see real progress in 'community-building.' The lesson here is that real and lasting change requires an 'inside-out' and 'bottom-up' approach, in addition to 'outside-in' and 'top-down.' The lesson is not that economically disadvantaged communities need no external assistance or resources. They do. We remain convinced that university outreach efforts and other external resources can play an important role in bringing about positive change in communities. However, outside help will be much more effectively used when the community is itself fully engaged, and if it can define the agendas for which outside resources will be used." [30]

Working with the community, needs were identified and ultimately federal grant funding was secured to carry out many of those needs. As external funding was received to support community development initiatives, Auburn did not bring the largesse of these dollars back to the campus to support faculty research; instead, we hired individuals from the community to lead these initiatives and kept much of the external grant support in Uniontown.

Make a Commitment to Long-Term Engagement

Excellent community outreach is not episodic; it is programmatic, research-based, and often long-term. Many communities and regions in which we often work in Alabama are beset with problems and challenges that have mounted over decades of benign neglect. As we develop partnerships with others in the State to try and ameliorate some of these conditions, we take a long-range view of our engagement. For example, due to ongoing funding shortages, Alabama's public school systems are constantly faced with inadequate facilities, outdated equipment, and insufficient teacher support services to accommodate the educational needs of students. It is not uncommon for Alabama students to lack up-to-date textbooks, attend schools with leaking roofs or broken windows, or be taught by teachers who are not receiving ongoing professional development courses to enhance their curricula and teaching techniques. To combat many of these problems, Auburn University has created partnerships with city and county schools across the State.

The West Alabama Learning Coalition is one of these partnerships. It was created to address issues facing public schools located in Alabama's Black Belt. The Coalition was founded on the belief that educational improvement and community and economic development are interrelated and interconnected enterprises. Through this belief it was determined that the best approach to addressing public school issues was to create partnerships between school districts, institutions of higher education, gov-

ernment and community agencies, businesses, and prominent community leaders. The Coalition is able to sustain itself by attracting grant support from foundations such as the Jesse Ball DuPont Foundation and by anchoring itself in the Dean's Office in the College of Education. Many faculty members in the College see this effort as an extension of their research agendas, and their involvement in it is counted as part of their workload. Because the issues addressed by the Coalition are widespread throughout Alabama, Auburn University will sustain this effort for years to come.

Another example of the University's long-term engagement strategy is an effort called the Interstate 85 Corridor Initiative. As the largest major research university in the State, Auburn is also one of the State's largest employers. But beyond providing jobs for many people, Auburn has not seen much of its research result in innovation and spin-off companies. The University wanted to do something about this.

Initially, the role of the University was one of convenor and leader of an effort to bring together eight municipalities, four counties, numerous universities, and the public schools along a 91-mile stretch of interstate to create a regional vision and economic development strategy. Now that the network of more than 200 leaders has been mobilized, the University will take on a less dominant leadership role. We will become an active participant and provider of research-based expertise to help drive the regional strategy. We see this project as a 20-year effort if we are to truly transform our region into one of high prosperity and economic competitiveness. We are committed to this effort as long as Auburn University sits smack in the middle of Interstate 85.

Institutions of higher education wishing to engage in meaningful, significant, and relevant community outreach have no choice but to form strategic alliances and partnerships. Residents of communities are no longer receptive to academicians as lone rangers who come into communities and prescribe solutions to social, economic and educational needs and conditions without involving the communities in the solutions.

Community partnerships are important because they serve as convenors of people and communities who might not otherwise come together to address significant issues or conditions they face. In rural Alabama, one of the most prevalent and ongoing problems is the racial divide. Due to generational and deep-rooted racial tensions that exist in several parts of the State, it is often extremely difficult for community residents alone to look beyond ethnic differences and work on advancing their communities. We have discovered that when Auburn University's faculty with expertise in race relations, sociology, political science, economic development, or architecture enter communities as a diverse group, they provide an excellent stimulus in getting communities to productively discuss these issues, while simultaneously focusing on strategies for community improvement.

