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Tents along the Merrimack

Homelessness and University-Community Cooperation

Mark D. Levine, Ph.D.

This article presents historical, institutional, and ethical contexts for a university and an industrial, ethnic community's cooperative effort to address local hunger and homelessness. A large portion of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell's students are of working-class and local origin. Neighborhood social problems are in effect their own, and community service may be considered a variant of self-help. Attention is paid the special importance of developing a sense of community across traditional boundaries on and off campus and to the establishment of permanent mutually beneficial structures.

The University of Massachusetts at Lowell is in its third year of institutional involvement with Greater Lowell officials, service providers, clients, and community, addressing local homelessness and hunger. As this institutional energy is advanced, the university is participating in the nationwide expansion of the higher education campus community service role, under way since the mid-1980s. With the economy worsening and the potential reshaping of societal priorities, involvement seems to be especially important to both institution and community.

To explore this relationship historically and sociologically, searching for origins and models, for themes and implications of past and present experiences, I ask: In an era of social and economic distress, what can a university do to promote lasting and mutually beneficial ameliorative structures in the neighboring community and on campus? I zero in on the role of community service in helping the campus to strengthen its own community. Implicitly, I inquire into the origins and the appropriateness of our sense of being an elite and discuss the particular opportunities for local students in promoting self help strategies and the possibility of service learnings.

Lowell and Homelessness

Some thirty-five miles to the north of Boston, Lowell, Massachusetts (1990 population, 105,000) is undergoing one of its cyclical economic downturns, always a little worse than the state's, and the warm weather of early spring brings forth a sprinkling of inhabitants sleeping by its two rivers and its latticework of canals.

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The nation's first industrial city, Lowell has always been a magnet for waves of work-seeking impoverished immigrants. Not unexpectedly, it has experienced the full complement of urban problems, including a shortage of shelters for the displaced. The city's first immigrants, Irish who were collected from Boston and elsewhere in the early 1820s to build its canals, were accorded a tract of swampy, mosquito-infested land near the mills, the so-called Holy Acre. There they established a ramshackle tent city, the Paddy Camps. Over the ensuing 170 years, each most recently impoverished immigrant began his life as an industrial worker in Lowell in the ten-acre triangle known as the Acre, the current home of a crowded community of Southeast Asians and Latinos.

Even the utopian boardinghouse system for the "mill girls," the regimented centerpiece of an attempt by the mill owners to avoid the social problems of British industrial cities, deteriorated within twenty-five years. The legacy for American industrialism, highly influenced by this experiment, was benevolent paternalism, including the containment and disabling of unions. The forms remained, but the literal structures disintegrated.

With each wave of impoverished immigrants and workers displaced in the volatile modern industrial economy, the city was once again faced with a housing shortage, with homelessness and hunger. By the mid 1980s, in the throes of the recession, shelters and feeding facilties were founded to respond to the growing problem. By 1991, approximately 20,000 Lowellians were living at or below the poverty line. Five shelters, housing 1,260, and two food pantries, serving close to 2,000 families per month with four days' food, had been established. Members of families, especially women-headed single-parent households, outnumbered individuals among the city's homeless shelter residents.

By the summer of 1991, 250 teens were estimated to be sleeping out of doors, especially in the Centralville section of the city, across the Merrimack River from the largest of the shells of the great mills, now part of the large Lowell Historic National Park. University graduate student surveyors had learned of serious dislocations from the Cambodian community of 25,000, most later reabsorbed by the cultural and family network. A large food warehouse and a weekend soup kitchen had been established; a teen shelter and a municipal Hunger Homelessness Commission were on the drawing boards. The demographics of the shelter population began changing. A few suburban families began appearing, ravaged and disjointed by the economy; as they were being helped, several became eager advocates for reform, offering the first presentations by victims heard clearly in the city. By the fall, 20 percent of those at the "wet" shelter for single persons had come after they had exhausted unemployment benefits. A recent phenomenon was the emergence after a night in a communal sleeping room of a well-groomed executive whose house had been repossessed and family had split up. Carrying leather attaché case, he left for work, the experience of the shelter fresh in his mind.

Just before the municipal election, a few local businessmen convinced some of the city councilors to pressure that shelter to leave the city. A picket line at City Hall quickly formed. Members of the University of Massachusetts at Lowell service community joined the picket line in step with shelter residents, staff, and board. Area religious and personnel from other shelters provided an impressive show of support. The hearing on the shelter removal was postponed and a citizen committee later was formed. The battle lines of the American nineties were being drawn, and the university was taking its place.

