

# **University Education for Community Change:**

**A Vital Strategy for Progress on Poverty,  
Race and Community-Building**

**By Andrew Mott**

## **Community Learning Partnership**

The Community Learning Partnership explores ways of building a stronger infrastructure for learning in the field of community and social change. It works to expand writing, research, evaluation, teaching, training and learning opportunities which give grassroots community groups and their supporters easier access to helpful and provocative lessons from the extraordinary efforts and experience of their peers.

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**COMMUNITY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP**

*expanding education for community change*

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# Introduction to Second Edition

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When this report was published two years ago, it hit a responsive chord in the United States and internationally. Comments on the report and our experience since its publication have shown the pattern it described to be universal.

There are three interwoven strands in that pattern. First, in the US and throughout the world, there is a desperate shortage of people who are expert at bringing poor people together to build strong organizations and movements for tackling the immense issues they face daily – society’s most fundamental issues of entrenched poverty, prejudice, and people being left behind.

Second, domestically and internationally, pitifully few colleges or universities have created educational programs to address that often crippling “pipeline” crisis. This difficult work is left almost entirely to nonprofits.

Third, the university educational programs which do help people learn how to be effective community change agents suffer from being isolated, marginalized, and held back from developing the breadth and depth which would maximize their value. This pattern is as common in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe as in the United States.

The people who have pioneered important programs in the emerging academic field we call Community Change Studies deserve enormous credit. They have struggled against great odds, meeting resistance from traditional educators who look askance at multidisciplinary practice-based education. They have also faced skepticism from grassroots groups which are not convinced that academics can help them tackle the tough practical challenges of preparing people for careers in community and social change.

These pioneering efforts include impressive examples of the pay-off which can result when practitioners and academics work together to create learning opportunities for the community organizers, developers and leaders who are sorely needed throughout the world. These

programs are of incalculable value in helping the next generation learn how to play these roles with skill, broad knowledge, and sophisticated strategies. They thus contribute greatly to the success of efforts to involve grassroots people as leaders in transforming their own communities and expanding opportunities.

Since writing the report, the Community Learning Partnership has had an opportunity to concentrate heavily on these issues with others in the US and internationally. This experience has surfaced important additional examples of highly creative Community Change Education programs which are tailored to meet local needs. As with the programs profiled in this report, they vary tremendously, from mid-career Masters programs in Tanzania and rural Uganda to organizing apprenticeship programs and new courses on community organizing and civic education in the US. Collectively they offer valuable lessons for us all.

Recent experience has fortified our earlier conclusions on the urgent need to develop concerted strategies for strengthening current Community Change educational programs and establishing new ones. In the US it is also providing us with exciting opportunities to work with others in creating new programs which focus specifically on educating people of color and others from low-income and working-class neighborhoods for important roles as community leaders and change agents.

As a result, the Community Learning Partnership is now pursuing a three-part strategy for expanding University Education for Community Change. This strategy includes –

1. Developing and enriching pilot educational programs which are tailored to provide young and midcareer people with new opportunities to develop their knowledge, skills, effectiveness and impact as organizers and leaders of community and social change efforts;
2. Developing new ways of encouraging others to learn from these programs and to launch new initiatives which respond to local needs

and opportunities for expanded education and training for community change agents; and

3. Developing new networks to enable now isolated academics and practitioners to learn from and collaborate with each other in building this important new field of study.

Some of this work has been focused internationally, bringing together leaders in the field of Community Change Studies for peer learning and collaboration across the globe. Through the International Working Group on University Education for Community Change, a number of us are collaborating to provide educators and activists from different countries with new opportunities to learn from the highly creative programs which are emerging in different parts of the world. Our goals are to help them use this knowledge to broaden current programs and develop new ones, while also helping generate the recognition and resources their programs need to expand and succeed.

Through this international collaboration we are learning that we share a common vision of the key components and values for any program of Community Change Studies. This

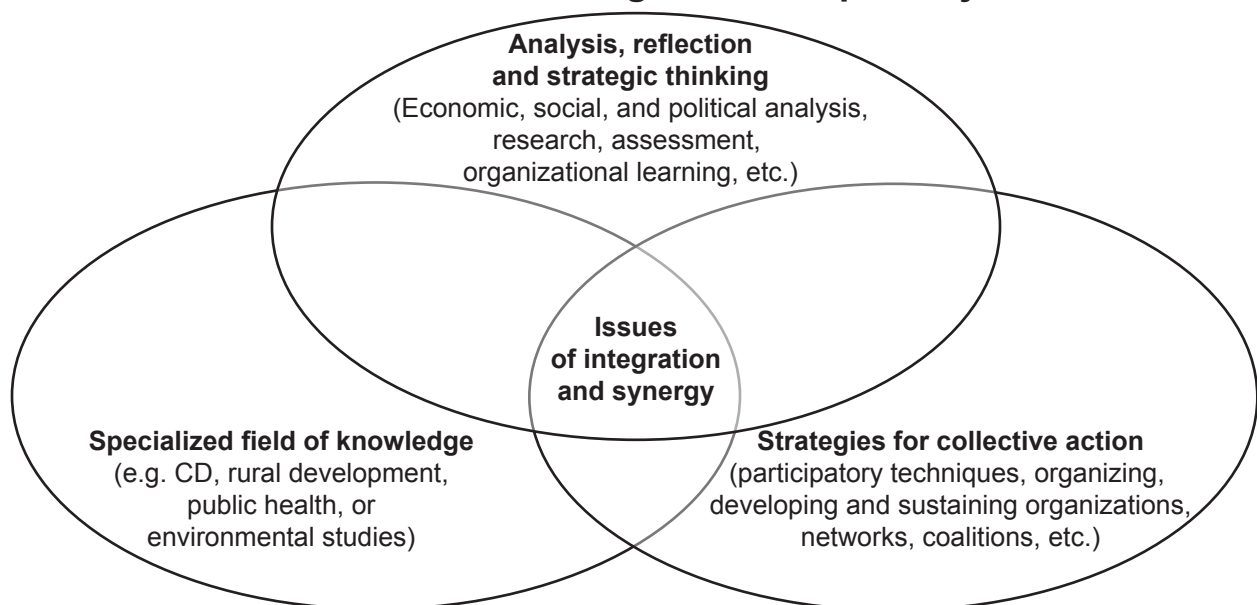
vision is remarkably similar despite the rich variations in our programs, each of which is deeply grounded in local needs and circumstances.

A number of key concepts and strategies have emerged as we have combined on-the-ground program development with exploring theory and practice. These should be useful to others who share our interest in expanding education and training for people seeking to create significant community and social change.

One central point of consensus emerged during a two-day meeting at New York University. All the participants agreed that three areas of study should be combined in education and training programs on community change so students have the full range of knowledge and skills they will need. These are depicted in the Venn diagram below. They include mastery of –

- the tools of collective action – getting people involved and participating, organizing them for action, and helping them build movements and organizations through which they can have a growing impact;

### Areas of Knowledge and Competency



- strategic thinking, analysis and reflection (or STAR) – helping people understand the environments in which they are working, including analyzing trends, power, and potential allies, and developing their skills in strategy and reflection so they can become increasingly effective; and
- knowledge of the specific issue(s) they are most concerned about, including understanding the root causes, current policies, how decisions are made, and alternative strategies for creating significant change.

