

Schools of Social Work Contribution to Community Partnerships: The Renewal of the Social Compact in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT. Embracing the concept that the social compact between university and community can provide a cornerstone for true social change. This article details how partnering with outside organizations in collaborative relationships can help fulfill higher ed-

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education's obligation to educate for the good of a democratic and learned populace. Often the social conscience of a university, schools of social work can serve as leaders in the development or facilitation of university and community partnerships to address or intervene in areas of social need. One research institution of higher education provides successful examples.

KEYWORDS. University, community partnerships, social impact, higher education

INTRODUCTION

By entering into mutually beneficial partnerships with the surrounding community, universities not only share their knowledge and resources, but they also gather vital information that can inform research, assist students in translating knowledge into real world practicality, and help all partners change the social condition. Universities are not the only institutions that can or should encourage their commitment to community-based partnerships; many federal and foundation grants now require such partnerships and interdisciplinary research that lends itself to community participation.

This background leads to a series of elementary questions about the ultimate goals of higher education—the tripartite missions of research, teaching, and service: How can the academy's missions translate into the community at large in a demonstrated way? What are the possibilities for meaningfully reconnecting the university to its neighbors?

This article discusses the importance of the social compact between the public and the university and explains the rationale for partnerships. It then addresses the potential for partnership building utilizing the resources of both large research extensive universities and smaller institutions of higher learning. Next it examines the role of schools of social work in the university/community partnership, providing real-world examples of successful partnerships. Finally, the article details the benefits of community partnerships, demonstrating the way schools of social work can play a meaningful part in revitalizing the university's role in the social compact.

HISTORY

Renewing the University's Social Compact

Many of the issues and answers involved in the current call for community/university partnerships take root in the historical concept of the *social compact*. This concept, particularly relevant to the system of public universities, may be defined as a tacit agreement between parties, defining each party's roles, expectations, and boundaries. Inherent in this social compact is the public's expectation that the liberty to conduct research and engage in scholarly pursuits will result in knowledge that is relevant and applicable to solving social problems and, in addition, that students will be educated in such a way that they can meaningfully engage in the democratic process.

It is in this context that the public is demanding that higher education return to its roots, creating knowledge and even products that are relevant to today's social, economic, and political climate. Especially in states such as Michigan, which has experienced a long-term downward trend in industry and employment, universities are increasingly being called on to become responsive to the social and economic needs of the twenty-first century. In their 2005–2006 report to the state, the President's Council, State Universities of Michigan, outlined the many ways in which public universities—and higher education as a whole—can support the state's economic base, facilitate teaching practical job skills, and work with the public to transfer scientific knowledge to those who need it most (President's Council, 2005).

Many colleges and universities are joining the call for educational relevance or are leading their own revolution (e.g., The Glion Declaration of 1998, Campus Compact's Declaration on the Civic Responsibility of Higher Education, The Futures Project [initiated by Brown University's A. Alfred Taubman Center for Public Policy and American Institutions], President Emeritus Larry Falkner's [University of Texas at Austin] call for a new social compact at the 2005 annual meeting of the American Council on Education).

Ira Harkavy, founding director of the Center for Community Partnerships at the University of Pennsylvania, states that the time to change how universities are rewarded by the society in which they exist is now. If the American university is committed to the social compact, "it should give full-hearted, full-minded attention to solving our complex interrelated problems, particularly the problems of our city. The benefits of doing so would be considerable for the university, the American city, and American society in general" (2000, p. 3).

Social Capital

Whereas the basis of the university's obligation to the public is based on the *social compact*, the importance of university/community partnerships also rests firmly in the theory of *social capital*, the "features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1993).

