



Local Heroes

How Colleges and Universities Enrich Their Host Communities

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Colleges and universities are re-aligning academic initiatives to link more closely to community needs. Campus-community alliances increasingly focus on: promoting economic development and revitalizing local neighborhoods; promoting cultural tourism and building new cultural venues and recreational facilities; and developing sustainable communities, with a particular emphasis on affordable housing models.

Difficult economic times force institutions to question the effectiveness of established modes of operation. At the same time, communities face their own challenges, including diminished budgets for basic education and social services. Campuses raise tuition and fees; communities raise taxes. Both consider potential layoffs of personnel. The tough times also encourage colleges and communities to devise creative solutions to the problems they share.

Consider these best practices:

Trinity College of Hartford, Conn., is a model for a truly engaged institution. The 16-acre Learning Corridor is an exemplary redevelopment project developed by Trinity and the Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (SINA), a coalition of the Connecticut Children's Medical Center, Connecticut Public Television & Radio, Hartford Hospital and others. The partnership created on a once decrepit tract of land adjacent to Trinity five educational institutions

including: a Montessori Day Care Center (grades pre-K to 5); a magnet middle school; a math and science academy; and an arts academy. The site also includes a Boy's and Girl's Club, a community theater and retail spaces.

Beyond the physical buildings, Trinity has linked its academic initiatives to community needs through a number of programs that go beyond traditional service learning. The Mega-Cities Institute, the Trinity Center for Neighborhoods, the Neighborhood Technical Center's Smart Neighborhood Initiative, the Institute for Living, the HART Job Center and the Aetna Center for Families are all programs that involve Trinity faculty and students with community leaders to improve the economic, physical and social characteristics of the neighborhood.

The **University of Pennsylvania** has been a leader in linking public service to community needs. Under the direction of Ira Harkavy, the Penn Program for Public Service, established in 1989, evolved into the Center for Community Partnerships. Its purpose is to support a university-wide effort to improve the quality of life in the West Philadelphia neighborhood adjacent to the university. Like their brethren at Trinity, Penn officials believe the future of both the institution and the neighborhood are intertwined.

The center engages in a variety of activities including academically based community service, traditional services to the community and community development initiatives.

Examples include: a university-assisted community school, an urban nutrition initiative, a community arts partnership, neighborhood-level planning, education and job training for youth and adults, and minority entrepreneurship training. Ongoing partnerships are developed with community organizations, federal institutions, foundations and other nonprofit groups.

Virginia Tech University in Blacksburg, Va., led an unusual initiative to establish an advanced network infrastructure called the Blacksburg Electronic Village (BEV). The BEV wired the community and offered a variety of Internet-based services to Blacksburg-area residents, civic groups and nonprofit organizations from e-mail to an electronic calendar of events and arts websites. From an academic standpoint, the program fosters research in the social, educational, political, economic and technical aspects of networking, as faculty and students evaluate the use and impact of community networking.

The **University of Illinois at Chicago** established the interdisciplinary Great Cities Institute (GCI) to create, disseminate and apply knowledge in community development, metropolitan sustainability, workforce development and professional education. The focus is the city of Chicago, but the institute also is committed to improving quality of life in other metropolitan areas. For example, the institute's Coastal Business and Environment Initiative provides local governments and planning agencies with the academic research support to achieve a more sustainable economic and ecological future. The institute's Chicago Workforce Development Partnership project promotes economic well-being by providing job access and advancement for poor Chicago residents.

Clark University in Worcester, Mass., was the forerunner of promoting economic development in adjacent neighborhoods, initially for its own self-interest. The Main-South area of Worcester was run-down and crime-ridden—hardly an appealing extended campus for a renowned university. Clark established the University Park Partnership, a collaboration among

residents, Clark organizations, Worcester Public Schools, government officials, local businesses and churches. The initiative was one of the first funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Outreach Partnership Center program, which supports university-community partnerships. Since the program began in 1995, Clark and its partners have renovated more than 200 residences and built 100 new residences to benefit local residents and attract faculty and staff to the college neighborhood.

Clark has established its own Educational Corridor, including a community school called the University Park Campus, for grades 7 to 12. Originally located on the campus, it is now a block away. Jack Foley, assistant to the president at Clark, says all 31 members of the school's first graduating class will be

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Photo by John Owens.

University Park Campus School students on a field trip to Clark.

attending college next year, including up to a dozen who will go to Clark tuition-free as part of the initiative.

One attraction of living in a college community is the range of cultural venues and recreational opportunities that contribute to a vital quality of life. Meanwhile, "cultural tourism" generates about \$6 billion in annual spending in New England, according to the New England Council, whose Creative Economy Initiative has brought together leaders of cultural and education institutions with their counterparts in business and government to strengthen the region's economic competitiveness.