There are many benefits of university-community partnerships. Given the keen competition for external grant support to enable universities to work in communities,

universities must figure out how to sustain the engagement when funds dry up. The primary benefit of successful partnerships is that the process of moving towards sustainability is immediately put in motion. When residents, organizations, agencies, and local communities actively participate in outreach projects, the commitment to sustain the project is much greater than community projects that are spearheaded and conducted solely by academicians. As documented extensively in *Reinventing Government,* a book by David Osborne and Ted Gaebler, it is much better to empower communities than to merely serve them.

Successful partnerships also enhance student achievement by providing students with an opportunity to connect theory with practice. Students who attend institutions that provide them with opportunities to engage in outreach and service learning activities are able to experience firsthand how their respective areas of study are applied outside of academic settings. This type of student engagement promotes leadership development, character development, cultural and community understanding, and self-discovery.

Higher education in America has come a long way in 350 years. More and more, institutions see engagement with their communities as vital to the effective achievement of their tripartite mission. But if we cannot figure out ways to reward faculty who use their research to improve communities, I'm afraid this effort might remain on the fringes of what major research universities see as their primary mission – basic research. We have taken the initial step at Auburn to do this.

DAVID WILSON, *Ph.D. is Associate Provost and Vice President for University Outreach, Auburn University.*

A Public Citizen:
The Civic Role of an
Educational Institution
for the Betterment of Society

The University of Texas-Pan American Office of Center
Operations and Community Services (CoSERVE):
A National Model for Economic and Community
Development

Osvaldo Cardoza and Gustavo Salinas

The University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) is located in Edinburg, Texas, approximately twenty minutes from the United States/Texas-Mexico border. UTPA is an accredited, public institution with a student enrollment exceeding 15,000. With 85 percent of its enrolled students of Hispanic descent, UTPA is the university with the largest Hispanic student enrollment of any four-year institution in the continental United States.

Committed to excellence both on and off campus, UTPA offers forty-five bachelor's degrees, masters degrees in twenty-five fields, a doctoral program in International Business, and a cooperative Educational Leadership doctoral program with the University of Texas-Austin. It also seeks to complement its academic programs by reflecting and responding to the international, multicultural, and multilingual needs of the surrounding community through public service.

Civic Role in the Community

The University's civic service is made possible through CoSERVE. CoSERVE (Office of Center Operations and Community Services) is UTPA's institutionalized public service arm developed to improve the quality of life for the community and to foster innovative solutions to economic challenges unique to the South Texas-Mexico border. CoSERVE, under the auspices of UTPA's External Affairs Division, is comprised of twenty-three centers that provide education, training, and professional expertise to local, state, national, and international communities. The office is staffed by a team of faculty, professionals, and students.

Established in 1986, CoSERVE started as CEED, the Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development, with a grant from the Meadows Foundation. Through CEED, UTPA sought to support the region's economic development efforts by sharing its academic resources. Over time, local needs spurred the organization to branch out and to develop specific programs to address those needs. CoSERVE is now an umbrella organization with twenty-three centers involved in various facets of economic and community advancement, such as: small business development, housing, personal financial literacy, government procurement, agricultural development, U.S./Mexico border economic studies, nonprofit resource development, international trade, English language instruction, local government strategic planning, industrial development, and census demographic information. Essentially, through numerous collaborations with community nonprofit, public, and private organizations, and with local, state, and federal entities, CoSERVE acts as a catalyst to stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and improve the standard of living for all citizens.

Dual Purpose of Citizenry

Engaging an educational institution in the community is essential to the positive development of the community, as well as for the institution itself. UTPA recognizes that the purpose of education is not only to instruct individuals on facts and figures, but also to prepare them to address society's current and emerging questions or needs so that they might help build a better quality of life. For the institution, engagement provides insight into possibilities for future learning and can equip individuals with the ability to respond to community challenges.