Picketing was not within the everyday persona of the historical institution, whose larger, more dominant subdivision, known to old-timers as Lowell Textile, had long represented to the community the power of of industrial capitalism.[1] The more genteel part, the state teachers college, had represented what is known today as literacy and was local, or at least regional.

Born of these two contrasting institutions, each established in the late nineteenth century, the present University of Massachusetts at Lowell still has a clouded local identity. The larger institution, Lowell Textile (1895; later Lowell Technical Institute, 1953), organized by the mill ownership to provide the mills with ongoing improvements in science, technology, and management, was one of the best in the country in textile engineering and management; the second institution, Lowell Normal School (later Lowell State Teachers College) had been an excellent state training institute for teachers and the earliest institution of higher education in the nation to train music teachers.

The division between town and the two gowns is ancient and distinctly ideological. Historically, Lowell Textile (Tech) was attended by a population from far outside the region (whom Lowellians still call blow-ins). When locals remember Tech of the 1920s and 1930s, they picture turbaned East Indians on the streets of downtown Lowell. There were children of Yankee mill managers, bright ethnics, excluded by discrimination from the Ivy League schools, and Jews from textile business-owning families in New York city. To the locals, Tech was academically formidable, exotic, patrician, unconcerned, and distant, almost invisible. Beginning after World War I, the mills began departing for the southern United States and eventually, as technology and manpower adapted to synthetics, the institution retooled and diversified as a modern technical institute and university. In the 1970s, the Textile Engineering Department was gradually phased out. Departments like Plastics developed an international reputation.

In contrast to Tech, Lowell Normal, later Lowell State Teachers College, had a local identity. State admitted many graduates from Lowell High School and Tyngsboro's Notre Dame and placed many as local schoolteachers. The institution was regarded as competent, friendly, and regional and as providing a guaranteed job for one's ambitious daughter. The merger into the University of Lowell in 1976 blurred the identities of each of the institutions, to be confused again for some alumni and locals by the recent merger of the combined institution with the three other state university campuses and the medical school in Worcester.

What has changed more strikingly in recent years are the student demographics. The majority of current students are typically the first in the family to attend college and often local. The institution's constituency has come almost full cycle: from manager and elite to proletarian. Unlike their predecessors, the present students bring along, and continue to live vividly, the legacy of the economic roller coaster, currently in a tumultuous dip phase. At this writing, a dramatic increase in tuition and fees, a decrease in scholarship aid, and cuts of university service threaten to wrench from the students' tenuous grasp the long-sought key to social advancement. Many who last year lived in residence halls and local apartments have moved back home; some have dropped out, awaiting better times.

An unarticulated community of thousands of university alumni, retirees, staff, and student family live throughout the Western Merrimack Valley within twenty miles of the institution. Hardly a local family who has lived a generation here does not have a member or close friend with a past or present university connection. In marked contrast to these numbers is the common condition of this population of emotional severance from the university. Alumni donations are at about one third of comparable institutions nationally. The university staff is of local origin and some of the faculty as well share the values and concerns of the region housing it. I will return to the larger university-community relationship, in which the local student plays a crucial role.

As the institution reaches out to the local community's needy by expanding its service component, it is resonating with dirges familiar to the students. Yet, an increase in campus volunteering has occurred quite spontaneously, in timely contrast to the stereotype of campus community service as existing exclusively between upper class private college student helping poorer local person. The stereotype has a long social history in both higher education and community service and is worth examining critically.

The American University and Community Service

Community service in American higher education has largely religious and classist origins, exemplified in the early twentieth century by the student YMCAs and the venerable community service programs at Stiles House at the University of California at Berkeley (UC/Berkeley), Dwight House at Yale University, and Phillips Brooks House at Harvard University. Although much lip service was given to democratic ideals, personal ennoblement was the goal of both service and higher education at the classic service institutions, Antioch, Oberlin, and Berea. In the mid-nineteenth century, public institution community service was given a large boost in the stipulations for federal establishment of land-grant colleges, many to become today's large state universities. In later years, this involvement of the publics waned, and only recently is it being reinvigorated, often in emulation of and led by the privates.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, the pronouncement of the social reform possibilities promised within the American experience entered the programmatic context of mainstream Protestant missionarism. Enthusiastic college students from Harvard traced the progress of immigrants in Boston's industrial suburbs at the turn of the century and laid some of the groundwork for the professionalization of community service as social work. They and their Ivy League counterparts swung with a mighty stroke the double-edged sword of help and prejudice; the mix characterizes community service to this day as the richer and more educated continue to set the terms of social amelioration of the poor.