The values and vision behind community change work are also consistent from country to country. They provide a guiding framework which underpins all our thinking and planning. The principal values which unite us are –

- a bedrock commitment to democracy, to strengthening democratic practice, and to helping ordinary people create social and community change from the bottom-up; and
- an equally strong commitment to justice and to helping community leaders and grassroots organizations and movements build the strength, vision, and practical programs and policies which are needed to significantly reduce poverty, discrimination and exclusion.

Members of the Working Group are candid in acknowledging that most of their own programs do not yet offer this breadth. Instead they focus on developing only one or two of these forms of expertise. One key reason is that -- because the importance of Community Change Education is not yet widely recognized -- they find it extremely difficult to garner the resources and bring together the faculty and practitioners needed to broaden their programs to offer a full range of courses and field experience.

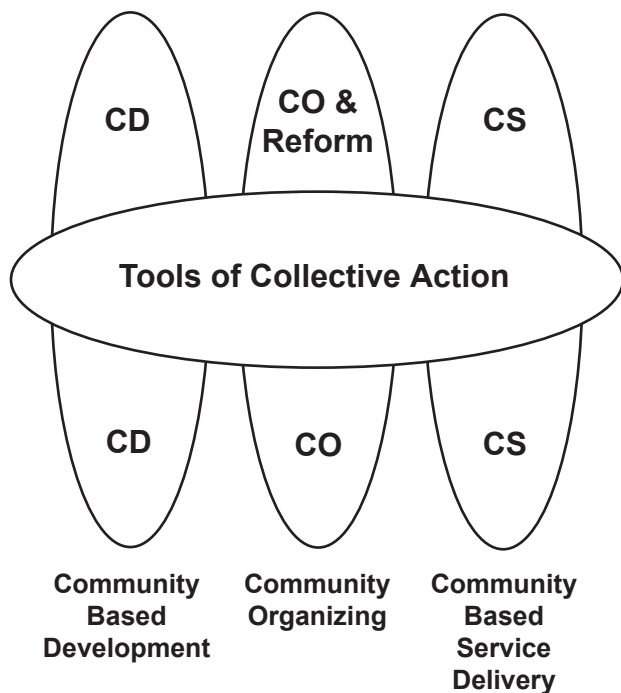
Despite this reality, the Working Group's members strongly desires to achieve that balance and richness in their own curricula and

in programs which are developed in the future. We find that Community Change Studies is most successful when it combines these three key elements in an integrated program within a framework which reflects the strong common values and vision which are central to community change.

We have fleshed out each of these three areas of competency. The tables at the end of this introduction highlight the full set of skills and knowledge which are needed by people who are seeking substantial improvements in their communities and major policy and institutional reforms.

The Partnership sees knowledge of the “tools of collective action” as being fundamental to any significant change strategy. Democratic change requires the involvement of large numbers of people in setting the agenda, taking the leadership, and making major decisions. Creating this level of involvement requires skill in fostering people's participation and channeling it into action.

How deep must a person's collective action skills and knowledge be? That depends upon the roles he/she plays and the strategies their organizations follow. Professional “organizers” organizing large numbers of people to build power and press major institutions for reforms need extensive skills in every aspect of collective action, including leadership development and sophisticated campaign strategy development. Those who concentrate instead on service delivery or community development programs or on community change education need a basic grounding in participatory techniques to ensure their approach is democratic and their programs are responsive to community needs, accountable to the people they serve, and successful in accessing resources from recalcitrant public agencies or other institutions. The following diagram illustrates the different levels of depth of knowledge of the “tools of collective action” which are required by different types of community workers – developers, organizers and service providers.



In addition, there is unanimity about the importance of incorporating three ways of learning into each curriculum. Together they reinforce each other, deepening a student's mastery of the subject and his/her ability to apply their new knowledge and skills in their community work. As illustrated below, these three techniques for learning are –

- reading and classroom work, including attention to theory and to learning from the experience of others;
- experiential education through field work with expert mentoring; and
- a strong emphasis on disciplined reflection which deepens each student's learning from both theory and practice.

Cooperative educational approaches which combine study, work and reflection are particularly powerful. Highly realistic situations create great opportunities for people to test the theory and ideas they gain from reading, research, and discussion. And "academic" programs enable practitioners to go beyond the immediate issues they face to analyze their

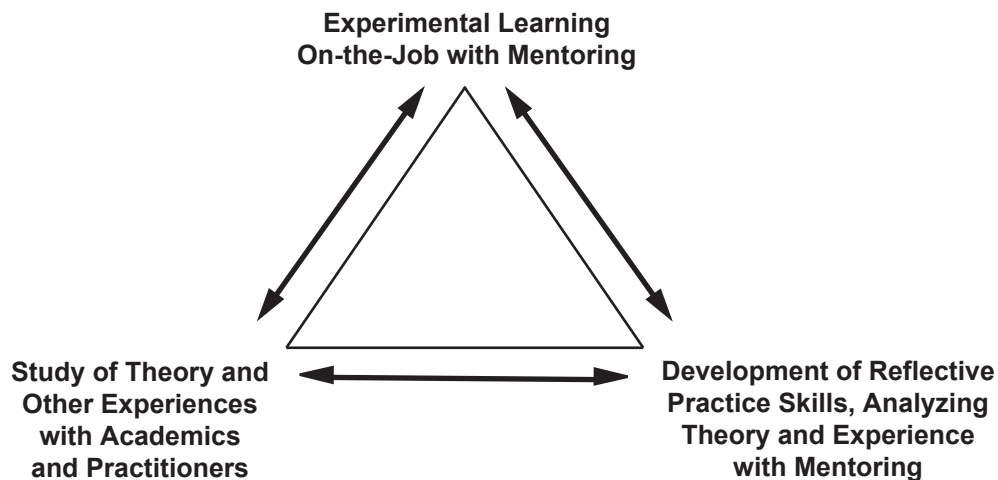
historical context, examine root causes and the roles various institutions play, and learn about the widely varying, often highly creative strategies which others have pursued in addressing those issues.

Experienced practitioners clearly have important roles to play as educators, bringing great knowledge and skills to teaching in this field. However, their full involvement in university programs is still rare. While some college programs involve practitioners as formal adjunct faculty-members, or in co-teaching with regular faculty, or as guest lecturers or "community scholars", there are tremendous barriers to involving practitioners in these ways. Unlike medicine and other fields in which "clinical" professors are understood to be essential, community change educators teach in academic departments which are leary of being too practice-based. Their reward systems are usually biased against faculty-members who stress field work, multidisciplinary studies, or community service rather than research, and promotions are contingent upon success in publishing heavily researched and highly academic articles in prestigious journals.

Academics can make tremendous contributions in developing people's knowledge and skills related to community and social change. In particular, experts in learning techniques and in developing people's analytic and strategic capacities can add greatly to the depth of the understanding, thinking and learning skills of their students, be they traditional students or activists, organizers, developers, researchers, or otherwise engaged in bringing about social change.

Furthermore, anchoring practitioner education in colleges and universities can add greatly to its credibility and enables practitioners to earn credentials and the concomitant respect and influence. Other advantages of higher educational institutions? Their unparalleled access to young people and to special funding





streams from government and philanthropy for tuition subsidies, scholarships, program development and other purposes.

Leading nonprofits and nongovernmental organizations have, of course, created their own training programs, many of which are of exceptional quality. In the US, for example, some national community organizing networks offer 2, 5, 10 or 20 day training programs on organizing, plus additional in-service education. There also are nonprofit-run certificate programs in community economic development (as well as university degree programs) in that field. To date, however, none of these nonprofit-initiated programs offer their students college credit – an especially significant benefit for people who, because of income or other barriers, have not had an opportunity to earn academic credentials which can help them in their careers. Furthermore, these nonprofit training programs are starved for resources: unlike college-based programs they do not have access to streams of government funding for tuition, scholarships, stipends or seed money.