> *"Traditional knowledge is only the collective memory of where that leading edge has been. At the leading edge there are no subjects, no objects, only the track of Quality ahead, and if you have no formal way of evaluating, no way of acknowledging this Quality, then the entire train has no way of knowing where to go. You don't have pure reason…you have pure confusion. The leading edge is where absolutely all the action is. The leading edge contains all the infinite possibilities of the future. It contains all the history of the past."* [31] – Robert M. Pirsig

For CoSERVE, involving itself in the community allows a better understanding of the realities faced in the region and helps us capture that "leading edge." UTPA is located in a region with significant needs, and to address those needs effectively, it must act as a citizen of its community. As a citizen, CoSERVE programs and staff involved in community projects gain insight through practical application. Through a fusion of classroom instruction, fieldwork, and experiential learning, the University is actually exemplifying citizenry as well as cultivating aware and responsible citizens. Ultimately, it produces a truly learned individual, one with real-world experience and the intellectual capacity to take ownership and responsibility to improve his or her

community. Concurrently, the University makes improvements in its understanding of how to better educate its students, staff, and faculty, as well as how to better develop its own academic programs necessary for building the skills of future citizens of the local community. Essentially, it is this "theory and practice" coupling that has made UTPA a pioneer educational institution.

CoSERVE Partnerships

UTPA lends its academic resources to community development, thus taking part in improving the standard of living for local citizens. It is a twofold advantage, however, as the University also contributes to faculty development by assessing its very own scholastic value to solving systematic issues in the area and validating itself as a true institution of higher learning. This benefit is largely made possible through community partnerships.

Community service is an integral party of UTPA's mission. In fact, CoSERVE's success in the community can be attributed to its very institutionalization at UTPA. By effectively utilizing University resources and private and public funding, and by establishing an organizational mission, CoSERVE has been able to form and cultivate relationships with various community organizations. By merging with local, state, national, and international programs, CoSERVE has attained mutually shared goals with its established partners and set numerous agendas for solutions. These collaborations often decrease duplicate services and enhance the limited resources of partners in the public service sector.

A few of CoSERVE's partners and/or funding sources include: U.S. Department of Commerce; U.S. Department of Agriculture; U.S. Small Business Administration; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; U.S. Census Bureau; National Institute of Standards & Technology; National Telecommunications & Information Administration; National Aeronautics & Space Administration; U.S. Department of Energy; Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Estadistica Geografia E Informática (INEGI) & the Secretaría de Economía; Levi Strauss Foundation; SBC Foundation; Fannie Mae Foundation, Exxon Mobil; Duke Energy; Dell Computer Corporation; IBM; The Boeing Company; Pfizer, Inc.; Lockheed Martin; public officials; regional chambers of commerce and economic development corporations; community development corporations; and various other nonprofit and private organizations.

Features of Successful University-Community Partnerships

In due course, CoSERVE has found that certain features augment the success of partnerships. The most significant are:

- **Communication** – Open communication between or among partners is essential to the planning and implementation of services. This allows for input,

direction, and innovation to address past, current, and future issues. For example, one CoSERVE center works closely with local housing programs to offer home-buying seminars. Constant communication among partners is necessary in order to provide the right information to clients on homeownership.

- **Collaboration –** Collective efforts enhance the efficient use of resources, allowing a broader depth and better reach of services to citizens to be met. For example, CoSERVE works closely with chambers of commerce in various cities. Through their chamber membership, CoSERVE is able to reach numerous small business owners with business training services.
- **Support –** Partnerships and programs must receive support from local leaders in order to come to fruition and to be maintained. Support can be financial, in-kind contributions, volunteerism, letters of support, etc. For instance, CoSERVE works closely with state and congressional representatives in securing funding and support from state and federal agencies to service their constituencies.
- **Flexibility –** The ability to adapt to changes in the environment is imperative to partner relationships due to the fact that each respective party has differing accountability standards with distinct reporting requirements. CoSERVE manages programs under several federal agencies and co-sponsors various projects with community resource partners. Not only does CoSERVE report to the funding agency, but it also must be flexible in meeting resource partner needs in implementing services, while maintaining its own requirements.
- **Vision –** Through engagement, CoSERVE and community partners are typically the front line to issues in the community. This insight automatically creates foresight for positive change when paired with community resources. For example, CoSERVE has involved itself in empowering residents of "colonias" (poverty-stricken areas along the U.S.-Mexico border) through basic skills education, counseling, and other services. Over time, CoSERVE has been instrumental in providing services such as financial literacy and homeownership through joint efforts with cities, counties, and nonprofit organizations.