Significant evidence of the elitist feature is the availability of large amounts of funds. Thus, the Phillips Brooks House (PBH) Association at Harvard is housed in an endowed building, assisted by a paid staff, and availed of major funding opportunities for its plethora of projects. While the heart of the PBH program is the student committee that receives, trains, places, and provides support for university volunteers, there are also grants available for consultants, equipment, and so on. A variant is Stiles House at UC/Berkeley, where students earn salaries working on established projects and are supervised by paid staff. Established just off campus as a nonprofit, it receives the majority of its funding from the United Way. Its historic record of

independence includes dogged protection of free speech during the state government sieges of the early 1960s.

The 1960s: Experiential and Service Learning

Following the World War II and the further secularization of American life and its institutions, a gradual shift occurred in campus discourse regarding community service, from its role in the development of Christian character to its function as a source of understanding in the social sciences as generator of social change and shaper of values.

The role of public and community service in higher education was a topic of the university self-examination that blossomed in the late 1960s. Drawing on a tradition emphasizing the role of experience in education, especially John Dewey, there emerged a critique of contemporary education as separate from and irrelevant to the mass of the experience of the general population. The writings of A. S. Neill, Ivan Illich, Paul Goodman, and others helped educators nationwide consider alternative missions and curricula, some involving service to the community, especially in the form of social change. Melding experience and education, making education applicable, relevant, value reflective, and change oriented helped established a place in the academic curriculum for analysis of the root causes of social problems: poverty, violence, racial and gender discrimination. The traditional boundary between campus and community was permeated and personal and social change activities became fit for academia. This period witnessed the establishment of such new applied community service fields as community psychology, formed from a combination of community organizing, clinical psychology, and social work. Looking backward, we remember the era as one of unbridled optimism.

Institutional changes in the university format and client followed. Colleges such as Antioch, Goddard, and Northeastern had long offered as mainstream curriculum the value-reflective integration of work and the undergraduate course work. In the atmosphere of self-examination, accompanied by the imperative of change felt in the late nineteen sixties and early seventies, and spearheaded by both education progressives and conservatives, this effort was expanded to include public state university systems and national networks. These adult external degree programs emphasized service to so-called nontraditional students (older, working, housewives, poor, minority). The first were the statewide Empire State College (State University of New York) and the national University Without Walls (Union of Experimenting Colleges and Universities) network, which soon offered to scores of adults the opportunity to blend experience and education and thereby to legitimate learnings from paid and family work, and from community service. Generally seen as a blessing by students hitherto excluded from or bypassed by academic and credentialling enterprises, some of the early participants also expressed concern that community leadership might be co-opted and diverted by academic control and legitimation.

A related development was the gathering of a single social science college curriculum around service. Grounded in a carefully constructed blend of community organizing and self-help methodology with academic methodology, such programs again included in their student body adults, working class and minority. In New England, the most significant of these was the University of Massachusetts at Boston's College of Public and Community Service (CPCS). CPCS frames its undergraduate and

graduate curriculum of theory and practice around service areas, ranging from legal to housing to gerontological services. Included is the educating of lay and practitioner students to be effective advocates. There is hardly a metropolitan Boston community or state agency or service organization that has not experienced its salutary influence, from its well-trained graduates in the public and community sectors to its surveys of vulnerable populations leading to changes in local policy and legislation.

Campus Rebirth of Community Service

The national trend in campus community service has been logged roughly in fifteen-year intervals, rising during periods of social and economic strain and idealism: from the Great Depression to the end of World War II (1930–1945); during the Civil Rights/Vietnam War era (1960–1975); and gearing up again during the economic bubble burst of the 1980s. By the turn of the 1990s, research showed the student body beginning to shake off its earlier reported narcissism. A national study examining social awareness as the student proceeded from high school to college concluded that high school student involvement in social service is at one of its highest points in twenty years and seemed to be positively correlated with social service. For the first time in recent years, student chose altruistic goals over capitalistic goals.[2]

By the mid-1980s, deliberate campaigns had been initiated at student and president level, followed several years later by a push for federal programs. In 1984, a young Harvard University graduate walked a sixty-five eastern college campus circuit, Johnny Appleseed style, to share a Harvard presidential letter on community service. The result was the founding of the Campus Outreach Organizing League (COOL), which now advises more than 450 campuses on community service. While not represented on as many campuses in Massachusetts as elsewhere, it has impressed many as a genuinely student driven operation. In their organizing, they have asked: How do we experience the power of a large number of involved students? They pitch for an ongoing commitment rather than a sudden one-shot burst of volunteer energy.