Practitioners feel the pipeline crisis acutely. Many see the need to design dramatically new pathways into organizing and for “continuing education” programs to enable practitioners to gain the knowledge, practical experience, and academic credentials which will help them increase their impact. The Community Learning Partnership therefore is working with

community organizers, nonprofit leaders and academics in several American cities to build new partnerships between the nonprofit and academic sectors to tap into the talent and resources each sector offers, creating ambitious new educational programs which respond to the talent crisis.

Another key concept which is emerging from the Partnership’s work is the need to create lifelong learning opportunities in the field of community change. Because of the complexity of the challenges which poor and excluded people face and the barriers to significant social change, change agents need access to additional training, education, and assistance at different points in their careers. This starts with making young people aware that they can have careers in which they are paid to tackle issues of poverty, discrimination, and community development, while also creating new educational pathways into those careers. It includes opening up learning opportunities in high schools, community colleges, and universities to provide the combination of “hard” skills, theoretical understanding, and competencies in strategic thinking, analysis and research skills which effective organizers need. And it includes opportunities for midcareer education when people are at important junctures, especially when they need the stimulus of being with peers, teachers and trainers, focusing on challenging issues they face, being

## Matrix on Lifelong Learning

	<b>Tools of collective action</b>	<b>Strategic thinking, analysis, reflection</b>	<b>Issue expertise</b>
<b>Grassroots training</b>			
<b>Certificate or AA</b>			
<b>4 year BA</b>			
<b>Postgraduate</b>			
<b>Midcareer</b>			

exposed to new ideas, analyses, and strategies which are new to them, and preparing for the next stages in their careers.

Pioneers in Community Change Education therefore have developed specific programs which are geared to be helpful at different points in people’s careers. The following chart illustrates the continuum of lifelong learning in community change studies.

In our work in the US, the Learning Partnership has identified four major sources of potential candidates for careers in community change. These are depicted in the chart below.

At the Partnership, we have chosen not to focus on recent college graduates at this point but instead to concentrate on the other three talent pools. We have made this choice so we can focus heavily on the fundamental problem which gravely weakens community organizing and change work in the United States today –

the shortage of people of color and low-income people as organizers and community change agents.

This shortage now feeds on itself in a vicious cycle. On the race issue, for example, because there are few organizers of color, there are relatively few minority candidates for advancement to positions as executive directors, consultants, and trainers. This pattern contributes to the perception among many minorities that the community organizing field is dominated by whites. This in turn reduces organizing’s ability to attract people of color into organizing and community change work.

To help break this cycle, we are concentrating on two approaches.

First, we are focusing on creating programs for new organizers and leaders, especially people of color and people from low-income and working class neighborhoods. The goal of these programs is to address directly the often crippling shortage of community organizers

## Sources of Students

<p><b>1. Youth in Low-Income Neighborhoods –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially people of color, including kids not now college-bound</li> <li>• Showing interest in and potential for organizing</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. Community Leaders –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Especially people of color</li> <li>• With experience in organizing, being a leader, sharing power</li> <li>• Showing potential to be organizers</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. University Students –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showing interest and potential but without access to educational pathway on community organizing and social change</li> </ul>	<p><b>4. Early and Midcareer Organizers –</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At critical point in careers and needing chance to reflect, learn, look ahead</li> </ul>

and change agents who – because they have directly experienced poverty and exclusion -- are particularly well-equipped to lead and organize efforts to change these conditions. The programs therefore include –

- targeted recruitment efforts through a system of “spotters” in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color;
- curricula which address issues of identity, race, class and gender as well as the combination of practical experience and knowledge-building which organizers need;
- pathways which start with practical training outside university walls and morph into college degree programs linked to continuing on-the-job experience with organizing campaigns;
- programs which allow a person to earn credentials as they advance, proceeding step by step from credit for individual courses to a college certificate, AA, BA and advanced degrees; and
- a combination of stipends or salaries and low or free tuition to make the education affordable.

To make these programs sustainable and able to move to scale, CLP and its local partners are leveraging the impact of their private funding by designing programs which take full advantage

of existing flows of government funds. These include –

- youth employment stipends;
- subsidized tuitions in state and local institutions of higher education;
- federal stipends through VISTA and other Americorps programs; and
- the \$4725 those programs grant to their graduates for education.

Most of these resources are, of course, not available to stand-alone nonprofit training programs.

Second, we are beginning to work with others in the US to address the need for intensive midcareer education for organizers. Our shared goal is to reduce the rapid turnover which is now hemorrhaging community change work. We believe that midcareer seminars and educational programs can reduce turnover substantially if they are designed specifically to address staff burnout and discouragement, providing them with a respite from their normal pressures and an opportunity for renewal. These programs should provide people who already have 5, 10 or more years of experience with opportunities for reflection, peer learning and support, intellectual stimulation, and renewal of their vision and sense of vocation. They also should enable participants to develop new skills and strategies, prepare them-

<b>History, theory and values</b>	Where are you in your journey as an organizer? What do you want from this learning community? Identity, satisfaction and frustration, thinking ahead to the next challenge	History of social movements and organizationbuilding in the city and the US	Values, theory and vision behind organizing, community change and community development efforts; different schools of thought on building organizations, coalitions, etc
	Balancing work and your personal lives, family, friends, etc.		

selves for growing management and leadership responsibilities, and earn a graduate certificate or degree. Involving academics who are grounded in community work as well as leading organizers and community change leaders from the US and overseas would add greatly to the appeal and stimulation midcareer programs can offer.

In early planning for one possible midcareer program in the US, we developed the following matrix to illustrate the mix of courses we were considering. This listing provides an example

of the stimulating combination of learning topics which could be included in a new Master's level program in Community Change Studies.

<b>Trends and challenges affecting community and social change</b>	Class, race, gender, age in the US; addressing issues of bias and institutional behavior	Demographic and public policy changes and their implications for community groups in the city; challenges of working across race, class, gender and age lines	Growth, gentrification, and urban trends and their implications for grassroots groups
	Globalization and the relative decline of the US economy – implications for city neighborhoods	The changing role of government, including the reduction in social programs, and its implications	Current philanthropic trends and their impact on organizing and issues of poverty and race

<b>Trends and challenges affecting possibilities and strategies for progress</b>	Advanced organizing and leadership development	Coalition-building and partnership strategies	Building solid, sustainable organizations; management for midcareer organizers
	Developing staff; creating a learning community	Preparing for the long haul and continually rejuvenating your career in community change	Fundraising and financial planning

<b>Skill-building</b>	<b>Option 1:</b> Participatory and action research; citizen monitoring and accountability	<b>Option 2:</b> Advanced use of technology	<b>Option 3:</b> Strategic communications
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<b>Issue knowledge</b>	<p><b>Independent study on moving to scale and creating reforms on specific issues you work on (eg. Jobs, housing, youth development)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understanding root causes of the issue, the broad policy issues, and the roles of key institutions and actors</li> <li>- becoming familiar with different strategies others have used</li> <li>- developing vision and direction for longer-term work on the issue</li> </ul>
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	<b>First Semester</b>	<b>Second Semester</b>	<b>Third Semester</b>	<b>Fourth Semester</b>
<b>Residencies</b>	A            B	C            D	E            F	G            H
<b>History, theory and values</b>	History of social movements and CO in the US	Values and theory behind organizing and social change efforts	Challenges to democracy and strategies for rejuvenation	Thesis or Practicum
<b>Trends and challenges affecting community and social change</b>	Class, race, gender, age in the US  Challenges presented by ecological crisis	Demographic and social changes 101  Globalization, shifts in global political and economic power structures	Demographic and social changes 102  Collaborative inquiry on particular challenges in the US	

## The Work Ahead

In 2009 the International Working Group will publish a book on the current state of the art in Community Change Studies globally. Drawing from our international research and dialogue and our concentrated work in the US, it will set forth a plan for developing this field of studies over the next 10-20 years. Central to this plan will be the launching of an ongoing international network, with sub-networks in Latin America and other regions as well as increased networking within the US. It will include plans for creating ongoing opportunities for peer learning and collaboration on common issues and on systematically growing this emerging field of study.