As the environment in the Rio Grande Valley is always changing, it is necessary to adapt to it and respond with the necessary assistance to improve the health of the community. At this time, CoSERVE has the following twenty-three centers under its umbrella:

- Rural Cooperative Development Center (RCDC) – provides business training and technical assistance to existing and start-up rural cooperatives in the South Region.
- Center for Border Economic Studies (CBEST) – provides policy-oriented research on regional economic development and trade; the labor market and immigration; health and environmental policy; and information technology in the border region.

- International & Workforce Development (IWD) – provides educational opportunities for area business and industry, professionals, government agencies, public and private schools, universities, and the general public through high-quality training programs.
- Census Information Center (CIC) – makes census information available to underserved communities.
- Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (CEED) – serves as a catalyst for business and economic development, job creation, and income growth through the provision of a broad range of education and technical assistance targeted largely to economic development organizations.
- Center for Local Government (CLG) – improves the effectiveness and responsiveness of local governments in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas by providing an array of educational programs, applied research, and other services.
- Center for Manufacturing (CM) – works with area manufacturers to improve the manufacturers' operation and profits through implementation of technologies and techniques that produce high-quality products on time and with less cost.
- Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) – develops model partnership programs for enhancing sustainable economic and community development in "colonias" and rural areas.
- Data and Information Center (DISC) – increases the availability and accessibility of demographic census data and other information to data users.
- EDA University Center (EDA) – through technical guidance, assists distressed communities in achieving their long-term competitive economic potential through a strategic investment of resources.
- English Language Institute (ELI) – provides English language instruction to students, professionals, and other individuals whose first language is not English.
- Industrial Partnership Center (IPC) – assists manufacturers and suppliers in qualifying as vendors in a global manufacturing environment.
- International Trade & Technology (ITT) – globally promotes the region and state as an international commercial center.
- Mexican Business Information Center (MBIC) – aims to be the leading provider of Mexican data and information along the U.S.-Mexico border.
- National Center for Excellence (NCE) – serves as pilot program of education and training on rural poverty issues.
- Project FORGE (FORGE) – provides rural South Texas farms and ranches with business technical assistance and support.
- Small Business Development Center (SBDC) – offers quality business counseling and training.
- South Texas Minority Business Opportunity Committee (MBOC) – plans, coordinates, and delivers available resources to increase procurement contracts and international trade for local minority businesses.

Impact of Involvement

The University of Texas–Pan American is not a stand-alone institution, but a product and manufacturer of the very area it serves. It does not exist in a vacuum or deem itself an "ivory tower" and untouchable. Indeed, it recognizes itself to be a citizen of the community, both vulnerable and responsible to its environment.

Involvement in the community is the most reasonable way to evaluate and respond to the needs of the region. The Rio Grande Valley is dynamic and underserved to an extent that any impact, negative or positive, will affect all of those who inhabit the region, including the University. It is then crucial for members of the community, like the University, to take an active role in securing the overall well-being of local neighborhoods.

CoSERVE has led the way in community involvement. Indeed, it is commonplace for CoSERVE to take a leadership role in addressing issues critical to the livelihood of its surrounding communities. Through academic guidance, practical application, and community partnerships, CoSERVE has made a great impact in the South Texas Rio Grande Valley. In turn, the University has also made impressive strides in its academic capacity due to its engagement in the area. Some examples of these results include:

- **Employment –** The Rio Grande Valley suffers from double-digit unemployment. Over the past eighteen years, CoSERVE has been instrumental in job creation by helping to develop businesses with employment capabilities in the area. Since 1986, 10,000 new jobs have been created, reducing joblessness and stimulating further buying power.

- **Investment –** Regionally, the area's per capita income is below the U.S. average. The percentage of persons living in poverty is typically double that of the national average. Over the years, CoSERVE has actively participated in generating over $100 million in private and public investment in the area to spur economic growth and raise the standard of living for local citizens.

- **Health –** Due to the poverty of the region, many of its residents lack proper health care and depend largely on public welfare for medical assistance. CoSERVE scholars conduct policy-oriented health-related research and make this information available to policy-makers, business leaders, government officials, academics, students, and the border community in order to foster informed decision-making.

- **Empowerment –** In order to meet the needs of an underserved region, CoSERVE establishes partnerships by recruiting organizations and members of the community to build engagement and responsiveness. Community Advisory Committees are an integral element of many centers under CoSERVE. As such, involved citizens and organizations feel a vested interest in the success of community programs and feel empowered to make a difference.