In 1985, three university presidents sat down and commonly experienced the Campus Compact, an influential organization of some 250 presidents of colleges and universities, including many of the most prestigious nationally. The premise is that commitment to service enters from the top and then from the bottom, the students. The Compact's mission is the increasing and focusing of community service delivery by the members' students, the linkage of service to curriculum, and the publicizing of the service aspect of their institution. Recently, the Compact has been attempting to fight off its reputation as an organization of the elite and as secularizer of service.

The Compact leadership point to the tradition of more spiritually based community service, to some extent a continuation of the earlier Protestant tradition, at the eminently successful programs of Compact members Notre Dame and Georgetown Universities. Indeed, a Jesuit psychologist I spoke with in San Francisco commented that service may be perceived as an obligation of the Eucharist. A further rationale for such service is expressed by Sister Gabrielle Husson, retired president of the Newton College of the Sacred Heart, who recalls community service at former Newton College as

> based upon the faith of the students, never for credit and quite extracurricular. First, service should be the outcome of one's education, of knowing more about the government and about people's needs. A really successful education should

> bring the student to the outcome that the student owes something to society. Second, education enhances and reinforces the motivation for the service and focuses students on what they can do. Third, people who respond to the call to serve are those who have the long range view. College students delay gratification, give a year of their life, they put off going into business or their profession, they get away from just making money and having the easy life. Service and education come together around the issue of sacrifice. Service is today's challenge. If students do it only in college, it still is a great experience: at the very least, they will have had a warm feeling for doing something for others.[3]

Following a groundswell of community service in every cranny of the nation, especially in the schools and universities, the federal government is taking the lead. The president set the tone by promising to institute a "community of light" to recharge the country with volunteerism. At present, three related entities exist: the National Office of Community Service, which provides public relations and recognition; the Points of Light Foundation, which institutionalizes and promotes the concept; and as a final spinoff, the National Community Service Act of 1990, which provides the funding. Under the act, a national youth service corps and a myriad of school and university service linkages with community will be developed. In Massachusetts, one goal will be to encourage school reform, for example, search for ways in which service can become part of the grade school curriculum. It is this legislation, one of whose sponsors is Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts, that encourages service learning and the development of lasting changes in the national health.

Community Service and Citizenship

It seems a common assumption that community service in college will lead to increased citizenship after graduation. A Campus Compact leader I spoke with seemed to imply that his linear definition of community service included "the exercise of civic responsibility by applying knowledge and skills to ameliorate a social situation."[4] It is this reasoning that causes Robert Bellah et al.'s *Habits of the Heart* to be a well-worn tract of the community service field and the strengthening of community to be seen as its goal.[5]

Harry Boyte argues that young people's community service is commonly experienced as personally significant, but students as often indicate that they are expecting to abdicate from civic action in the future. Boyte, in comment on the National Community Service Act, notes that community service counters an inner sense of purposelessness in the young server on the "private" level, but fails to generalize to civic or political behavior in the "public" sphere. Boyte argues that today's youth feel not disillusionment but considerable anger toward the political process. This anger is not addressed by the performance of community service, which provides them rather with a needed opportunity to feel useful. In providing students solely opportunities to feed shelter residents, they are being abetted in their individual need, but kept from the public role. Boyte argues that only through the young person's experiences of empowerment can preparation for later roles of citizenship and political life occur. These experiences are not specified.[6]

A Model Regional Collaborative

Homelessness, housing, and hunger are among the major targets of today's student servers. By the academic year 1991–1992, out of 105 Campus Compact member

institutions responding to a survey, 74 had established housing/homelessness programs and 74 had hunger programs. Eight institutions or regional collaborative had specifically targeted homelessness.[7] In the fall of 1991, I visited one of these, the (San Francisco) Bay Area Homelessness Program, and came away wondering if this model might be useful in the Northeast. Certainly the program generated hopefulness, one of a university's particular spiritual contributions. After two years of experience funding this publicized, powerful, and versatile regional collaborative of colleges and universities, the enthusiastic corporate founder had suggested that the university may be the institution capable of solving the problem of homelessness.