The Function of Social Capital

Social capital theory is based on the premise that social networks have value. According to Portes (1998), there is a growing consensus that social capital "stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of memberships in social networks or other social structures" (p. 6). Coleman (1988) theorizes that social capital is the structural convergence of people, resulting in action. It is through social capital that individuals become part of a group. The group can then leverage their combined resources to access economic resources, "increase their cultural capital through contacts with experts," and "affiliate with institutions that confer value credentials" (Portes, p. 4). Similarly, the group can access physical (land, buildings) and human (skills, knowledge) capital (Kay and Pearce, 2003).

The Importance of Connection

Empowerment, or the ability to form and benefit from social connection, can, when it is lacking or stunted, compound the problems that America faces. Portes describes impoverished urban communities in which social capital takes the form of strong ties between family and friends. Though the value of these ties cannot be denied or belittled, social or economic situations in these neighborhoods mean that the social ties of these communities don't often reach beyond, effectively blocking access to a larger beneficial network that can open the door to services, education, and opportunity. Portes (1998) corroborates Putnam in his assertion that the erosion or loss of social capital in minority or other underprivileged communities is a root cause for many social problems.

In social context, it is often those whom people connect to, rather than their own knowledge, that builds valuable social capital. Thus,

even if community members have information to share with the university about the “situation on the ground,” a barrier to their access often means their voice goes unheard. It is when the university stops to listen that it can mobilize its resources—human, structural, programmatic, or monetary—to work with the community to effect true social change.

Social Capital and Social Justice

In their discussion of university/community partnerships, Marullo and Edwards (2000) stress that higher education and community involvement can be a “. . . vehicle for transforming society to make it more just” (p. 897), and note that an initial step is for the university to differentiate between charity and social justice. Charity work is terminal—it ends when the players leave or a problem is solved. Justice work is structural—it “sees education as a part of an empowerment process . . . the goal of the justice advocate should always be that those in need will no longer face such needs . . .” (p. 901). Marullo and Edwards state that if social justice is not at the heart of university involvement, a cursory or failed partnership has the potential to further alienate and disenfranchise the community.

The authors further state that social justice-based partnerships should address root causes. Many problems have symptoms—sometimes easily bandaged by mere charity—but treating the symptoms without treating the structural imbalances that cause the problem is ignoring causality. If resources are not aimed at addressing the root of social injustice and disparity, “we exhaust our ability to create the social structures that operate for the greater good . . .” (Marullo and Edwards, 2000, p. 910). Treating poverty while ignoring the fact that many of those impoverished have no knowledge or capacity for securing financial capital, asset building, or wealth transfer ignores the structural deficits inherent in economic disparities, just as treating blood pressure and type II diabetes might miss the fact that soda is cheap and fresh produce is not readily available to an urban population.

Because they are the most intimate with social conditions they experience on a daily basis—the root causes—community members can provide the university with expert knowledge of their own. Communities can provide academia with the vital information it needs to form targeted research questions, examine the most effective and necessary interventions, mobilize personnel or other resources, and

make their work applicable outside of the ivory tower. As a result, the community also benefits. Their participation is essential, their role much larger and more important than that of a mere research subject.

Building Community Partnerships Regardless of Size

As programs and professors seek out avenues for creating true relevance in their research, teaching, and service agendas, collaboration and multidisciplinary partnerships have become key. For example, a search of projects funded by the Office of University Partnerships—a HUD-based organization that encourages and supports university/community partnerships—reveals that approximately 100 such programs were financially supported in 2005 (Office of University Partnerships, 2005). Partnerships with community is an opportunity all institutions of higher education can implement, regardless of whether they are public or private, large or small, have graduate programs or are exclusively baccalaureate-granting institutions.

While fewer in number than other types of learning institutions, research universities have an undeniable influence on American education (Boyer, 1990) and, with their immense resources, educated faculty, and economic contribution to the surrounding community, research universities have the potential to be in the forefront of the return to the commitment to service (Checkoway, 2001).

However, exclusively baccalaureate institutions, smaller colleges, community colleges, or even excellent social work programs with fewer resources than the larger schools—whether money, personnel, or time—who have the desire to engage in community research or partnerships are also able to so. If an institution is willing to invest the time in gauging its faculty's interest in pursuing this type of programming, there are opportunities for all to be involved, from community colleges to the 4-year undergraduate programs.