- **Capacity –** Grassroots learning is almost inevitable in an area with such immediate needs. Both the University and its partners receive first-hand knowledge when dealing with community issues, making their learning much more valuable. A CoSERVE Ph.D. student tied applied research on housing projects to her dissertation, thus amplifying her scholastic work with real world experience. HESTEC, a CoSERVE conference for Hispanic students following a course of study in engineering and science, provides real insight into actual careers available to under-represented minorities. CoSERVE M.B.A. students work hands-on with small business owners that need technical guidance to operate their business, thus putting their learning to the test. Due to this engagement, many of these students stay on to become permanent employees and resources to CoSERVE.

Impetus for Civic Duty

"Private charities as well as contributions to public purposes in proportion to everyone's circumstances are certainly among the duties we owe to society."

– Thomas Jefferson

The University of Texas-Pan American defines itself as an institution committed to providing an environment of academic freedom in which faculty and staff engage in teaching, research, and service. The results of that research and creativity are shared with the general public through performance, presentation, publication, and public service activities.

As an institution of higher learning for its community, UTPA realizes that a quality education is largely bound by the results of its very application and the value it brings to the surrounding community. By involving itself in community service, the University itself has learned, and keeps learning, that civic duty is much more than an obligation, but is necessary for qualitative advancement. True knowledge is imparted not only through books, but also through experiencing and responding to real situations in the present, thereby creating citizenry. Characteristics like listening skills, respect, adaptation, compassion, understanding, acceptance, and experience are competencies for citizenship that can only be learned through practice.

Hence, the "front door" to the University is not just on campus, in lectures, or in a book, but in every point of contact where knowledge may be shared between the University and the community for the betterment of society. Every relationship created, whether it is with an organization, a student, a public leader, or a community member, must be nourished and seen as an opportunity for progress.

Education is ongoing and thus its composition must always be put to the test. Some test results may be negative, while others may be positive; the outcome can lead to produce learning and improvements. One positive outcome for the University of Texas-Pan American is its continuing ability to refute the theorem that "those who

can, do and those who can't, teach." Clearly, the positive results stemming from UTPA's application of knowledge toward public service point to the falsehood of this maxim. Indeed, it is only one of the many ideas that UTPA has set out to analyze, test, and improve, as should be the ongoing purpose of any educational institution.

Osvaldo Cardoza *is Director of the Community Outreach Partnership Center in the Office of Center Operations and Community Services at the University of Texas-Pan American.*

Gustavo Salinas *is Director of the Women's Empowerment Business Center in the Office of Center Operations and Community Services at the University of Texas-Pan American.*

A Partnership That's Making a Difference: The University of Pennsylvania's West Philadelphia Initiatives

Judith Rodin

Benjamin Franklin once observed that no sailing ship is ever designed, built, and captained by a single person. Franklin would have understood that in many distressed urban communities today, success will depend on the work of many, including local institutions – universities, in particular – that are willing to roll up their sleeves and work alongside their neighbors.

A belief in active corporate citizenship and enlightened self-interest formed part of the genetic material that Franklin passed on to the many institutions he founded, including the University of Pennsylvania. He would have understood immediately why it is so important for Penn and a growing number of urban research universities, which typically are the largest employers in their cities, to invest their intellectual, financial, and social capital in restoring their inner-city neighborhoods.

Franklin saw no inherent conflict or tension between doing well and doing good. In his "Proposals for the Education of Youth in Pensilvania," Franklin declared that fostering an "Inclination join'd with an Ability to serve Mankind, one's Country, Friends and Family should indeed be the great Aim and End of all Learning."

When pursued vigorously and simultaneously, the two missions – developing the inclination to do good and the ability to do well – merge to help form a more perfect university that educates more capable citizens for our democracy.

Penn's Daunting Challenge

For most of its history, Penn has been deeply engaged with urban issues. But it's

in the past decade that we have found new ways to *apply* our intellectual and financial resources toward the transformation of our own back yard. In revitalizing our West Philadelphia neighborhood, we found our true calling as an urban research university. We assumed roles and risks that no other university had ever taken on. We demolished walls that kept Penn and our neighbors from forging nourishing connections with one another. We created a model for urban universities to become the catalysts for neighborhood transformation.