In 1987, the state of California somewhat backhandedly laid the groundwork for the effort by requiring by legislation (but without accompanying funding) that students at four-year public colleges perform an average of thirty hours of community service a year. The California Compact has helped eight (now ten) public, private, and parochial higher educational institutions in the Bay Area launch this foundation-funded collaborative effort targeting homelessness. The collaborative's coordinating offices are at San Francisco State University, where service-conscious students have long worked with the homeless, whom they pass in great numbers on their way to campus.

Among the collaborative's strengths are the recognition of individual institutional missions and characters, and thus the fostering of a full array of public, private, parochial, university, state, and junior college projects. Featured generally are tie-ins to curricular and preprofessional areas. For example, engineering students are making toys for the homeless, elementary education majors are tutoring shelter youngsters, and communications majors are creating brochures and writing publicity stories.

UC/Berkeley has developed a community-based homelessness prevention program featuring a suitcase clinic, the suitcases carrying the necessities for examinations of the homeless by undergraduate and graduate medical and health students. In the Roving Résumé Project developed at San Francisco State, trained students help shelter residents present their skills in résumé form in conjunction with job training. This is at once a supportive counseling process and an attempt to solve a problem underlying homelessness — joblessness. After taking a course on homelessness taught from a public policy perspective, a homeless person emerged from the student ranks to teach the course, which now includes experiential activities. Laudatory stories about these projects have appeared in national and foreign media.

The outside community, especially its homeless members, is actively involved in the program's planning and delivery. The collaboration was inaugurated with a series of three open town meetings on the subject of what a university can do to solve social problems. Agency staff, the homeless, and the formerly homeless are included on task forces. At San Jose State, an alliance with the homeless has been formed and expanded to include "all those without power." The Roving Résumé Project, inaugurated at a résumé writing day at a shelter, took off dramatically when residents were attracted to it. And, based upon the premise that homelessness is a social status, a plan is in the works to enroll the homeless in college, thus eliminating status barriers related to their condition. As students, they will have housing and medical services, for example.

Finally, institutions are free to reward the student's service in their own way, that is, with credit, recognition, and so forth, integrating it into an education at that institution in varying degrees. Thus far, the campuses have stressed innovations and expansion of service and understanding the problem of homelessness. For the next

two-year period, "advocacy" (the organizing of pressure so that people know they have a chance to win something) is to be emphasized.

Community Service: Tradition and Challenge

Thus, in contrast to the traditional elitist and religious traditions of university community service, a counterforce emphasizing understanding, social change, community participation, and citizenship has regularly burst through, especially in recent years. Clearly, the public institutions have an important role to play, especially those that are community institutions. On the other hand, sorting out their identities and roles is a particular challenge.

In two regards, the sources of community service at the University of Massachusetts at Lowell are the most traditional: (1) community service as an enhancement or obligation of cocurricular (out of class) life. Student residence halls, organizations, and clubs include service among their activities. (2) community service as an essential of religious life on campus. As on other campuses, campus ministry stresses community service. Paralleling the region's demographics, the majority of students on campus are at least nominally Catholic. The religious center serving Catholic students has developed as its major service target of the past few years a large religious shelter for homeless families. This parallels the city's definition of religious charities as the more worthy of support.

The third expresses the university's unique role as neighbor: (3) community service as an aspect of the city as laboratory. The university has been quite up front in proclaiming that the city is ideal as a laboratory for applying theory and practice. With university help, the city has been linear and rational in approaching its recovery from the last of its disastrous declines. Beginning in the mid-1970s, the city of Lowell engaged in far-ranging economic and cultural planning, ultimately in a heady, visionary effort reflecting university values called the Lowell Plan, generally unprecedented in the commonwealth. As the electronics industry provided a long-overdue burst of economic libido, Lowell's "Massachusetts miracle" became a hook upon which Governor Michael Dukakis hung his 1988 presidential campaign. What signaled the success were the several hundreds of thousand tourists from across the nation and world who annually visited the Lowell National Historic Park, the centerpiece of the downtown that occupies twelve acres of refurbished mill buildings and other facilities and is preparing a canal system to rival that of San Antonio. The results created both the intellectual climate and the physical structure for fieldwork for countless university curricula and undergraduate, graduate, and professional practice and internships.