Institutionalization: Building a Program on Existing Strengths

Though not guaranteeing a system-wide buy-in to pursuing community partnerships, having administration and faculty with a demonstrated history of personal participation and dedication to the social compact can facilitate institutionalization (Maurrasse, 2001). Once key administrators are invested in developing and supporting a course of community/university partnerships, building upon existing strengths

in programming and faculty intellectual interests can assist administrators in introducing, encouraging, and perhaps funding the pursuit of these collaborative relationships, regardless of an institution's size.

One successful example of administrative commitment can be seen in the leadership of University of Michigan (U-M) President Mary Sue Coleman. Dr. Coleman has embraced and encouraged the opening of the U-M Detroit Center, a concept that the U-M School of Social Work played an integral role in developing. The center was opened in the heart of Detroit to serve three purposes: (1) to create a structural presence for the U-M in Detroit, (2) to encourage new and support ongoing education and research with Detroit community groups and other universities, and (3) to provide a centrally located base for many of the community-based efforts. The center stands not only as a symbol of U-M's commitment to working hand-in-hand with the Detroit community, it serves a practical purpose as well, providing office space, classrooms, meeting space, and special events areas for University faculty, staff, and students and members of community groups and partners.

Another key component in facilitating university/community partnerships at any level of higher education is successfully getting the faculty out into the community and giving the community access to the university (Maurrasse, 2001). A central point person, organization, or agenda is helpful in educating the faculty about how to initiate contact and form relationships in the community and providing the community a contact for their ideas and information. The facilitator will not need to manage the project but will need to support it on all levels (Reiniger, n.d.). Similarly, Israel, Schulz, Parker, and Becker (1998) cite the presence of a community organizer as being critical to the success of a partnership. The facilitator, with a respected reputation and historical presence in community leadership, can provide a bridge between the university and the community partners.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Schools of social work are uniquely poised to simultaneously contribute to both the social compact *and* the social capital of a community in a variety of ways, and they may take on the role of bridging the larger university with community partners by way of example. Inherent in their mission is empowering people to create change within their own communities, whether in their neighborhood or country, or within their academic department. The profession's multiple agendas

advance the well-being of the human condition, from its earliest roots to today's evidence-based research agendas.

Early History

Early social work moved away from a charity model and toward helping people help themselves. Whereas charity workers tended to investigate the elements of need facing a given person, settlement workers took a broader view, investigating what the person needed and how to provide that to all who needed (Huff, n.d.). The settlement houses became a blueprint for the development and the advancement of community organizations dedicated to the social well-being of their neighborhoods.

The link between the settlement houses and local universities often came from a link to a religious school (e.g., Northwestern University at one time held a Methodist connection), which opened settlement houses of its own. This provided a critical link between those with their fingers on the pulse of society's needs and those who could educate others to assist in examining social issues and creating new knowledge in order to address them.

Place of Schools of Social Works in Community Partnering

Besides generating new knowledge, schools of social work quite often serve as the center of social conscience in the university, and social work faculty and students are often on the forefront of identifying and confronting social problems, disparities in health and mental health, and social justice issues—work that is most often manifested in cutting-edge research agendas and focused on evaluating human services and studying the needs and service requirements of specific populations. In fact, Fisher, Fabricant, and Simmons point out that, for those involved in research, teaching, or study involving macro or community practice, collaboration with surrounding communities is inherent in their discipline (2004). Bolda, Lowe, Maddox, and Patnaik (2005) support this claim by pointing out that social workers are often key players in the social services that a community might need, bringing skills to a collaborative relationship such as community organization, direct service, and advocacy and knowledge of policy and a background in evaluation.