Clark is now a major player in the

Worcester Cultural Corridor, an ambitious renovation and revitalization project spearheaded by an investment in arts and culture. A master plan for the area provides affordable housing for artists and others by renovating mill buildings and vacant properties to create *live/work spaces* for related businesses. A contemporary art center, restaurants, parks, retail and mixed-income housing are all components of the plan to create a strong arts/business district for the city and area colleges to stimulate the local arts economy. Says Foley: "Once you're part of a community partnership, people look to you to be involved."

The **University of Massachusetts Amherst** has embraced the creative economy with establishment of the *Western Massachusetts Arts Alliance*, a partnership linking cultural resources that contribute to the vitality of the four counties of

western Massachusetts. In addition to hosting workshops such as Arts Curriculum Frameworks, Making a Living as an Artist, and a Forum for Funding in the Arts, UMass partnered with members of the Knowledge Corridor to create a Connecticut River Valley Cultural Corridor map. A cultural tourism forum held in May brought together regional leaders, artists and organizations to learn more about the creative economy and the potential economic contributions of arts and culture groups. The next step is development of a regional arts website.

North of Boston, a partnership that began at **Salem State College** is responsible for conceiving

ArtsNorth, an organization linking arts institutions north of Boston. A number of other institutions of higher education including Endicott College, Montserrat College of Art and Gordon College are also involved in promoting and joint marketing of cultural venues in the region.

Recreational venues play an important part in promoting cultural tourism. UMass is currently reviving a Five College Bikeway that will link the university with Amherst, Smith, Hampshire and Mount Holyoke colleges, allowing recreational uses as well as commuting and inter-campus travel by students who take courses among the five colleges.

In their role as community anchors, colleges and universities must support sustainable development practices through teaching, institutional practices and community

students and the community about long-term sustainability and to model the behavior of its' graduates.

In partnership with the town of Amherst, Hampshire received a Livable Communities grant to study how an "ecological and cultural village" might be expanded at the edge of the campus, adjacent to an existing market and residential neighborhood. The college seeks to work with neighbors to expand the Atkins Farm Country Market into a true village center, employing sustainable development guidelines. Says Prince: "Students wanted more connections to the community. It was Hampshire's responsibility to generate intergenerational conversations and to encourage a dialogue with the neighbors." A series of public meetings educated local and college residents about best practices in green architecture,

open space character of the area.

A major factor in sustaining college communities is providing a range of housing options for university affiliates. In recent years, inflated housing prices have inhibited recruitment of new faculty, staff and graduate students. Groups of students renting single-family homes and apartments in the community deprive local residents of affordable housing options. Clark addressed this issue by promoting renovation of housing adjacent to the university through downpayment incentives and low-cost loans to faculty and staff. In other communities, colleges and universities are taking a much greater responsibility for housing their own.

New campuses like Florida Atlantic University, the University of California Merced and Cal State Monterey Bay are creating new communities, much like the Hampshire model, that provide a full range housing for faculty, staff and students, without affecting local housing stock. On the West Coast, the institution typically retains control of the land with the tenant paying for building/home costs only plus a minimal ground lease fee. In more established New England communities, the strategy is different. In Hanover, N.H., Dartmouth College is developing new housing models for faculty and staff by buying land, acting as developers and controlling costs. Still other urban institutions like MIT are employing creative means of gaining additional housing stock by renovating old mill and factory buildings, an excellent model for reuse of existing structures and materials.

By sharing their expertise, becoming engaged in workforce development and practicing sustainable development principles that improve the quality of life for the campus and the community, colleges and universities are enhancing their academic missions while stimulating the economic and cultural vitality of their regions.

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Photo by Peggy Moskowitz.

Housing renovated by the Main South Community Development Corp.

development. This means moving beyond the current focus on "green architecture" to mitigating traffic impacts, managing growth, recycling facilities and integrating principles of sustainability in the curriculum.

Hampshire College in Amherst has developed a model approach—a Sustainable Master Plan that outlines goals for academic programs, life-cycle costing, environmental preservation, resource utilization and controlled expansion. Hampshire views the campus community as a *living laboratory* for experimentation, encouraging permeable boundaries with the neighborhood. Hampshire President Gregory Prince believes it is important to educate young people,

climate-friendly buildings, storm-water management, safe pedestrian streetscapes, native landscapes, traffic calming and multimodal transportation. This model plan will provide housing, retail and commercial space arranged around a village green and Main Street configuration with connections to Hampshire College and the local residential areas that include a retirement village.

Working together, the college and the town will examine existing zoning restrictions to develop a plan for greater density that promotes a village identity. Hampshire officials hope the plan can become a prototype for the entire town that promotes smart growth and re-development while preserving the

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