(4) Community Outreach. Since the merger in 1976, under the leadership of President (now Chancellor) William T. Hogan, born and bred in the heart of the city, the university has built a set of bridges to the community in the form of technical industrial, educational, and artistic centers. In one of these centers, the service relationship has been explicitly thought through and the term *responsive collaboration* coined. The accompanying maxim is "never do what we haven't been asked to do," i.e., to respond consciously to both community and volunteer needs. This tone would provide immediate backdrop for the university to formally enter the field of community service.

Unfortunately, Lowell's ten years of successes were followed by dramatic economic falterings, forecasting the state's decline and functioning for the governor as

the "emperor's new clothes." The local former mill workers and their families, an aging population making up 25 percent of the city, were among the disillusioned. They noted the high price of downtown real estate and the disappearance of stores providing everyday necessities other than those providing the historic stage set for the city's preservation effort. While the preservers were memorializing yesterday's workingman and -woman, they seemed to be providing dubious benefits for today's; since preservation aided in the gutting of the downtown, it may well have contributed to today's homelessness and hunger in the city.

For the university, the laboratory has developed a crucial social dimension. The challenge today is to follow through with the city during truly hard times, to be more than a summer soldier. The elitism of the institution is at stake: no longer can it count on providing service to the community strictly on its own terms.

A Structural Addition

In the fall of 1989, the stage seemed set for a general foray of the university into community relations and service. Following a suggestion of then board chairman and former U.S. senator Paul Tsongas, President Hogan launched a small Office of Community Service (OCS). To facilitate flexibility, its agenda was left open. Thus was available the groundwork for a testing of the possibilities and limits of university service to the neighboring community and a consideration of the role of service in an education at a university so connected to its locality.

The University of Massachusetts at Lowell and Homelessness

During the spring of 1990, the president of Lowell's largest domicile for the homeless convinced the Catholic bishop and the Lowell assistant city manager to promote a Hunger Homeless Week the following November. The shelter, the subject of a picket line in November 1991, is located in a downtown human catch basin in the shadow of operating and dormant mill buildings. The structurally unemployed and underemployed are domiciled next door to prostitutes, drug addicts, and the mentally disturbed in compact, industrial dormitory rooms. Public schoolteachers who cannot pay their rent mix with elderly poor. The case was easily made when the city officials visted and saw childhood friends living at the shelter. The university was invited to the first planning session in June of 1991.

The bishop expressed a particular interest in increasing local awareness, and made a strong case for awareness as the first goal of the week, with networking second and fund-raising third. It seemed comfortable for the university to offer educational programming. The city's conception of the university contribution was collecting for the shelters and food pantries, serving meals at the shelter, running in a road race, and stretching "arms across the shelters." We made two additional offers: to prepare an informational folder and to organize teach-ins. The folder discussed the local and national problem, stressed housing shortage and poverty as causes, identified families as the most rapidly increasing population of homeless, listed the shelters and food pantries, and culminated in a "what you can do" section. Some fifteen thousand copies of the brochure were circulated on the campus and throughout the city network of shelters, agencies, churches and synagogues, some businesses, government facilities, schools, and libraries.

The three sessions of Gown and Town Teach-ins, two at the university and one downtown, were designed to proceed developmentally from experience to analysis to action. Session 1 offered a taste of the problem and community service from volunteering students, shelter personnel, and university ministry. Session 2 offered faculty, staff, and student research on the problem, including a presentation of the history of federal public housing.[8] Session 3, held at an in-town setting across from City Hall, featured government policymakers discussing their recommendations. The preparation of these in collaboration with the community planning committee provided an opportunity to address public attitudes to the city's homeless and to social services. They represented an important statement on inclusiveness of the parties concerned with the problem and the first steps in building and strengthening a community of concern.

In Lowell, ethnic and religious roots run deep and political power is carefully segmented as well. Historically, neighborhoods and many services in the city, including some public services, are known in their French-Canadian, Irish, Greek, Polish, and other identities. Religion, often Catholicism, plays a large role in city events and services. The first challenge to the planners was to break down old barriers and prejudices.

The negotiating of inclusion began as a quiet subtext to planning the week's events. Gradually there occurred greater acceptance of the two affiliated family shelters funded largely by government funds, which also tended to serve more of the city's homeless Latinos, and even of the city's confidential homeless facility, the shelter for battered women and their families. The religious sister director of the family shelter, which had initially been proposed as the sole family shelter to receive funds from the event, played a central role in bringing in the other secular family shelters. The "dry" family shelters began to support the much more visible "wet" shelter. Discussion began of common collections of food, clothing, linen, and furniture by the shelters and pantries.