Schools of social work have found that community-based partnerships and research programs allow participating students the opportunity to see the theories they learn in class applied in real-world contexts. Via these opportunities, students can learn practical skills in evaluation methods, survey methodology, data collection models, and statistical analysis—skills often necessary for the “design, implementation, and modification of community interventions”—and practical application of community-organizing concepts, and project development and management skills (Hyde and Meyer, 2004, p. 73).

Many federal agencies and private foundations encourage partnering with the community as a precedent to receiving their support, and the importance of community involvement in social work research is becoming evident in the available funding. Many of the University of Michigan School of Social Work (U-MSSW) community partnerships began with targeted funding that sought to promote this type of collaboration, and yet many of the collaborations within the school have found their genesis in providing the community with resources such as faculty expertise, evaluation services, human resources, and learning opportunities for students—and sometimes all of the above.

The U-MSSW has served as the home for the Global Program on Youth (GPY), a W.K. Kellogg-funded initiative that has been on the forefront of the development and support of collaboratories¹—partnerships and communities (whether local, regional, national, or international) that include researchers, policymakers, and service providers—that are exploring and addressing issues related to the well-being of children and youth in such areas as child development, policy impact, mental health, and teen pregnancy. Under the GPY umbrella, the Teen Pregnancy Prevention collaborative included businesses, nonprofit agencies, unions, neighborhood centers, criminal justice representatives, schools, faith-based organizations, and citizens who shared the desire to address issues related to teenage pregnancies. The collaborative focused on the complexity of the social issues inherent in early pregnancy, including abstinence and sex education, the health and well-being of both mother and child, and the financial status of early parents.

The U-MSSW is also the home of the CDC-funded Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) Detroit Partnership, which includes numerous community-based organizations, local and state health departments, local health systems, and two U-M schools. REACH Detroit supports interdisciplinary, community-based participatory research that strengthens the ability of partner organizations to develop, implement, and evaluate health interventions

to improve the health and quality of life of families and communities on the east and southwest sides of Detroit, specifically addressing the health priority area of obesity and diabetes in the African-American and Hispanic communities.

One faculty member, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, has partnered with local health services providers and social services agencies in the city of Detroit to evaluate a culturally specific HIV/AIDS risk reduction program entitled JEMADARI (Kiswahili for “wise companion”), which was designed to specifically address drug- and sexual risk-related behaviors in drug-dependent African-American men. Developed to address the CDC’s statement that “culturally specific challenges—including continued health disparities and substance abuse—have contributed to the spread of HIV/AIDS in African-American communities” (Tannenbaum, 2002), faculty and community partners sought information about whether increased empowerment through adaptive coping skills, perceptions of personal control, ethnic identity, and adaptive peer support would predict a decrease in drug- and sexual risk-related behaviors in the future.

As evidenced by the projects described earlier, working with the community and community-based organizations to address health disparities is an urgent issue for schools of social work and other related departments—such as schools of public health, nursing, and medicine. Additionally, social justice in the twenty-first century also includes confronting disparities in access to and skill development with emerging technologies. In the fall of 2004, the U-MSSW—bringing its experience as a cofounder (with the Gateway Group) of the technology program DetroitCONNECTED—partnered with City Connect Detroit, an organization whose goal is to connect community stakeholders (e.g., community organizations with universities, grassroots groups with funding sources) for the benefit of social and economic changes in Detroit. Through a think-tank process, participants identified problems, strategies, and solutions for tackling technology infrastructure, resources, availability, training, growth, and relevance.

These are but a few of the numerous partnerships the faculty, staff, and students of the U-MSSW have developed in order to fulfill not only the social compact charged to the larger university but to carry forward the very tenets of the social work profession.

Benefits for the University and the Community

In their success, and indeed by virtue of some of their failures, community partnerships cultivated within the U-MSSW have affected

social change through collaboration across disciplines, among cultures, and across time lines. In their goal to translate knowledge into competent, reality-based solutions, university/community partnership participants have also been positioned to offer a unique perspective into the mutual benefits in a partnership itself. Following are a number of general benefits as identified by a systematic review of current literature, illustrated by examples of how collaboration with the community has reflected or embraced the concept of mutual benefit.

