

EMERGING TRENDS IN UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

University and College Community Partnerships
University of Nevada, Reno Comprehensive Master Plan

PURPOSE

There is a growing trend in urban universities to tear down the economic, social, and physical walls that separate them from their surrounding communities. Experts believe that "new conditions now prevail that make it both essential and highly likely that school-community-university partnerships will become the hallmark of the "New American University in the New Century."¹

This document identifies the emerging trends in partnerships between urban universities and colleges and their communities to undertake community revitalization and economic development and highlights their potential application to the development of the mixed-use district proposed south of I-80 by the City of Reno and the University of Nevada, Reno.

Companion documents prepared for this effort addressed specific case studies for:

- University Circle; Cleveland, Ohio
- Trinity College; Hartford, Connecticut
- Ohio State University; Columbus, Ohio
- University of Pennsylvania; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

NATIONAL TRENDS

- University-community partnerships are creating mutually rewarding opportunities for physical improvement, social and community advancement, and economic development.
- Outgrowing their inward-focused traditional roles, institutions of higher learning are becoming more active in their urban communities, increasingly seeing these communities as "living laboratories".
- Universities and colleges use their intellectual, human, and financial capital to act as leaders in community revitalization efforts. The combination of diminishing public funding for economic development, educational and social programs, combined with the shift to a knowledge-based economy, creates an ideal setting for institutions to become actively engaged in community and economic development.
- Recognized nationally as a successful practice of urban revitalization, public and non-governmental funding is increasingly available to jumpstart university-community partnership initiatives.
- The partnerships typically form a separate non-profit organization that avails the partnerships of grants, entrepreneurial decision-making, etc.
- These partnerships address a variety of programs that include:
 - Home ownership and home improvements
 - Retail development
 - Job training
 - Educational outreach

APPLICATION TO UNR

UNR is actively engaged with the City of Reno in support of a mixed-use district south of I-80 adjacent to the southern boundary of the campus. The goal of the university is to have a vital and cultural "downtown" district for the campus community. This city-led partnership provides greater possibilities for initial success and implementation. Most current university-community partnerships spring from the university and then bring on the city as a partner. However, in this case, the university and the City share the advantage of establishing common goals and their relationship early in the process and in conjunction with the development of the university's comprehensive master plan. Continued cooperation and strategic alliances should continue to foster a collaborative process that will ensure that the university's and the City's goals and needs are addressed.

Multi-faceted Approach

UNR and the City of Reno will do best by undertaking a multifaceted approach to gain success in the mixed use district south of I-80 by strategically providing improvements in the following areas of concern:

- Social
- Economic
- Cultural
- Physical

Program of Shared Uses

We envision that the district will contain a mix of uses to include: retail, entertainment, services, parking, and housing. Many of the university's program needs can contribute to the success of the mixed-use district. The following provides an initial list of suggested areas of cooperation that the university should consider:

- Retail – Target a percentage of the jobs for students
- Housing – Provide alternative housing for students, faculty, and staff
- Shared academic programs – Locate academic programs to the district that will benefit by their proximity to users and to create a "living laboratory". Such programs can include continuing education classes, adult education, child development and daycare, health outreach programs, performance and art venues, housing and caring for the elderly, etc.
- Parking – Locating several thousand parking spaces (connected by the university shuttle system) will serve to vitalize the area and will promote increased use of the parking structures during the weekends and summer.

Strategic Investments

Universities have been able to incentivize private developers and organizations to invest or take part in redevelopment initiatives through several mechanisms. To cite one mechanism, SINA (Trinity's partner) purchased a distressed building in the area and donated it to another non-profit organization. The organization then took over to renovate the space with funding provided through private foundation funds and city funds. To cite another, SINA partnered with two community non-profit housing developers. SINA identifies, purchases, and markets the homes while Hartford Hospital provides acquisition funds and construction financing.

EMERGING TRENDS

UNR faces a physical barrier in its own redevelopment efforts: I-80. In the 2nd Master Plan work session, the UNR Graduate Student President raised that this area is not a physical barrier as much as it is a psychological barrier. The blighted neighborhood the students must pass through, she says, is the real deterrent to ease of access. Trinity dealt with these same issues in its own crime-ridden and suffering neighborhood of Hartford, Connecticut. In order to promote connections between the campus and Park Street seven blocks north of campus, they concentrated development between the third and fourth blocks north of the campus as a stepping-stone to Park Street. West of campus, a blighted residential area is another deterrent for students to leave the campus. In response, the Trinity Master Plan designated a block east of campus as a potential development focus. Trinity's Master Plan designated about ten compact areas surrounding the campus as potential focuses for development and connectivity. This spotted development plan places revitalization in pockets to spur further revitalization in a ripple-like manner.

METHODOLOGY AND ASSUMPTIONS

This study was compiled based on the consultant's expertise and research found through literature on the HUD Office of University Partnerships Office website. It was also based on the consultant's case study research that focused on: Ohio State University, Trinity College, Case Western Reserve, and University of Pennsylvania.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Emerging Trends in University and College – Community Partnerships

The traditional, historical stance of institutions of higher learning has been to close themselves off to the surrounding community to the point that some have become fully self-contained communities. The growing solidarity between academic institutions and communities is transforming this characteristic. The potential for colleges and universities to pioneer urban community revitalization is slowly being realized by a select group of universities interested in economic development and civic engagement in their communities. This growing trend is breaking into the mainstream as universities nationwide are taking note of the benefits of forming public-private partnerships, many in the form of Community Development Corporation's (CDCs), aimed at redevelopment projects in their surrounding communities.

