COPC CENTRAL

Engaged Colleges Are Central to Strong Communities

Playground Project Benefits Local Children

Developing partnerships and combining university and community resources. That is the primary focus of the Louisiana State University (LSU) Community University Partnership (CUP). For several years, LSU has been heavily engaged with the Old South Baton Rouge (OSBR) community, an urban area immediately north of its campus.

Through years of partnership building, LSU has learned many important lessons. Its most poignant being that the key to successful partnerships is trust. While LSU and OSBR are in close proximity to one another, they are also worlds apart. Due to socio-conomic differences and barriers lingering from a past of racial segregation, trust building had to start from the ground up on numerous levels.

Dr. Marybeth Lima.

LSU received HUD Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) funding in 2001. This enabled the university to institutionalize its partnership

Rhode Island COPC Promotes Leadership Skills

Sometimes a community change is the result of small steps that ripple outward through the neighborhood. A COPC collaborative in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, provided leadership and personal skills training to residents of an aging city neighborhood, who have become actively involved in local school, government, and community activities to improve their neighborhood.

Working with the Woodlawn Neighborhood Association, the University of Rhode Island's (URI's) Urban Field Center formed a COPC in 1997. The COPC's goal was to create a sustainable, revitalized neighborhood of empow-ered and employed residents, according to Marcia Marker Feld, a professor of urban planning at URI and executive director of the Urban Field Center. Feld, who served as founding director of HUD's Office of University Partnerships from 1995–96, specializes in the development of com-munity empowerment through inter-institutional collaboratives for housing, neighborhood development, and public schools.

The Woodlawn neighborhood's manufac-turing base had gradually deteriorated over the past 30 years, according to Feld. As the community works to retrain its resi-dents for high-tech jobs, it also must meet the needs of an increasingly poor and needy populace.

"When we began working with the Woodlawn neighborhood, none of the com-munity organizations worked with one another," Feld says. "It became clear that people didn't know how to reach city hall, how to get things done. We formed a governance committee of the COPC with elected representatives and decid-ed to hold two Leadership Development Institutes to facilitate empowering the residents."

Dr. Marcia Marker Feld.

Enhancing Leadership Skills

Twenty-two residents participated in the first Leadership Development Institute, which utilized an introductory training cur-riculum designed to enhance leadership and personal skills, build community leaders, and provide service to the community. The

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with OSBR in several ways. Many faculty members were involved in the grant and multiple initiatives were outlined; however, few projects represented a truly visible product that would benefit the community and stand the test of time. A playground project at a local elementary school proved to be an ideal way for LSU to reinforce visibility and permanence in the community while meeting a very real community need.

Dr. Marybeth Lima, a faculty member in the LSU Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering took the lead with this project. Through LSU CUP, Lima established a partnership with Polk Elementary School, one of four area schools. Lima puts theory into practice. She uses service-learning to teach her classes because it allows her students to gain hands-on experience in their fields of

Kids playing at the new Polk Elementary School playground.

study, while assisting community groups. Lima and her students visited and interviewed Polk Elementary students, from several classes, about what a dream playground should look like. Then Lima's students compiled these ideas along with the children's drawings and turned them into playground plans.

In order to reinforce LSU's commitment to the project, the university hosted a playground groundbreaking ceremony at Polk Elementary. Faculty, staff, and children from Polk Elementary participated in the program alongside LSU representatives and local leaders. The school principal chose several children to play active roles in the ceremony, and they were actually the ones who shoveled the first bit of dirt from the future playground site.

Under Dr. Lima's leadership, student and community volunteers constructed the playground over a period of several weeks. The

LSU representatives and Polk Elementary faculty, staff, and students participate in ground breaking.

process was carefully executed and was monitored by certified playground inspectors. LSU also coordinated a dedication ceremony to celebrate the playground's completion. Faculty and staff from Polk and LSU, as well as community representatives, participated in a short program, but the kids were the stars. The children displayed their playground drawings and performed skits and dance routines to celebrate the new addition to their school.

The playground addition has excited Polk students as well as community members. Polk Elementary School allows neighborhood children to use the equipment outside of school hours so they can bring along their siblings and friends. LSU has been successful in building community trust in OSBR, and CUP hopes to build upon these successes.

Dr. Marybeth Lima and her students have built several other playgrounds in the Baton Rouge area. She recently served as LSU's first service-learning faculty fellow and has received national recognition for her innovative teaching methods. In 2005, Dr. Lima received the Ernest A. Lynton Award for faculty professional service and academic outreach. ✳

Students Study the World—In Small Pieces

This class helps students realize that change takes time, that they can't fix everything in one semester," says Stacy Harwood, assistant professor of urban and regional planning at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign (UIUC). The class—Social Inequality and Planning—introduces students to the social, political, economic, and cultural forces shaping communities today. It emphasizes the role of race, class, and gender relations in urban social issues and the process through which successful community intervention occurs at the local level: community organizing, participatory planning, advocacy planning, and community development.