When I returned to my hometown and alma mater in 1994 to assume the presidency of the University of Pennsylvania, I knew we were blessed with the academic strengths, resources, and history to be one of the premier teaching and research universities in the world. At the same time, I was acutely aware of the deterioration of the West Philadelphia neighborhood at Penn's doorstep. By the early 1990s, our University City neighborhood – a once-dynamic and gracious community of magnificent Victorian homes and lively diversity – had fallen on hard times. The community had grown poorer and more dangerous, with one in five residents living below the poverty level. Crime had risen significantly. The streets were littered with trash, and abandoned homes and buildings became canvasses for graffiti artists and business addresses for drug dealers. Three local elementary schools ranked at the bottom in state-administered math and reading tests.

Not surprisingly, shops and businesses were closing, pedestrian traffic was vanishing, and middle-class families were leaving. And despite the many individual efforts of faculty and administrators to reach out to the community, residents by and large still felt that Penn had turned its back on the neighborhood.

Could a university so alienated from a deeply distressed neighborhood at its doorstep continue to grow and prosper? That was the fundamental question we faced. While some counseled that the problems were intractable, others encouraged Penn to take a leadership role in revitalizing the neighborhood as a matter of enlightened self-interest.

Taking an Institutional Leap of Faith

During the early months of my presidency, I found myself persuaded by the latter perspective. I saw that investing in the neighborhood would pay academic dividends for Penn, and that this wasn't a zero-sum game, in which Penn would have to ransom its academic future to improve the fortunes of the neighborhood. I believed that for Penn to flourish academically, our neighborhood had to flourish as well.

Moreover, I felt strongly that we had an example of integrity to set for our students. The state of the neighborhood was our business. How could we educate and exhort our students to contribute to society if we did not offer them an institutional example of positive civic engagement? If Penn could make discoveries that saved lives and drove the global economy, then surely we had both the capacity and moral obligation to use our intellectual might to make things right at our doorstep.

However, it was one thing to support and recognize the great efforts of faculty and staff to take incremental measures to solve West Philadelphia's problems, if it fit within their research purview. But to offer to take the lead as an institution in redeveloping a distressed neighborhood that disliked us, and assume an unprecedented level of financial and social risk? That was a different story.

Yet, the neighborhood was in crisis, and only Penn had the capacity, the resources, and the political clout to intervene to stabilize the neighborhood quickly and revitalize it within a relatively short time period.

Terms of Holistic Engagement

So, we created a community development agenda in which we would strive to rebuild West Philadelphia's social and economic capacity by simultaneously and aggressively acting on five interrelated fronts:

- We would make the neighborhood clean, safe, and attractive with a variety of new interventions.
- We would stimulate the housing market.
- We would spur economic development by directing University contracts and purchases to local businesses.
- We would encourage retail development by attracting new shops, restaurants, and cultural venues that were neighborhood-friendly.
- We would improve the public schools.

I want to stress the point about our integrated approach. Many urban and other universities had taken action on one front or another, or had approached these issues sequentially. None had attempted to commit to intervening holistically on all fronts at once.

We also made certain explicit commitments about what we wouldn't do.

- First, we would never again expand our campus into residential neighborhoods. We would only expand to our east, which was made up entirely of abandoned buildings and commercial real estate.
- Second, we wouldn't act unilaterally. Instead, we would candidly discuss what we could do with the community, and we would operate with transparency.
- And third, we wouldn't promise what we couldn't deliver. Instead, we would limit long-term commitments to promises we knew we could keep – and we would leverage our resources by stimulating major investments by the private sector.

In my mind, nothing short of a revolution would do. We reoriented the entire administrative culture at Penn toward transforming the University and the neighbor-

hood simultaneously. To accomplish this, the leadership of Penn would take responsibility for directing and implementing the West Philadelphia initiatives. To underscore this commitment, our trustees formed a standing committee on neighborhood initiatives, equal in status to committees on university finance, development, and others.

Stabilize First, Proceed Directly to Growth

To make the neighborhood cleaner and safer, we strengthened our Division of Public Safety by hiring more police officers and investing in state-of-the-art technology. We also created a University City special-services district (UCD) that employs safety ambassadors who walk the streets and support campus and city police, and trash collectors who supplement city units. These were welfare-to-work participants, thus contributing to another social action goal.