University of Pennsylvania, Trinity College, Case Western Reserve, and Ohio State University

These universities are among the pioneers that have broken new ground. Other universities are following suit. Oregon State University's (OSU) community development team visited Penn in the summer of 2000 to learn from their successful model. Yale and Columbia have also put together comprehensive programs focused on housing and economic development in their surrounding neighborhoods. Information regarding 20 other universities and colleges, among hundreds, establishing community partnerships can be found at <http://www.oup.org/about/copc03.html>. University and college-community initiated projects cover the spectrum and range from community education to housing to economic development.

Fiscal Realities and Changing Social Roles

One can trace the emergence of university and college–community partnerships to fiscal realities and changing social roles. In light of decreased federal funding and shrinking municipal budgets to support social programs as well as housing and programmatic links between higher education and the community, innovative partnerships are able to address pressing urban needs. Ira Harkavey, Director of University of Pennsylvania’s University Center for Community Partnerships writes, “stated directly, ‘real-world’ developments are ‘forcing’ higher eds, particularly urban higher eds, to become genuine civic institutions devoted to solving the pressing problems of our society. The democratic promise of the American university sharply, disturbingly contrasts with the reality of American society.”²

Several factors have contributed to the phasing out of the traditional university. According to Richard M. Rosan, President of Urban Land Institute, three factors explain this change³: After WWII the U.S. economy shifted from an industrial focused economy to a brain powered, or knowledge-based economy due in large part to the research streaming out of universities such as Stanford and MIT. The role of universities began to expand and became the focus for the future of the economy.

Universities are increasingly involved in urban revitalization to protect their campuses and create a favorable environment to attract students and faculty, adding to the success of the university. There has been an increasing emphasis on the university’s role as a major civic participant.

HUD’s Office of University Partnerships

National institutions and government agencies are also increasingly aware of the potential success of university–community partnerships. HUD directs an office called the Office of University Partnerships. (<http://www.oup.org/>) Their slogan reads “colleges and communities—partners in urban revitalization.” Foundations are also interested in seeing how their support of higher education will help improve K-12 schooling, civic responsibility, and the strength of community, among other pressing public problems. As Ira Harkavey, Director of Penn’s Center for Community Partnerships writes: “to put it another way, altruism pays—doing good may be the best way for universities to do well.”⁴

Town-Gown Relationship

Universities are reinventing their relationships with their neighboring communities and undertaking the revitalization and redevelopment of the urban districts in which they sit. These partnership initiatives have been primarily focused on improving rental housing and quality of life, increasing home ownership, revitalizing the retail market, improving education, and developing multi-use developments that include commercial, retail, and housing. Campus Partners, Ohio State’s CDC, placed its multi-use Gateway Center in the most blighted area of High Street. This strategic move provides a catalyst for further development by bringing new uses to the street. Trinity developed The Learning Corridor, an extensive group of educational facilities, directly adjacent to its own campus. They focused neighborhood retail approximately seven blocks away as well as development focus zones adjacent to the campus.

Creating Lasting Economic Impact

After spinning off from their universities and colleges, many graduates and faculty often establish companies adjacent to their university, creating valuable economic impacts. The nature of the knowledge based economy lies in its flexibility of location. Knowledge producers move to their desired location and jobs and companies follow. Universities on the other hand, are permanently placed in their locale, requiring them to attract economic development. Creating a high quality of life is therefore essential for attracting valuable economic development.

Many urban universities and colleges share the same sets of problems: urban decay, unemployment, high crime rates, lack of commercial and retail development, lack of interest in home ownership, and a poor tax base to support the local public schools. These factors combined create eroding urban economies and neighborhoods that lack vitality and a sense of community. But that trend is turning around thanks to increased town-gown relationships and public-private coalition building on the part of universities.

Universities are many times the largest employer in the area as well as the agent that contains the necessary set of resources for successful community and economic development: research, expertise, human capital, relationships to lending institutions and partners, eager students and faculty interested in socially responsible projects, as well as the time and money to invest. They are the "fuel for innovation, entrepreneurship and regional synergy."⁵

Community revitalization projects, while they are the "right" thing to do, are also economically essential for universities and their local governments. These universities are transforming their urban setting from a liability into a competitive advantage, capitalizing on the milieu of experiences and the richness of community that is innate to the urban context.

ENDNOTES

¹ Harkavey, Ira. "School-Community-University Partnerships: Effectively Integrating Community Building and Education Reform." University of Pennsylvania. Conference Paper presented. Available: http://www.upenn.edu/ccp/Bibliography/Ed_HUD_paper.html.

³Harkavey.

⁴ Rosan, 3.

⁴ Harkavey.

⁵ Rosan, 1.

FIGURES ATTACHED

None

End of Emerging Trends