At the same time the Community Learning Partnership will continue working with others to expand Community Change Studies in the United States. If the US is to successfully address poverty and race and to strengthen both our democracy and our communities, we must greatly increase the number of community change agents with the skills and sophistication to work with local people on these tough challenges. This will require that we create new partnerships and educational pathways, supported with significant new private and public funding and the best talent we can marshal from the practitioner and academic worlds.

We are finding the cross-fertilization of ideas and approaches between US and international initiatives to be of tremendous value. It enriches thinking in both spheres, exposing all of us to an exceptionally broad range of experience and creative strategies. It also gives us new perspective on how our individual work fits into a broader worldwide process of knowledge-building on how best to foster democratic change and greater social justice wherever we live and work.

## Main Areas of Competency for Community Change Studies

### 1. Tools of collective action

- Skills in eliciting participation
- Bringing people together to participate
- Developing consensus
- Community organizing
- Developing leadership
- Moving people into action
- Developing programs
- Building coalitions, alliances and partnerships
- Building broader efforts and movements
- Using different strategies for impact – services, development, advocacy, etc.
- Developing accountable, sustainable organizations
- “Managing”, starting with being systematic, leading teams, And then developing advanced management and leadership skills

### 2. Strategic thinking, analysis, and reflection (STAR)

- Self-awareness and identity
- Understanding culture, race, class, gender, etc.
- Centering your work in community values
- Understanding the environment in which you work, power analysis, economics, social structure, culture
- Reflective practice
- Strategic thinking, planning
- Action research, especially PAR and Citizen Monitoring
- Evaluation and organizational learning

### 3. Issue expertise (e.g. public health, women's issues, community development)

- Understanding the immediate issue or project
- Understanding its root causes
- Understanding any underlying policy issues
- Understanding how decisions are made, who makes them, and what points of intervention exist
- Identifying potential partners and allies
- Being equipped with the facts and technical analysis needed
- Developing vision and direction for achieving growing, longer-term success on the issue

# Foreword

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Like many others who have worked on issues of poverty, race, and community and social change, I have become increasingly concerned about the future of this important work. At a time when the political and economic environments are particularly challenging, there is a dangerous shortage of people who are fully prepared for the tough but absolutely essential work of leading the grassroots organizations which both strengthen America's low-income communities and expand opportunities for people our society often leaves behind.

Because of the enormous immediate challenges low-income organizations face, few nonprofits and funders have set aside time and resources to educate and develop the next generation of leaders for these vital social and community change efforts. Understandably, we have focused on the urgent work which must be done immediately, helping people tackle issues which are central to revitalizing communities and expanding opportunities. The unfortunate result – **we have invested too little in developing sufficient numbers of people with the vision, breadth of knowledge, commitment and skills needed to tackle the enormous issues which low-income communities and people of color face in America today.**

In thinking about this massive challenge, I have often wondered why universities do not play a more significant role. If poverty, race and community are such central issues for our society, why don't institutions of higher education develop programs to educate people for careers as leaders and supporters of community change efforts? How much potential do universities have for preparing people for these careers? If the potential is great, what should be done to ramp up university-based programs so they educate more young people for careers in community change and help mid-career people hone their skills and broaden their knowledge so they can increase their impact?

Thinking back on my own early career, I have often been puzzled and frustrated by the fact that fewer than a handful of American universities offer the kind of interdisciplinary program mixing classroom work and experience at the community level which was offered forty years ago in Iran when several of us taught courses in "National Development" at Pahlavi University, preparing students for careers in rural development.

In the intervening years since Iran, I have devoted my career to providing advice and assistance to organizations through which poor people represent their interests on issues which concern them. Working directly with grassroots groups, overseeing a far flung program of technical assistance and policy support for hundreds of such organizations, and working in policy circles, I have become even more convinced that it is essential to foster the development of democratic community organizations. These groups give poor people and people of color a voice and real influence in their own communities and in the arenas where government, the private sector, and major nonprofit institutions make decisions which powerfully impact their lives.

I have also been reminded frequently of the difficulty of organizing communities, especially disadvantaged ones, and bringing about significant change against great odds and the opposition of powerful defenders of the status quo. This work takes great skill, knowledge, and analytic and strategic strengths, as well as commitment, creativity, courage, and openness to learning. It is unconscionable that America's well-endowed and powerful institutions of higher education have, by and large, ignored the challenge of helping prepare the leaders and organizers which these communities, and America as a whole, need so badly.

With support from a grant to Community Catalyst by the Community and Resource Development Program of the Ford Foundation, I have had the great privilege of devoting concentrated time to exploring these questions.

To get a clearer sense of the current status of university-based programs which relate to community change, I interviewed over sixty people, most of them in universities throughout the US, and reviewed curricula, course materials, books and articles. This report reviews what I have learned during this brief but stimulating scan, and highlights the conclusions I have drawn from it. It includes recommendations on practical steps which would substantially increase the relevance and impact of American universities in opening up new opportunities for communities of color and low-income people.

In thinking through what kinds of leaders are needed, we must start with a theory of change, a theory of how social and community change can happen on issues of poverty, race, and community improvement, and what background and skills leaders need to lead that process of change. The theory which underlies this report has several elements –

- Low-income communities must be the prime movers in order to ensure that the change reflects their needs and priorities;
- They must build their own effective organizations to represent their interests, and they must hold those organizations accountable;
- They cannot achieve success on their own but need the power and influence of allies, partners and coalitions;
- Their success requires broad knowledge and analytical skills, expertise in involving people and developing leaders, a long-range vision and sophisticated strategy;
- It also requires that people be organized to build real power as there will be great resistance to change and they will need to win the competition for resources and policy reforms which will benefit disadvantaged communities; this will require community organizing and the building of alliances and coalitions;

- These challenges require leaders and organizers with remarkably broad backgrounds and a variety of forms of expertise;
- While people can learn and develop all these capacities through experience, trial and error, they will develop far more quickly if they have an opportunity to learn through a combination of structured learning opportunities, practice and critical reflection; and
- University-based programs can be one important route for developing these leaders, but those programs must be reshaped to accomplish this specific purpose, and they must involve practitioners as well as academics in teaching so they can offer the combination of knowledge, skills, and vision which are needed to have an impact on the fundamental issues which face our societies.

I am deeply grateful to Mil Duncan, former Director of the Ford Foundation's Community and Resource Development Unit, and Miguel Garcia, Acting Deputy Director of that Unit, for their generous support and strong encouragement for this work. I also would like to thank Annemarie Ewing for her editing help, Margaux O'Malley for layout and design, Kate Villers, Rob Restuccia, and Rosemarie Boardman of Community Catalyst for making this work possible.