Community Benefits

Self-Determination and Empowerment. The idea of self-determination in a community-university partnership is vital. As mentioned briefly, past relationships with a university may have created a negative impression within the community, or the university's paternalistic attitudes may have created an imbalance in how the community viewed their true worth in any relationship. This may be especially true in ethnic and economic minority communities, where there is a history of university involvement that produced feelings that the participants were merely being observed (the "laboratory" factor) and results were limited or not applicable to the actual community (Harper and Salina, 2000; Kone et al., 2000; Ahmed, Beck, Maurana, and Newton, 2004).

Inherent in the social work profession—and, in particular, community organizing—practitioners encourage the active participation of the populations with which they work or, to examine it in light of the previous discussion, those who might be lacking social capital. Encouraging participating community members to actively contribute to the partnership, its goals, its outcomes, and the evaluation of each supports the cultivation of social capital. Thus, the process of developing a partnership may be just as important as the partnership itself (Maurasse, 2001), allowing parties to develop norms jointly, identify common goals, and involve those who may not be normally involved. Empowerment is an underlying objective and increases the personal investment in positive outcomes (Hardina, 2003).

Hausman, Becker, and Brawer (2005), in their discussion of collaborative health partnerships, indicate that *personal benefit indicators*—quantified or measurable concepts of the benefits community members or other participants have gained or realized by their participation—are one way a collaborative can evaluate its social capital impact. These indicators can include increased job satisfaction, fulfillment of personal or spiritual goals, a capacity for learning new or utilizing different skill sets, and—most important to the concept of relationship-

based social capital theories—the ability to interact with peers, and all contribute to personal benefit and empowerment.

REACH Detroit research personnel worked with community members to develop and create recruitment materials, consent forms, and discussion guides (Kieffer et al., 2004). REACH also recruited local community members who were up to date on community issues and norms to act as discussion moderators. Additionally, community members participated in focus groups and assisted in analyzing resulting data. In the end, their investment in the REACH project was a result of their desire to confront and address the health issues of their own community.

Partnership agencies involved with the Global Program on Youth found that the sharing of capital—human, social, physical, and the like—became an important key in balancing the power structure of the relationships. Careful aim was taken to ensure that both the university and the community participants had a stake in the process, results, and dissemination of project outcomes, that both the university and community contributions were considered expert, and that all participants could equally claim ownership of the project.

One of the community partners stated:

We are treated as partners. It's a collaborative effort. We're all there. We all give input. . . . It's a group of professionals all on the same level, all working together, only [the PI] knows a little bit more than we do about a lot of things. I'm thinking this is the best opportunity I've ever had to collaborate with a university while I've been on the job and I would want to repeat that in the future. [It's] led to a couple of other side discussions . . . [which] probably wouldn't have occurred simply because we wouldn't have been in contact with one another (Hudgins and Allen-Meares, 2005, p. 12).

It should be noted that in addition to the benefits the partner has indicated, the connection—the ability to make contact with those outside of one's normal circle of peers, mentioned by this participant—is a by-product of the partnership itself. The side discussions were facilitated by being at the right place at the right time. Social networks do indeed lead to further empowerment and further involvement.

Human Resources and Capacity Building. Communities can benefit from the university-community partnership through capacity building (e.g., the addition of human resources). Partnerships often provide access to staff that would otherwise be unavailable, typically in the

form of university students. Whether as volunteer workers or as an integral part of the research process, the added personnel expand the organization's capacity and result in the ability to complete more work, do more analysis, or provide more services (Strand, Murullo, Cutforth, Stoeker, and Donahue, 2003).