In addition, we partnered with neighborhood residents, the electricians' union, and the local electric company to install fixtures to uniformly light the sidewalks of 1,200 neighborhood properties. Not only did these efforts create a brighter and cleaner neighborhood, which attracted more and more foot traffic, but by requiring whole blocks, rather than individual homeowners, to commit, we encouraged a revival of community associations, block by block.

This, in turn, led to greening projects – such as the planting of 450 trees and 10,000 spring bulbs and the creation of four public and three children's gardens – which set the stage for the dramatic transformation of the major neighborhood park from a dangerous drug-infested space riddled with broken glass and condom wrappers into a thriving recreational venue for children and the locale for a weekly farmer's market.

Along with making University City cleaner and safer, Penn had a major initial impact on housing, which itself had become a clean and safe issue. We began by acquiring twenty abandoned properties in strategic spots throughout the neighborhood, rehabbed them, and sold them to the public. We weren't seeking a profit on these homes. Rather, we were seeking to build capacity by stabilizing blocks and promoting home ownership.

Penn Becomes a Private Developer

We also stepped up our efforts to encourage more Penn affiliates to move into the neighborhood. But to make the neighborhood more attractive to residents, students, and visitors alike, we needed to provide retail and cultural amenities and engineer radical improvements in the public schools. We resolved to plan and build a public school, and we chose to undertake two large-scale mixed-use retail development projects in hopes that major anchors would bring shops, restaurants, theaters, and ultimately private investment and private development to University City.

Along one largely deserted stretch on Walnut Street, we built a 300,000-square-

foot project that included a luxury hotel, a beautiful new Penn bookstore, public plazas, and a raft of stores and restaurants. At the periphery of the campus, we bought out existing leases to make way for a 75,000-square-foot project that included a state-of-the-art movie theater and a very desirable food market – two amenities that our neighbors told us were desperately needed.

Now, scores of new shops that run the gamut are opening throughout the neighborhood, while a key commercial corridor bustles with art galleries, performance spaces, and an international restaurant row that reflects the dynamic cultural diversity of University City. Thousands of people – from the Penn community, from the neighborhood, from all over the region – are flocking to shops, restaurants, and cultural venues that came into being as a direct result of Penn's decision to redevelop a dying commercial core into a thriving, productive asset.

Having large crowds on the streets has made the neighborhood safer and much more exciting. It's been a shot in the arm for the local economy. And it has finally made University City attractive to outside private developers.

But this wasn't just about building and attracting amenities. This was also about building sustainable economic capacity back into the neighborhood by providing new opportunities for local businesses and job growth among neighborhood residents. Toward that end, we required that our construction projects create substantial access for women and minorities to the trades. We invested in small businesses that created opportunity for welfare-to-work recipients and other members of our local community. And we redirected a portion of our purchases toward West Philadelphia vendors. In seven years, we have purchased $300 million in goods and services from local businesses. And we are receiving incredible service.

These interventions have been remarkably effective in revitalizing the neighborhood. Over a seven-year period, crime has fallen 31 percent. We've added more than 150,000 square feet of new retail inventory, with 25 new stores opening over the past four years. We've encouraged the creation of thousands of new jobs for local residents. Thanks to a partnership with Citizens Bank, more than $28 million has been made available to local nonprofit community development groups, for-profit developers, small businesses, and homeowners.

Perhaps the most intriguing statistic of all is the population change. While Philadelphia as a whole has seen its population decline by 4.5 percent over the past five years, University City has seen an increase of 2.1 percent.

The Last Piece of the Puzzle: An Excellent Public School

Everything else we did made University City a much more enticing place to visit. But if we wanted to make the neighborhood more attractive for families, we had to improve public education. Yet, we could not have even begun to transform the schools had we failed to build safety, life, and economic capacity back into the neighborhood. We were also building and fostering relationships of trust among all our

neighbors to forge a community of shared values – a community in which we all would learn, and grow, and flourish together.

This was the context in which we resolved to do something substantial and dramatic to improve local schools. As much as Penn had worked in the past to improve the learning environment, we faced some hard facts. Children from low-income families by and large were trapped in struggling schools. Their parents had no choice and little hope of seeing their children receive a good education.