The class is required for all undergraduate planning majors and is open as a general education course to all UIUC undergrads. The 55 to 60 students who take this class each fall work with community organizations to implement portions of neighborhood plans developed with the East St. Louis Action Research Project's (ESLARP's) assistance. The fall 2004 Social Inequality and Planning class worked on approximately 10 projects in the South End and Emerson Park neighborhoods of East St. Louis, Illinois.

This course is one of many that collaborate with East St. Louis community organizations. These collaborations are supported by ESLARP at UIUC and the Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center (NTAC). ESLARP provides technical assistance and capacity–building assistance for community–based organizations in East St. Louis. Because East St. Louis is 180 miles from campus, NTAC plays an important liaison role between the university and the East St. Louis community.

Harwood and several ESLARP colleagues worked with the South End Development Organization (SENDO) on a 2003 neighborhood plan for the South End neighborhood that contained a number of short–term projects. "We wanted to find projects that would involve students and residents, provide opportunities the students could learn from, and do things that the residents wanted to do but couldn't do by themselves," says Harwood.

SENDO was primarily interested in increasing visibility and celebrating the organization and neighborhood. South End is a neighborhood in transition, with changing demographics. SENDO's members include older women, most of whom are retired, and a few younger residents.

Promoting the Community

UIUC students worked with the South End residents to design, print, and sell t–shirts. South End residents had long wanted to produce the t–shirts, and the students helped to enable the ideas to take form. Students made posters with t–shirt designs, and helped residents choose colors and decide what text would be printed on the shirts. "The students took care of the logistics," Harwood says. "They found the best options for printing, got the order in, and delivered the shirts."

Harwood used funds from a Community–Based Learning grant from the UIUC Office of the Vice Chancellor for Public Engagement and Institutional Relations to pay for the first batch of t–shirts. "We paid $5 a shirt and sold them for about $10 each," she says. "The South End organization ordered 100 t–shirts and sold them all. Everyone—adults and kids—wanted t–shirts. It was a fun project for everyone involved. Now they're talking about doing a second batch."

Top: Students engage in field work in the South End neighborhood; Middle: UP260 students exhibiting promotional materials; Bottom: UIUC students at NTAC .

UIUC students also worked with the Emerson Park Development Corporation (EPDC) to help collect data to complete a new neighborhood plan. Harwood's students collected neighborhood data, which they put into a geographic information system (GIS) database for the Emerson Park organization. "One of the challenges right now is that they can't afford to buy commercial software

(for GIS), so we're discussing how they can use what's available for free," Harwood explains. "Only one staff member at Emerson Park can use manipulative software, and right now he's busy writing grant proposals to fund development. Emerson Park really didn't need much technical assistance," says Harwood. "Their plan is finished and they have paid staff with the capacity to implement many of the plan's projects."

Creating Meaningful and Beneficial Projects

"It's a challenge to create a meaningful project for both students and residents that can be accomplished in one semester," Harwood says. "We want to get the students excited about tasks that may seem menial but are significant to the neighborhood organization."

Harwood sees benefits for everyone involved in the class. Students get real-world assignments, learn to deal with uncertainty, and are exposed to the realities of nonprofit/community-based organizations. "Students learn that social change takes time. They learn the importance of small, symbolic tasks."

Harwood believes that the project motivates students to take on more complex community-service projects after they complete the course. "The course makes students more empathetic to those living in poverty and to the struggle to make real improvements at the neighborhood level," she says.

The community benefits through increased visibility and the accomplishment of specific, concrete tasks. Harwood notes that the joint projects generate excitement and motivation within the community organization.

"This class makes teaching more fun," says Harwood. "Faculty members' willingness to help with project implementation has deepened the trust between faculty members and the community organizations."

Recommendations for Replication

Faculty and students must be committed to producing a quality product or result for the community, according to Harwood. "Students work with residents to learn about the community organization and what it is trying to accomplish. At the same time, students and faculty must be careful not to promise more than they can deliver."

"This is not an easy course to teach," says Harwood. "It requires the faculty to allow students to take more of a role in their learning process." Harwood tries to make

8-week program for youth and adults offered an introduction to community services available to the Woodlawn neighborhood. Representatives from the police, fire, health, and sanitation departments spoke to residents about city services. Local banks participated in the institute to discuss business and the economy. Local organizations made presentations about community projects and youth programs available to Woodlawn. The institute also began a violence-prevention program, a precursor to the Weed and Seed program.