The significance of this development went even further than the breaking down of a social barrier and the decision to work cooperatively: a discussion had begun thereby of the future of the city, on some of its new parameters, and on the creation of permanent new structures, ultimately on campus as well as in the city. At the last of the teach-ins, with little fanfare, a proposed piece of legislation emerged. This followed sharing between Lowell officials and a director of a major Boston service agency leader and was translated in the days following into legislation for a Lowell municipal commission on hunger and homelessness. The three initial planners of the commission represented city management, city council, and university, soon supplanted by the Hunger-Homeless Task Force.

Commissions signal new formats and generate both heat and light. The first City Council discussion was noted in the front page headline of the May 22 *Lowell Sun*: "Homeless Issue Sparks Debate." The story noted that the city councillor who introduced the ordinance for the commission — who is also a part-time university professor — was labeled by a colleague a "flaming liberal" for "making Lowell a magnet for the hungry and homeless" and for bringing in "new problems."

During the eight months necessary for the home rule petition of the commission to receive the required state legislature and governor approval, some of the systems proposed in the ordinance have been developed by the Hunger-Homeless Task Force: for example, the beginnings of centralized collections for the shelters and food pantries; a refocusing of energies on housing; the further development of the community of concern, presumably to serve the commission. At the same time, the

economy had worsened and forces within the city had mobilized to attempt to drive the "wet" from downtown.

A second year of Hunger-Homeless Week had been organized. The successful structure of the first year's event and artifact were maintained: the religious worship service; the week's symbol, two circles, one containing in red and black a house, and the second, a plate with knife, fork, and spoon, each with a negative black diagonal line across it; the canisters for collecting money; the hand stretched between the shelters and food pantry and the walk to city hall; the fund-raising dinners; the road race; and the folder and teach-ins. Planning was simpler and approached with some exuberance. After the third teach-in, a further meeting was scheduled, in anticipation of the return of the commission to the city.

New combinations of persons occurred and new issues were addressed. The low-cost housing planners began to meet with the shelter and food pantry network to share concerns and strategies. Child hunger had become the cause of an active member. Support was developed to help overcome opposition to a teen shelter. On January 28, in testimony at the hearing on the state-approved commission, because of concern that city councillors might construe the commission as a vehicle for establishing new shelters, emphasis was placed on the pursuit of new housing. The council's affirmative vote was unanimous.

In a parallel development, the federal ACTION agency awarded the university's Office of Community Service a Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) program. Six VISTAs were soon in university-community collaborative sites. Each assignment was to increase university participation with targeted populations in the Greater Lowell area, including one with the city's Homeless Shelter Network, shortly to aid in the development of the new commission. The principle of the VISTA involvement is to facilitate new services and structures, which will remain after the assignment. During the second year of the Office of Community Service VISTA program, two VISTAs will work on low-cost housing programs.

The University as Community

With the strong support of the university chancellor, the university's community service program and the Hunger-Homeless affiliation has been able to offer important side benefits for the university. Just as performing service improves the student self-concept, employees value themselves as returning some of what they have received, especially during a time of fiscal strain. Employees, retirees, alumni, and students are recognized in the annual Community Service Recognition Week organized by the Office of Community Service each spring. This in turn strengthens workplace morale and product. The 1992 theme of Service Recognition Week is Service Learning, to confront the educational component as well as the faculty.

The University as Neighbor

Lewis Mumford has written that

> to share the same place is perhaps the most primitive of social bonds, and to be within view of one's neighbors is the simplest form of association . . . Neighbors are people united primarily not by common origins or common purposes but by

> the proximity of their dwellings in space. This closeness makes them conscious of each other by sight, and known to each other by direct communication, by intermediate lines of association or by rumor. In times of emergency . . . neighbors may even become vividly conscious of each other and capable of greater cooperation.[9]

Local students and local employees present a particular opportunity to be neighborly, yet barriers of consciousness remain to be worked out.

A Working It Out Model[10]

Grounded in principles of community psychology, the model is an attempt to explain the dynamics underlying community organizing strategy. It posits different cultures (social groups), each with its own ideology and methodology in accomplishing its goals. Working it out is a process of discovery of goals held in common and the creation of a cooperative campaign around these. In the hunger-homelessness campaign under consideration, there are probably three cultures involved: university, student (and university staff), and community. What is especially interesting here is the role of student and University staff midway between community and university. Thus, a model of local student community service provides a point of departure.