Middle-class families with school-age children in University City did have a choice: they could send their children to a private school or move to the suburbs. What was it going to take to give children from poor families a reason to hope, and middle-class families a reason to stay and become truly vested in the neighborhood?

The answer would become clear to a large number of stakeholders: an excellent new school. We chose to reach for the brass ring and create a Penn-assisted, inclusive neighborhood public school whose enrollment reflected the broad diversity of University City. Only a school of this magnitude would capture the public's imagination and send the strongest possible signal to our neighbors that Penn was deeply committed to a sustainable future for West Philadelphia.

However, for this public school to model best practices and innovations to the benefit of other neighboring schools and ultimately transform urban public education, it had to involve the School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers in a true partnership.

Nothing like this had ever been tried in the history of public education in America. First, it took a lot of persuasion and "gentle" arm-twisting to reach an historic, three-way agreement. It took another year of painstaking, thoughtful collaboration with educators and community representatives to come up with a design and plan for the school, and then another year of addressing the fears and concerns of residents – some of whom were suspicious of our motives, and others who didn't want to be left out in the cold.

But ultimately, with the great leadership of our Graduate School of Education, we were able to create a university-assisted, pre-K-through-8 neighborhood public school near Penn's campus that now accomplishes many things. It provides an excellent education for up to 700 neighborhood children. It is strengthening existing neighborhood schools by providing professional development and serving as a source of best practices. Because we linked the school to ongoing neighborhood revitalization, the school is also evolving into a community center that offers many benefits to the community: vocational, recreational, and adult education programs; cultural events; and a town hall where the community can come together to explore and debate issues and visions of the future. And by making University City more attractive to young families with children, the school has stabilized the neighborhood even further, while Penn continues to leverage our resources and investment in the new school to improve all local schools in West Philadelphia.

A Boost to Service Learning

Penn's institutional engagement in the neighborhood has energized the academic climate on campus. Nowhere is this more evident than in the world of academic-based service learning. The Center for Community Partnerships has played a leading role in integrating and connecting the academic work of students and faculty with Penn's overall engagement in West Philadelphia. By developing more than 150 rigorous, problem-solving courses *with* public school teachers and students, Penn faculty and students have created a dynamic sense of community that gets everyone involved in learning and growing.

The courses have fostered an improved learning environment in the schools and more homegrown neighborhood economic development. We have also observed a heightened sense of citizenship among our students, many of whom have become leaders in the civic engagement movement.

One example is geologist Robert Giegengack's class in Environmental Studies, which teaches fundamental research in environmental toxins. It's a tough, basic science course. But members of the class also apply some of what they have learned, by helping public school students and their families, most living below the poverty line, identify sources of lead in and around their homes. The undergraduates work with students from a nearby middle school to test soil samples from their yards, dust and paint samples from their homes, and assist in mapping the risk of lead exposure in the neighborhood.

In addition, the middle-school students work with the undergraduates to design materials that are disseminated to parents and neighbors, alerting them to the dangers of lead exposure and advising them on how to decrease the chances of lead ingestion by the group most at risk of its ill effects: pre-school toddlers.

As a short-term program of outreach and information dissemination, the course has succeeded. Area school children are now more knowledgeable about the problem of lead exposure in their homes and neighborhood, and middle schools in Philadelphia now have a unit of study installed in their curriculum that focuses on the lead problem. Moreover, the findings of the program are enabling us to better understand the epidemiology of lead exposure in Philadelphia, where the data are available to city health clinics and private practice pediatricians for analysis and research.

Engaging the life of the classroom with the problems of the real world contributes to a happier, healthier marriage between town and gown, which can inspire our students to become contributing, creative citizens.

The Fruits of Partnership

With strategic planning, brutal self-assessment, measurable implementation goals, guts, and some good luck, Penn indeed did transform its relationship with our neighbors, and in the process, we've all been happily transformed.

Ten years ago, few thought Penn had the guts to stick its neck out for its neigh-

bors. Today, we realize that by putting our money and reputation on the line to help revitalize University City, the neck we saved might well turn out to have been our own.

JUDITH RODIN, *Ph.D. is President Emeritus of the University of Pennsylvania.*