University partners can also contribute to capital in the form of technology, physical space, and expertise. Technology was an especially important component in the GPY collaborative owing to the physical distance between many of the partners (working from locations such as Michigan, California, Mexico, and Toronto and Israel, Paraguay, South Africa, and Nigeria). Establishing a Web presence was an important part of the Teen Pregnancy Project, with a marked increase in Web hits upon publication of a related book that pointed to the site for additional information. Similarly, space is a crucial element of the Detroit Center, providing a centrally located area in which to conduct partnership matters and ensuring that the community has access to those who can assist them in their action for change.

Additionally, nonprofits often do not have the time, or the luxury of devoting personnel, to design the evaluation processes they need to examine their own processes themselves (Strand et al., 2003). Faculty members can bring their time, expertise, objectivity, and often their funding to the task of finding out what works, what does not work, and what needs to change to help the organization provide maximum services with minimal effort by working smarter, not harder.

Credibility. In addition to human and capital resources, community partners gain access to the credibility and influence of their university colleagues (Strand et al., 2003). The reputation of the university and the professional credentials of the faculty partners may bring with them an element of legitimacy for the community partner. One GPY partner stated, "I think it might help in setting policy, the added clout of having an organization behind you as opposed to trying to do something as an individual as we get to the point of trying to make some major changes . . ." (Hudgins and Allen-Meares, 2005, p. 16).

Leveraging one partner's expertise at the possible expense of the equality of the partnership is balanced by the validity that recognized researchers can provide (Axel-Lute, 1999). Credibility can also provide leverage in securing or expanding the use of funding dollars. In their report based on the think tank proceedings, DetroitCONNECTED noted,

The nonprofit community in Detroit has attempted to overcome hurdles slowing integration of technology into the city's residen-

tial neighborhoods, but their capacity remains insufficient to deal with the scope of the challenge ... for [them] to successfully overcome these barriers, they must work closely with the public and private sectors, while aggressively taking advantage of funding opportunities currently available (Cherry, 2005, p. 4).

University Benefits

Universities also reap the benefits of partnering with community organizations and agencies.

Knowledge Production. The university-community relationship is a starting point for various knowledge production opportunities, such as how to enhance curriculum based on findings from the field; discussions resulting from a particular experience; discussions exploring and encouraging further occasions for involvement; and the opportunity for reflection, writing, and publication (Bingle and Hatcher, 1996). For example, faculty involved with JEMADARI have utilized their involvement in JEMADARI as a case study in a course on the role of evaluation in social work.

In addition, faculty members are able to communicate similarities and differences between collaborative research and more traditional approaches. Students are provided with examples of how the community can impact the identification of social problems, the design of a study, the implementation of solutions, and the ways in which information is distributed. In fact, a faculty member involved in REACH Detroit is a featured speaker in the aforementioned evaluation course, presenting an example of how to evaluate a community-based prevention program.

Lessons learned in partnerships have also been used to spark interest in similar or related initiatives within larger university circles. One principal investigator has shared his interest in technology-supported collaboration with his students through curriculum and course development, and he has provided fellow faculty with information about how geographic information systems may be used in mental health research. As a result, additional faculty members are seeking more information on how this technology can enhance their own course of research.

Challenging the Paradigm. University-community partnerships provide the university with an opportunity to evaluate and challenge its own norms and concepts of what research means to it. Though merely one possibility in the countless ways universities can partner with their

neighbors, community-based research provides an important example of thinking outside the norm. Community-based research is not the objective data collection, analysis, and results-based theories that typically permeate the academy. Whereas the university's conventional research outcome encompasses "prediction or understanding alone" (Hills and Mullett, 2000), the goal of community-based research is less tangible and instead seeks meaningful impact or change. Community members and researchers are involved in the entire research process—from defining the problem to publishing the findings (Center for Applied Public Health at Columbia University, 2003). "Both researcher and participant are actors in the investigative process, influencing the flow, interpreting the content, and sharing options for action" (Sohng, 1995, n.p.). Researchers cannot remain outside the community but must instead become a part of it.