COPC sponsorship of the Leadership Development Institute allowed residents to attend free of charge. Several URI graduate students worked with Feld and Gayla Gazerro in the program. The Leadership Development Institute also included a community service component. After some deliberation, residents decided to paint the neighborhood fire hydrants with the flags of the countries from which their families came. Countries represented include Vietnam, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Russia, and many Central and South American countries.

"The real lesson learned in the fire hydrant community service project was how the system works," says Feld. "Residents had to visit approximately a dozen municipal and state offices to get permission to paint the hydrants."

Meeting Multiple Challenges

One of the challenges of working in the Woodlawn neighborhood was the many languages spoken by neighborhood residents. "We had residents who speak Russian, Portuguese, Spanish, Cambodian, and Hmong," Feld says. "In many cases, we were dealing with a cultural background in which education was not valued. Residents initially could not see the connection between the Leadership Development Institute and the value of raising the quality of life environment. One resident told me, 'I'm 60 years old, why do I need to learn this?'"

The fire hydrant community service project helped residents to see the value of the Leadership Development Institute classes as it brought neighborhood residents together. Other benefits came from the program, according to Feld. Men and women attended in equal numbers and residents of all ages participated in the classes. Several residents became actively involved in local school committee activities after completing the Institute classes. One resident currently works on a commission at the Pawtucket city hall.

A second Leadership Institute offered advanced skills, focusing in areas such as diversity, community outreach, building consensus, training in mediation and resolution, grant writing, focusing on neighborhood and city, and community service. Approximately 15 residents participated in the second institute.

# *Congratulations to the*
COPC 2005 Grantees!

Community Outreach Partnership Centers (COPC) program grantees use their grant funds to establish and operate a COPC to address the problems of urban areas. In addition, COPC New Directions grantees use their funds to build upon their existing COPC programs and expand focus on issues such as healthcare and community development and revitalization. The following colleges and universities are the 2005 COPC New Grants and New Directions grantees.

COPC 2005

University of Arizona	$400,000
Regents of the University of California	$307,692
State Center Community College District	$399,965
Adams State College	$400,000
University of Maine System	$396,281
Massachusetts Institute of Technology	$399,999
Niagara University	$399,891
Research Foundation City University of New York for Bronx Community College	$400,000
Research Foundation of CUNY/Lehman College City University of New York	$354,109
Research Foundation of State University of New York	$359,050
Research Foundation SUNY/ State University of New York at Fredonia	$399,868
Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma	$386,051
University of South Carolina Research Foundation	$394,536

COPC New Directions Grantees

University of Denver–Colorado Seminary	$200,000
University of Northern Iowa	$199,943
Louisiana State University and A&M College	$198,923
Northern Essex Community College	$198,343
University of Missouri – St. Louis	$199,893
University of Nebraska at Lincoln	$199,952
State University of New York at Binghamton	$199,999
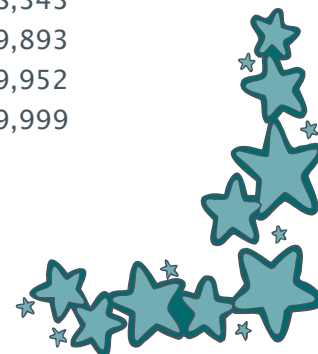
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the reading and lectures strategic, to provide the larger context for the service–learning projects in which the students are involved. "I don't overload the course with reading and lectures, because students need time to digest and discuss what's going on in their field work," she says.

For more information about the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign COPC, contact the East St. Louis Action Research Project, 326 Noble Hall, 1209 South Fourth Street, Champaign, IL 61820, Phone: (217) 265-0202, Fax: (217) 244–9320, e–mail: eslarp@uiuc.edu or Website: http://www.eslarp.uiuc.edu/. Or contact Stacy Harwood, Assistant Professor, University of Illinois, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, 111 Temple Buell Hall, 611 Lorado Taft Drive, Champaign, IL 61820, Phone: (217) 265-0874, Fax: (217) 244–1717, e–mail: sharwood@uiuc.edu. ✳

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Determine What the Community Needs

Feld has some recommendations for those considering a similar project. "Listen to what people need," she says. "Find out what their concerns are. Conduct an informal needs assessment. And find out how often residents contact city hall or their elected representatives. The answers to these questions will help determine what kind of program should be offered."

When the 1997 COPC grant funding expired, the executive board of the COPC turned themselves into the Woodlawn Community Development Corporation, which continues to work in the Woodlawn neighborhood. "This was the best way to institutionalize the work of the COPC," says Feld. "We were empowering the community residents by helping them learn the skills they needed."

For more information about the Woodlawn/University of Rhode Island COPC, contact Dr. Marcia Marker Feld, Principal Investigator, (401) 277–5235, e-mail: mfeld@uri.edu, or Gayla Gazerro, Director, (401) 277–5236, e-mail: gayla@uri.edu. ✳