– Andrew Mott, May 2005



# Chapter I: The Growing Challenge

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**P**overty, race, and strengthening the social fabric by strengthening community institutions – there is broad agreement that these are central issues for the United States. Poverty is growing as increasing numbers of people are being left behind by our economy, our educational institutions, and our traditional system for providing social mobility. Race relations are becoming more complex as our nation becomes far more multicultural and issues of racial justice and racial tensions simmer. Our social fabric and democratic institutions are under strain, as concern grows about the extent to which our community institutions have the strength, openness and leadership to bring and hold people together, creating the webs of close ties, common values, helping relationships and democratic traditions which are so important to successful communities.

**There is also broad agreement that community organizations of various types must be central to any strategy for addressing the interlocked issues of poverty, race, and social fabric.** In this era of government retrenchment it is clear that the public sector will not take the lead in addressing these issues. Nor are large nonprofit institutions well-suited for this task, as they typically work area-wide and must balance many interests and activities rather than focus on particular communities. And the traditional civic concerns and leadership of local business are being weakened as mergers and globalization reduce the number of hometown corporations and local corporate leaders.

There is no choice: Leadership on poverty and race therefore must come from the community itself. Well-led, truly community-based organizations can become uniquely knowledgeable about the community's needs, skilled at involving large numbers of volunteers to work on priority issues, and effective in ensuring that new resources, partnerships, policies and programs are developed to strengthen the community. They also can become vital bridges

for linking people together across racial and economic lines to address issues of race and poverty.

Strong, well-led community organizations are therefore essential to the success of other partners in the process of community change. Without effective systems for involving community residents, efforts to reform public education, increase public safety, or transform the lives and attitudes of community residents will fail. So will initiatives which are designed to improve housing and sustain it over the long-run, or to prepare hard-to-employ people for lives of work and a chance to move up. All these reforms require changes in people's attitudes and the development of systems which are sensitive to a community's unique opportunities, are "owned" by those they are serving, and enlist strong neighborhood backing.

There is growing recognition of these lessons in major public and private institutions. Many police departments, public health and mental health professionals, experts in youth and family development, workforce development specialists, and foundations creating "comprehensive community initiatives," for example, have concluded that they must work through community-based organizations if they are to achieve their goals.

As agreement has grown on the central importance of grassroots groups, there has been very substantial investment in those organizations. Foundations, churches, corporations, government agencies, and others have invested billions of dollars in community organizing, community development and community-building. Low-income people, especially people of color, have invested huge amounts of volunteer time in building organizations through which they work to change their communities and public policies for the better.

The need for grassroots organizations and well-trained people to lead them is certain to increase. As new immigrant groups settle into the United States and as the working poor, people of color, young people and the elderly grow in relation to the rest of the population,

## ***Strong, well-led community organizations are essential to the success of other partners in the process of community change.***

they will need to band together on the particular issues they face. They will need formal and informal groups through which they can join with their peers, represent their interests, meet their immediate needs, and increasingly serve as partial substitutes for the government agencies which are shrinking as the social safety net weakens. People will therefore be strongly motivated to create a new generation of self-help and mutual help organizations, drawing on the unique American traditions of self-reliance, the building of strong voluntary associations, and vital support for those associations by private philanthropy.

Reliance on grassroots groups will grow as tax cuts, military expenditures, the shaky economy, and conservative social and fiscal policies further reduce support for social programs. Poverty will increase dramatically: government cutbacks are reducing services and income transfer programs, and low-income people of all races are facing growing barriers to advancement because, while the need for a well-educated workforce is growing, they typically face poor schools, the digital divide, and increasingly unaffordable higher education. The gap between rich and poor will widen rapidly unless the political and fiscal situations change dramatically. Because poor people cannot count on the public or private sector or large nonprofits to take the lead in changing this situation, there will be a growing need for strong nonprofits which represent and serve poor and working people.

There is by now a rich body of experience with different strategies for strengthening low-income communities. These include community organizing, community development, and approaches to reforming the public and private sector policies which have such an impact on neighborhoods and on each person's chance to

get ahead.<sup>1</sup> **There is much to learn, and it is essential that people who lead these vital efforts have opportunities to learn from the experience of their predecessors and peers. Informed with this knowledge, they will have a far greater chance of succeeding in bringing about significant social and community change.**

### **The Crisis in Leadership**

**D**espite the growing consensus on the critical importance of grassroots organizations, and despite this major investment and growth, the field of community change faces a mounting crisis of leadership. There is a severe shortage of people who are fully prepared for key positions in the field – whether leading grassroots groups or providing vital support to them from other sectors. The infrastructure for learning is still pitifully weak, with people expected to learn on the job, through trial and error, with little access to the lessons others have learned in tackling similar challenges. Nonprofits typically are so overstretched that few can either hire people as apprentices to their top leaders or invest significantly in other forms of training and mentoring.

To build a strong community-based sector which fully responds to these needs, **far greater priority must be given to developing a pipeline which can generate the skilled leadership community groups will need. It will be particularly important that growing numbers of young people from immigrant populations and other families of color be prepared for challenging jobs in community-based nonprofits**, as their backgrounds give them unique advantages for understanding and leading their communities. Their backgrounds also increase the likelihood they will

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<sup>1</sup>For the purposes of this paper, “community development corporations” are defined as nonprofit organizations which create and manage housing and/or economic development programs. “Community organizing groups” are those which stress organizing a mass-based constituency and building power for collective action and advocacy, rather than running their own programs. “Community change” is the process of engaging people in reforming broad policies and systems and changing the behavior of major public and private institutions with the goal of increasing opportunities for low-income people and other disadvantaged groups.

*There is much to learn, and it is essential that people who lead these vital efforts have opportunities for learning from the experience of their predecessors and peers.*

make long-term rather than fleeting commitments to the neighborhoods and people who most need their help.

**Community change is, in short, a tough and demanding job requiring a broad background, analytic and strategic skills, and practical experience in understanding and motivating people and moving them into action on strategies which will lead to growing success. It is a tremendously challenging – and exciting – responsibility, at least as complex as any other profession. Like other professions, it requires extensive preparation, well beyond what people can learn on a job without a serious educational component, mentoring and guidance.**

**This challenge is greatly heightened by the major leadership transition now underway.** Many grassroots groups and support organizations are now going through a wrenching generational change. Organizers and leaders who emerged from the activism of the 1960s – a unique period in American history when the civil rights, Chicano, antipoverty, and women’s movements stimulated a surge of community organizing, alternative social service and community development efforts – are now retiring or otherwise stepping out of management roles, leaving leadership positions vacant.

In many ways this transition is healthy, bringing new energies and ideas to the work. But the trend also has great dangers. The older generation is often passing the torch to people who are 25 or 30 years younger because there is a “missing generation” of people who would now be 40-55. When that generation was young, few entry-level jobs were available as grassroots groups were reducing their budgets in the face of a poor economy, backlash against the activism of the 1960s, and reduced philanthropic giving and government support. Furthermore, those who found jobs with community groups often found their path to advancement blocked as founders stayed on and budgets remained static. Many therefore moved to jobs with greater upward mobility –

politics and government, other nonprofits with higher salaries and benefits, foundations, and corporations and banks concerned about their affirmative action and community reinvestment obligations. This brain drain has left many groups with such a large generational gap that they now have no choice but to shift to much younger leadership as their founders move on.