One of the graduate students working with a GPY collaborative discussed the impact on his understanding of university research:

It's completely taken away my earlier conception of what it was to do social work research. . . . In essence what I thought was important to do, in terms of being a good social work researcher, was to get a lot of articles published, crunch a lot of numbers, and ultimately not concern myself with questions about the utility of the research, the project, [or] public practitioners. It has completely changed as a result of this project, largely as a result of working with the PI and getting my hands dirty by working with the people on the ground level (Hudgins & Allen-Meares, 2005, p. 26).

Context. One benefit to community-based partnerships and research is knowledge creation rooted in *context*. By stepping out into the community, both faculty and students experience a worldview other than their own, which can enhance understanding about the reality of problems facing a community (Maurrasse, 2001). Especially in a research relationship, communities present the university with a true opportunity to study social problems in an environmental framework, including the location and actual people involved (Reid and Vianna, 2001). The knowledge and information that the community partners bring with them is as important as the contribution from the university (Strand et al., 2003), and community input can ensure that the end results are accurate and relevant to the needs and outcomes they identify (Axel-Lute, 1999).

Context played an important role in some of the REACH Detroit project's initial conclusions. Though there is ample evidence that minority populations realize higher rates of diabetes and obesity, polling and educating community members revealed that dietary concerns are not always based upon a community member's desire to consume unhealthy foods but rather a lack of access to or resources for healthy foods or the knowledge of how to prepare them. "Overcoming such environmental barriers is a crucial component to the design of effective interventions to enhance health behaviors in low-resource communities" (Two Feathers et al., 2005).

Mutual Benefits

As important as individual benefits are, the concept of *mutual benefit* is also a key concept in successful university-/community partnerships (Maurrasse, 2001). Mutual benefits accrue to both.

Utilizing Multiple Approaches and Multiple Points of View. When discussing how education has become disconnected from the larger society, one participant in the American Council on Education's Listening to Communities program commented, "Real solutions to problems are not specialized. Real solutions are interdisciplinary" (Thomas, 2000, n.p.).

University benefits can stem from the challenge of approaching complex community problems utilizing a less traditional and perhaps less myopic point of view, considering multiple approaches or multiple disciplines in the examination of complex social issues. All departments and academic groups at a university are able to share in the assessment of problems and have the capacity to engage in solving those problems (Maurrasse, 2001).

The ability to embrace participants from a variety of organizations—crossing disciplines, levels of expertise, and perspectives—has greatly contributed to the greater diversity within the REACH Detroit partnerships. With a combined focus on eating a healthy diet and exercising as vehicles for avoiding or controlling diabetes, obesity, and high blood pressure, the REACH program—with university personnel based in the School of Social Work and the School of Public Health, and with professional partners at several medical and health organizations—has grown to embrace organizations such as the urban gardening programs Greening of Detroit and Earthworks Gardens and 4-H programs, recreation centers, mental health service providers, and other programs that may not have been traditionally included in a health

research project. These groups work together to support the efforts of the REACH partnerships, to increase the development of, access to, and use of community resources and social supports that promote healthy lifestyles.

Funding. Both university and community partners may be able to leverage their relationship for local, state, or national funds (Israel et al., 1998) and for matching funds or merely the ability to write and secure more grants (Strand et al., 2003).

A partnership can also stretch funding dollars by leveraging faculty and student time and other resources (Strand et al., 2003), which can keep overhead costs down. In addition, information gathered can be used to strengthen grant proposals or provide new funding opportunities.

The community can also utilize the connection to the partnership itself to provide funders and other external parties evidence that they are open to self-evaluation and willing to seek evidence-based solutions to become more accountable and effective in their service delivery (Dugery and Knowles, 2003).

DetroitCONNECTED members documented that one of the strengths of the partnership was the joint purchasing power that could “be harnessed to great advantage in the city” (Cherry, 2005, p. 9), facilitating an ability to upgrade technology components at a faster pace. Members also noted that the strength of the partners as a whole may be more attractive to alternative funding sources, such as loan officers or state assistance programs.