Second, as the variety of approaches to community change has multiplied, most people have been forced to specialize in just one somewhat narrow aspect of the work. They have specialized in housing development, or anticrime efforts, or health care, or tenant organizing, with relatively few people having an opportunity to broaden their knowledge and analytic skills beyond what they learn in carrying out their particular duties.

**This is unfortunate as it is increasingly clear that the highly complex work of community change requires a mix of approaches – community organizing, community development, coalition-building and policy advocacy among others. It is also apparent that communities require multi-issue, increasingly comprehensive strategies rather than concentrating on a single issue.** You cannot, for example, solve the housing problem without addressing issues of jobs and income, schools, public services, safety, and public and private investment in the neighborhood as a whole. Furthermore, those issues require working at the citywide, metropolitan and statewide levels as well as locally, a challenge which requires strong political skills and alliances.

Third, **the shortage is especially great among people of color** whose leadership is essential because communities of color are disproportionately poor, neglected and cut off from opportunities. Educational gaps, stubborn patterns of white dominance in key institutions, and the appeal of jobs offering greater security and upward mobility continue to limit the number of people of color in grassroots leadership positions.

## *There is a severe shortage of people who are fully prepared for key positions in the field.*

### **The Need for Action**

The success of this transition depends in large part upon whether there is a significant expansion of programs to prepare two cohorts of professionals to lead community change efforts.

**For the long-run there must be great expansion of *programs to prepare college-age young people for work in community organizing, community development and social change organizations, and then link them to careers in that field*** so they can lead community change efforts in ten or twenty years. It is especially important to support programs which attract people from communities in distress as those students start with both a deep understanding of those communities and a greater likelihood they will make long-term commitments to them.

**For the short-run, considering the massive leadership transition already underway, immediate attention must be given to *mid-career programs which broaden the knowledge and deepen the skills of already experienced practitioners*.** They soon will be assuming broad-gauged responsibilities which require that they master issues and adopt strategies which are now foreign to their experience. Their ability to make this transition successfully will determine the future success of grassroots efforts to bring about substantial social and community change.

It is therefore crucial that steps be taken to help prepare both age groups for their new challenges. It is time for making judicious investments to reinforce good programs which are already underway and help them expand their impact. **In addition to providing direct support for prototype educational programs for young and mid-career people, efforts to *build and strengthen networks through which now-isolated academic programs and practitioners can work together to refine and expand their current educational and training programs would contribute significantly*** to mutual learning and mutual support across institutions and disciplines.

That strategy underlies this scan of the current state of university education related to careers in community change.

### **Background on This Search for Solutions**

This scan focuses on the preparation of people for careers leading and supporting community change efforts. Their role may be to lead community organizing, community development or community-driven coalitional efforts to influence policies, or to work on those issues from within government, major nonprofits, philanthropy or business. Whichever role they play, they will need to develop extensive knowledge and skills with which to foster significant change in low-income communities and expand opportunities for poor people and people of color. This requires that they develop –

- broad knowledge of the interrelated issues poor people and their neighborhoods face;
- an understanding of how major public and private institutions relate to those communities and how they might be reformed and strengthened;
- strong analytic skills;
- a strong sense of strategy and skills for leading change within an organization, a community, and its environment;
- expertise in involving community residents and developing their capacity to analyze the issues they face; and
- skills in building strong organizations to represent low-income communities and become full partners in decisions which will determine their future.

In addition, community change agents need in depth knowledge of the particular specialty they will concentrate on most, such as housing and community development, workforce and economic development, community organizing, or community planning.

*As the variety of approaches to community change has multiplied, most people have been forced to specialize in just one somewhat narrow aspect of the work.*

## The Role of Universities

Why focus on universities as potential help for this alarming shortage of practitioners? Aren't universities so removed from the realities of low-income communities and the practical difficulties of running complex organizations that they are incapable of educating people for community change work? Doesn't their entire reward system militate against the kind of multifaceted, multidisciplinary knowledge and skill-building which is needed?

**It is clear that universities are not the only answer to the crisis. There is great potential in building up the nonprofit sector's capacity to provide much more extensive training and mentoring, building on the expertise and systems which are already in place. But they cannot handle the crisis by themselves as they have strict limits in their access to resources, their access to young people, and the range of their expertise.**

Against this backdrop, as part of a broader strategy for responding to the crisis of leadership, there are four reasons for focusing on universities.

First, **universities are the best point of contact with the young generation which the community change movement desperately needs.** There are currently over fifteen million students in institutions of higher education. Because of their tuitions and proximity community colleges, state universities, and commuter colleges are particularly good places for reaching people of color and low-income students who might devote their lives to this work if they were influenced by experiences and a curriculum which drew them into this fascinating and challenging field. However, there are many students at elite universities – whites and people of color, people from middle-class backgrounds as well as low-income – who can make enormous contributions to the movement, and there are many examples of pro-

grams in those universities which offer courses and service opportunities which provide invaluable backgrounds.

Second, it is by now abundantly clear that **nonprofits will never get the resources which are needed for the intensive, long-term educational programs which are needed.** In the community change world, it is extraordinarily difficult to attract funding for more than a three or five day training program. A few organizations are funded to offer three or four weeks of training over a year, usually coupled with a research or action project related to the trainee's daily responsibilities. Some community organizing networks provide three or four months of training through workshops and experience working on an organizing campaign. Most groups have no choice but to hire the best people they can find and train them on-the-job.

Third, while the vast majority of universities offer few courses which are directly relevant to community change work, **universities do have great potential as sources of education and training for this field. This has been demonstrated by the best programs which already exist on different campuses.** Those programs illustrate how much can be gained by drawing on universities' enormous resources for teaching, research, and partnerships with communities. They can reach undergraduates, regular postgraduate students, and – as they do in other professions – mid-career professionals. And they have prestige, stability and continuity which are particularly appealing to people who are interested in career development and upward mobility.

Fourth, **this generation of students has a strong orientation to service which is causing universities to give new attention to community needs.** Again and again people interviewed for this scan remarked on how anxious young people are to provide services to people who need help. Cynical about politics, skeptical about major reforms happening in their lifetimes, many are excited by opportunities for community service. This has fueled

## *For the long-run there must be great expansion of programs to prepare college-age young people for work in social change organizations.*

the “service learning movement” which over 900 university presidents have endorsed and which, despite its weakness on most campuses, does have great potential as a focal point for educating people about community change.

Some educators like former Harvard President Derek Bok see a new emphasis on participation and civic values as an important counterweight to market forces as decisions are made concerning university curricula. Bok, for example, is deeply concerned about how university education is increasingly “market-driven” rather than oriented toward the common good, and very committed to efforts to increase the emphasis on service and civic engagement.

**This scan of university programs related to community change looks very broadly at the wide variety of programs which currently exist. It attempts to grasp the entire picture and to understand broad trends and patterns while learning of especially promising prototypes. This exploratory paper seeks to identify opportunities for relatively modest investments which could make a substantial difference over time.** Investments in good programs which need greater stability and some chance to grow; investments in new programs which hold great promises; investments in helping key people network with others who are struggling with similar issues and are isolated from peers and other experiences; investments which will lead to incremental gains and, over time, to a gradual strengthening of university-based education for people working in the field of community change.

### **Universities – The Broad Landscape**

**I**n general, there is a somewhat surprising number of university programs which provide some courses related to community change. However, these programs are isolated from each other, usually on the margins of a university, and vulnerable to

changes in leadership, institutional politics or the loss of vital outside funding. Most focus on only one or two aspects of community work, but a few are broader and more geared to give people a fuller background for working in low income neighborhoods. Collectively they give a glimpse of the potential and possible scope of more thorough curricula for college-age students and mid-career practitioners.

Several patterns are clear from this scan.

First, **the gulf between practitioners and academics is even wider than generally acknowledged.** Even among those who share a strong common commitment to grassroots community organizations as key institutions for addressing issues of class and race, there is little contact between practitioners and academics. They live in parallel universes, participating in different meetings and conferences, rarely reading the same materials, and not even knowing each other’s names. It is rare for research and other materials to be shared across these lines despite the fact that both universes conduct extensive research on community issues. Despite talk of “partnerships” there are relatively few examples of close collaboration between academics and community leaders, even on research on community issues and student placement – two issues on which they have potentially strong common interests.

Universities are in general heavily biased against experiential education and skill-building, viewing them as somehow being inferior and contrary to the traditions set by research universities (despite adoption of clinical models in such other graduate institutions as medical and dental schools and some business and law schools). Even when there are field placements with community groups, the obstacles to having practitioners co-teach with academics are immense. Those which have introduced co-teaching have often reversed themselves when their leadership changes and a new dean or chairman reintroduces a more “academic” approach.

## ***Immediate attention must be given to mid-career programs which broaden the knowledge and deepen the skills of already experienced practitioners.***

Second, **many of the most interesting programs have emerged in non-elite institutions.** Most are located in less well-known institutions, including community and commuter colleges and the less prestigious branches of state university systems. These institutions suffer less than elite universities from overwhelming pressures to ape the major research universities by publishing pathfinding research studies in academic journals. Their faculty members are often more free to create the practice-based and interdisciplinary approaches and university/community partnerships which are central to community work. They also are more entrepreneurial and accustomed to responding to markets for specialized education and training and offering courses at times and on terms which are attractive to adult learners.

Third, **university norms usually limit programs to a single discipline such as planning or social work or public health.** Because of the “tyranny of the disciplines,” promotion is dependent upon a teacher’s academic achievement in his or her field. They seek tenure in a single discipline, and earn it through conducting research which meets that field’s standards and is published in journals grounded in that discipline. This militates against cross-disciplinary work – an approach which is essential to researching or working on multifaceted issues in complex communities. As a result, very few university programs have a truly multidisciplinary approach despite the need to use techniques from different disciplines to analyze and address the complex and interrelated issues of poverty, race, community and public policy.

Fourth, **there are tremendous problems of isolation and lack of communication and sharing among university programs related to community work.** Interviews with over fifty people in universities revealed the extent to which they see themselves as on the mar-

gins of their own institutions and isolated from others trying to teach and involve students in community change studies.<sup>2</sup> Again and again interviewees expressed their desire for information about other college-based programs related to community change.

One factor contributing to the isolation of community-oriented university programs is that they are scattered in so many different places within institutions. In many universities, a thorough review of the course catalog reveals a surprising number of courses relevant to low-income communities, but they are in different departments and not linked. The undergraduate pattern is often a crazyquilt of courses in such departments as sociology, social psychology, political science, urban studies or anthropology. Similarly postgraduate courses are in schools of social work, urban studies, planning, public policy or public service, divinity, law, public health, sociology, economics and regional economic development, and leadership studies. To add to the complexity quite often some of the most relevant courses and research are concentrated in a “center” which is related to one or more departments.

Needless to say, this scattering of programs aggravates their isolation. Faculty-members often are unaware of other courses which also focus on low-income communities, especially those in different departments or based at a center with little visibility. **Students have no way of knowing that, with careful planning or guidance, they could piece together a series of courses which would give them quite a strong background for community work.**

There are also few opportunities for faculty to interact with people teaching similar courses in other universities. Because the major professional associations are dominated by traditional academic interests, their conferences,

<sup>2</sup>This sense of being marginalized is not confined to the United States. At a recent conference at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex (IDS), there was a consensus among academics who teach “participation” and community-oriented courses in seventeen countries that they all – including IDS – were working on the margins of their universities and feeling isolated and vulnerable.

## *Efforts to build and strengthen networks through which now-isolated academic programs and practitioners can work together would contribute significantly.*

materials and working groups stress highly “academic” topics and research with little emphasis on community service. They seldom provide fora which help faculty deeply involved in community studies to learn from each other and explore common issues and strategies. In some disciplines like social work and planning, however, there are smaller formal or informal associations which provide opportunities for like-minded faculty to learn and support each other’s efforts. Unfortunately, these associations typically lack the resources to be robust sources of help on curricular development and the development of strategies for growing the field.

With all these gaps, it is easy to understand why there is no forum for bringing together faculty from different disciplines and different campuses to discuss how they might collaborate to develop the emerging field of community change studies. There are few opportunities for them to explore how they might work together to expand teaching, research and community work which is –

- Linked to real partnerships with community people and the organizations and institutions which represent and serve them;
- Participatory and designed to strengthen communities and community leadership, building on the assets which already exist;
- Multidisciplinary in analyzing and responding to community conditions and needs;
- Grounded in both theory and practice; and
- Designed to develop the students’ knowledge base, analytical capacities and practical and process skills by using theoretical and experiential teaching methods, practitioners as well as academics as teachers, and participatory action approaches to research.

A fifth factor is also extremely important. **The programs which exist are highly vulnerable.** Their future often depends upon their ability to attract sufficient “soft money” from

outside the university to justify their existence. When that funding dries up, the programs typically shrink or die.

The future of these programs also often depends upon the leadership of one or two people who have carved out space for their programs over a lengthy period of time. In some cases these are tenured professors who use the security of their tenure to free themselves for community work and community-oriented teaching, but who have not institutionalized their work to ensure it will continue after they retire. Since many of these professors are veterans of the 1960s, they are now retiring without assurance their legacies will continue. While there are outstanding instances of a university president, dean or chairperson of a department giving priority to community-based service learning, there are countless examples of failure to institutionalize these efforts so they last beyond that person’s leadership. As a result many such initiatives have been swept away by a successor who returns the school to more traditional academic priorities.

Why do people teaching these community-oriented subjects feel marginalized? In contrast to the 1960s, when students joined with the civil rights, antipoverty and other movements to press universities to meet community needs, the reward system for university faculty now is even more heavily dominated by the priority on research and publishing. In the interviews one professor after another reported that teaching is valued less than research, and that work benefiting the community gets little credit when decisions are made on promotion, tenure, and budgets. With universities suffering from tight budgets and cutbacks in personnel, teaching staff are pressed to concentrate on what’s most essential to their careers, leaving little time for serving the community.

### **Four Responses to the Crisis**

**T**his scan began with interviews of a cross-section of about twenty people to learn from their experience and their views concerning the potential for university-based



## *Universities are the best point of contact with the young generation which the community change movement desperately needs.*

education for people leading and supporting community change efforts. These initial interviewees included directors of community organizing groups and CDCs as well as academics. The interviews provided the basis for developing initial conclusions concerning the types of interventions which would be most useful in expanding educational and training programs for community change agents. These ideas were then tested and refined through additional research and interviews.

The interviews surfaced many ideas, of course, but there was broad agreement on three important points of intervention.