The ultimate goal of university and community collaboration should be to create new, readily available knowledge that both the university and the community can access for their respective needs (Israel et al., 1998). Participation empowers the community as they learn to organize, analyze, and act upon the knowledge they are helping to create (Hendrickson, 2001). Knowledge becomes the power the community needs to affect true social change (Hendrickson; Israel et al.).

Community members, however, may see collaboration as one piece in the larger agenda of change (Strand et al., 2003). Additionally, the scope of change may be the improvement of one life or a complete overhaul of a social system. The greater the change, the more resources must become available to affect that change, meaning that research may be a compliment to funding, empowerment, and action.

The examples throughout this article have demonstrated how collaboration can assist in meaningful change. By empowering faculty, students, and community participants alike, GPY has successfully incorporated the science and strategy of research with the impact of

grassroots activities, changing the health and well-being of children and their families in the process. REACH Detroit has changed the lives of countless Detroit citizens through empowerment and literal life-changing information and social action. DetroitCONNECTED is ensuring that all citizens of Detroit will one day have the access and the skills to participate in our information-based society. These collaborations have explored real problems facing real communities and, in doing so, have contributed to and assisted in the development of infrastructure, resource sharing, and knowledge production that will benefit participants and the greater community.

Participants in university and community partnerships have expertly established their ability to raise awareness surrounding important policy issues and to adeptly provide clear, timely, and relevant information to policymakers at all levels. It is also important to recognize that the impact of these tasks and achievements is not limited to only programming and services for these target populations. Partnerships have expanded the thinking and outlook of partners; changed their attitudes about working with groups, tools, and programs outside of the “usual suspects”; and encouraged partners to both collectively and individually examine their own roles in the process of social change.

CONCLUSION

The benefits of a university-community partnership can be—as indicated by the success of the U-MSSW’s collaborative relationship—life-changing. Faculty and students have opportunities to learn and experience the world in a new way, and community partners reap the benefits through more help, more time, and the knowledge that in the end the people they serve will get some solutions for the problems they face.

Current social and political events create both those problems and, at the same time, opportunities that successful collaboration has the potential to address with practical solutions. Heeding the call from the public to return to the basic tenets of the social compact, universities can utilize their ability to educate, research, and serve the greater good of democracy by providing an opportunity to directly affect the communities in which the schools are situated.

Though many schools and colleges within a university have something to offer the surrounding community, schools of social work are uniquely positioned and have a historical relationship of partnering to advance their professional objectives. Many schools of social work

have strong ties to the community and participate in projects that instruct faculty and students from all disciplines how to connect with the people in the surrounding community and, together, make a true difference in the lives of students and neighbors alike.

Though at the forefront of this emerging movement, large, public research universities are not the only institutions that can participate in or benefit from developing and growing community-based research and teaching programs. If interest exists and the administration is supportive, smaller schools can leverage the talents and interests of their faculty, staff, and students to cultivate partnerships that can inform research, support service learning, and mutually benefit all participants.

When asked about the impact of the collaborative model employed by GPY for his teaching, his students learning, and the agency's mission, one of the faculty leaders noted, "It is the kind of research . . . that social workers ought to be doing because it has very immediate real world implications for real world agencies and real world families and kids" (Hudgins and Allen-Meares, 2005, p. 35).

NOTE

1. Collaboratory research models initially emerged from the life science and physical science realm. Collaboratories have been described as "center[s] without walls, in which the nation's researchers perform their research without regard to geographical location—interacting with colleagues, accessing instrumentation, sharing data, and accessing information in digital libraries" (Kouzes, Myers, & Wulf, 1996, p. 40). GPY utilizes a collaboratory model that employs information technology to communicate with multiple disciplines and partners and "builds on the strengths of translational, participatory, and IT-supported collaboratory research approaches" (Allen-Meares, Hudgins, Engberg, & Lessnau, 2005, pp. 29–30).

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