First, in preparing for the future, **there is great potential in building upon the current remarkably strong interest in service learning and expanding civic engagement to foster development of undergraduate curricula which introduce students to the field of social and community change.**

Second, throughout the interviews it was apparent that **now-isolated programs would benefit greatly from being more closely linked to experience elsewhere.** In speaking with people on more than forty campuses, it was abundantly clear that much could be gained by increasing contact among people who teach similar courses or engage in quite similar research and service projects. One element of an overall program for supporting the expansion of community change education would be to provide funds to expand the networks which currently link people within a single discipline.

Third, exciting new programs are emerging which deserve support because of their pioneering approaches. These include new programs intrusted by practitioners and involving community colleges and other flexible institutions in offering entry-level education and field placement.

Fourth, to begin meeting the immediate need to strengthen the skills and knowledge of people who are now assuming responsibility for leading community change organizations, there

was broad agreement on the **great value of creating Master's-level programs for mid-career people, and that those programs should be multidisciplinary and geared specifically to strengthen people's ability to lead community change efforts.** To maximize their practical usefulness, they must involve experiential as well as academic learning. This is facilitated when a faculty includes practitioners as adjuncts.

### **Conclusion**

Over the last four decades, as America has struggled with issues of poverty, race and opportunity, there has been a growing consensus about the central importance of strong and creative grassroots community organizations. They bring low-income people together to address issues which matter to them and their neighbors. They create new ties among neighbors, build social capital, and strengthen neighborhoods. They develop leadership, build self-reliance and skills, and represent the interests of people who would otherwise be marginalized and ignored. And many are important vehicles for delivering responsive services and launching important community development projects.

**If these groups are to grow and be sustained so they can handle all these crucial responsibilities, high priority must be given to supporting university-based efforts to prepare the next generation of leaders and top staff for grassroots organizations and the networks and institutions which are critical to their growth and success. This is a central challenge for foundations and other funders, for top staff of community groups, for support organizations and for other leaders in the field.**

## Chapter II: Undergraduate Level Education

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

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

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

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

### The Current Status of Undergraduate Education on Community Change

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>4</sup>Recently people inside Peralta have shown new interest in possibly replicating the Los Angeles program, including programs emerging in Connecticut and elsewhere.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Unfortunately, after more than three decades, the College was gutted. Budget cuts and a conservative state administration are taking their toll. Essential services were eliminated, enrollment dropped, the college refocused on attracting international students, and faculty members left or were forced out. Tragically, this exemplary program no longer survives.

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

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

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

**It is noteworthy that both these programs were completely unique and largely unknown. While both are ambitious, well-designed, proven programs which train the community change leaders of tomorrow, neither is widely recognized or supported, and neither has been replicated.<sup>5</sup> The Community Learning Partnership has therefore dedicated itself to replicating these programs and pioneering new ones.**

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

*It gives maximum credit for people's past experience and for experiential learning generally, either on the job or through other real life experiences.*

## Other Exemplary Undergraduate Courses and Placements

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The "service learning movement" has grown enormously over the last decade. It is a response to this generation of students' strong interest in community service as well as deep concern among university leaders about student cynicism about the value of voting and participating in our nation's civic life and politics. More than 1100 university presidents have joined Campus Compact to support the growth of service learning on campuses throughout the country.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>7</sup>Hollister

## Several universities have taken service learning considerably farther.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*None of these service learning programs, however, is geared specifically to preparing people for careers in community change.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>11</sup>Interview with Alta Lash, former Director, Trinity Center for Neighborhoods. With a change in presidents, these initiatives were eliminated.

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

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

This course is now being replicated at Wellesley, Spring Hill College, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and Providence College. Ganz wants to see it replicated, with appropriate adjustments, at many other colleges across the country. He therefore has developed unusually detailed course materials and made them accessible to others on the web. Ganz also has given special attention to selecting and training his Teaching Assistants so they will be fully prepared to teach the course elsewhere in the future, and has created a list serve linking his former students together to stimulate continuing interest in organizing.

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

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

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

**Considering the students' strong interest in service, the colleges' concern about the need for greater civic engagement and a rejuvenation of our democratic institutions, and the crying need for talented leadership for the next generation of community**

**change organizations, it is a particularly good time to consider what steps could be taken to ratchet up the level of undergraduate programs. The unifying goal should be to equip an increasing number of college students with the inspiration, academic knowledge, analytic skills, initial experience and practical help to be good candidates for jobs in community change.**

### Developing a Model Community Studies Curriculum

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**No institution of higher learning currently offers such a strong, coherent, multidisciplinary background in community**

**studies, incorporating all five elements of a model program. However, the scan revealed that there is fertile ground for more comprehensive community studies programs. It also identified the seeds of model courses, excellent field placement strategies, and effective approaches to the practical issues of coordination, teaching and mentoring.**

## **Moving Forward on Undergraduate Education**

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

### **1. A Concerted “Networking” Strategy**

**A “networking” approach could support the creation of learning communities linking academics who teach courses related to community change and engage in related research and assistance to grassroots groups.** The goals would be to help them learn from their peers and use that learning to strengthen their own programs and gradually broaden them so they offer students a more multifaceted background in community studies, closer to the five-point model set forth above.

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

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

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

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

reality, while also informing practice with the new insights which come with greater understanding of useful concepts and theory.

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

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

### **2. Expand Current Programs**

A second strategy would be to **select one or more institutions which already have many of the ingredients for a full-scale community studies program and provide them with resources to fill the gaps and expand their programs**. These could then serve as models for other universities. This strategy would be enhanced if it included an active program for disseminating lessons from these models and seeding similar efforts at a second set of institutions.

**The AA degree which LA Trade Tech offers in Community Economic Development provides such a model for the**

**community college world. There is great potential for replicating this pioneering program** which is almost unique in its focus on reaching and educating poor and working class people of color for increasing responsibilities in community-based organizations. Also promising is the potential of complementing this program in Community Economic Development with similar AA programs in Community Organizing and Community Change or Community-Based Service Delivery.

Community colleges are of great importance. Forty percent of all university students are now enrolled in community colleges – about six million students. Many of them come from low-income backgrounds and/or are people of color. **Funding and other resources should be targeted on a strategy for starting AA programs in community change and development at other community colleges, and then linking it with entry into four year institutions** for students who want further education and experience. That approach has added potential in California where the AA program is already accredited statewide by the state university system.

### **3. Create New Prototype AA and BA Community Change Studies Programs**

A third strategy would be to fund the planning and creation of new community college and four-year college programs designed to produce the organizers, developers and service providers low-income communities sorely need.

A useful element in such a strategy would be funding the development of **model undergraduate curricula for AA and BA degrees in community change studies**. This strategy could be done by funding a multidisciplinary team of academics and practitioners to design a program which has all five components of the comprehensive undergraduate program described above. They could draw from their different disciplines and experiences to design that curriculum, develop required and optional courses, identify case studies and reading materials. They could also think through

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

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

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

**High priority should be given to funding the creation of new programs in Community Change Studies at the AA and BA levels.** If these were based in state institutions of higher education, they could offer relatively low

tuitions. As degree programs they could also offer Pell scholarship grants and other financial aid, an advantage which is not available to nonprofit training programs.

Starting them in community colleges would give them unique access to low-income and working-class students as well as students of color – a great asset in this field. Furthermore, with their tradition of working closely with industry in designing educational programs community colleges care accustomed to partnering with outside practitioners. They are therefore great potential partners for nonprofits which are committed to expanding Community Change Education: they know how to partner with outsiders who have great knowledge and expertise but need partners who can collaborate in creating degree-granting programs which involve both academics and practitioners in teaching students.