Toward a Model of Public Service for the Local University Student

Let us first examine the assumption that middle and working-class university students are less appropriately volunteers than more affluent students. This is because, it is argued, they are too focused on their own economic problems and too busy working to make money to serve; because service is a *payback* by those who have received society's bounties and not to be expected from poorer folk; and because they do not live on campus, where student activities such as service are organized. All of these raise legitimate questions.

Class issues affect service. The tradition of serving, of paying back, is grounded in identity. Especially for the nonelite student, identity is often grounded in institutions other than the university. A Southern California–based Chicana leader I interviewed describes the phenomenon. While a student, she was hired to direct the campus office of community service. Despite the personal connection, her *compañeros* consciously shunned her office and performed service only through the campus Chicano organization. There, they felt comfortable that the programs would serve their *raza*, which appropriately deserved the payback from them. With its 4-H values, the official community service office simply felt too Anglo. While my informant was currently serving the mainstream community service establishment, she would soon be leaving to begin a career in teaching. On our campus, a major route to service is the Catholic Center, probably for similar reasons.

As the depth of the economic trough is felt in our institution, we are experiencing increased volunteering, literally an increase in student altruism under fire, and probably an increase in self-help behavior. Those with prior experience serving are in the majority. Our experience is consistent with the Community College Compact based in New Mexico, who find that their students make "great volunteers, especially if they've been involved before in their communities."

To hypothesize about some of the psychosocial dynamics of local students, the obscure but important work of the British social theorist Richard Hoggart provides a base. Hoggart analyzes, with a bit of British Left romanticization, the experience and dynamics of the upward mobility of the new working-class student in British adult

education settings. The experience is intended to be democratizing and liberating, but since cultures are clashing, turns out quite differently. The newcomer to the middle-upper-class world of education is characterized as "uprooted and anxious," teetering "at the friction point of two cultures." The new learner is inclined toward intellectual passivity and what Hoggart calls "moral paralysis." With street sense dulled, the new learner is "cautions and lacks resilience." What Hoggart considers his natural working-class openness has become distrust: he has difficulty "responding to the genuine in others." From the standpoint of community service, we watch his useful intuitions and compassion drift away. Yet Hoggart believes that the new learner holds on to just enough of those sensibilities. The out-of-place student can draw upon and apply critically the "still considerable resources of working class" people and continue "putting their own kind of vision in what may not really deserve it"; that is, into being compassionate in way transcending the linear world of school or education.[11]

This reservation seems to describe the germ of university community service for all students and certainly for locals. Indeed, I believe that it provides an important rationale, confirmed in our experience, for the inclusion in the educational experience of public and community service. Helping one's literal neighbor becomes potentially much more than noblesse oblige, or a payback. So construed, community service can be witnessed as intrinsically empowering to both recipient and receiver. It frames usefully the argument that students should shape and direct their own service activity. It makes community service self-help. It provides a response to Boyte's concern: empowerment can quite naturally be an ingredient of community service. This experiential counterpoint to noblesse oblige is important to maintain. The converse of this approach seems well worth avoiding: that the student be impelled to help on terms other than his or her own, that is, to impose inappropriately the university or academy's values on the recipient of help.

A Pluralistic Approach to Community Service

Bringing together the two elements above, this would suggest the importance of blending approaches, acknowledging on the campus a range of motivation for community service: from religious impulse to ethnic identity and values to academic and profession outcomes; and second, a parallel mixing of cultures within our work in the community. Clearly, the traditional elitist approaches of the university community service field are to be questioned if institutions that overlap so clearly with their communities are to realize their full service potential.

Roles and Responsibilities of the University

1. *Friendly listener.* This is the most important, without which others diminish in effect.
2. *Friendly agitatory (teacher).* The university can stir the intellectual pot.
3. *Advocate.* The university can support and raise issues and viewpoints that lie within its expertise, methodology, and values; for example, regarding the need for long-range, preventative planning and for empowering strategies.
4. *Arbiter.* By remaining beyond local politics and power struggles, the university can emphasize equity and arrange meetings and reconciliations, especially in commonly encountered areas where prejudices get in the way. The community can provide the opportunities by agreeing that the university in fact has this reponsibility and, at the very least, possesses a fresh perspective.

5. *Provider of a source of hope.* By presenting the social issue as a problem in understanding for which there exist rational solutions and then attempting to apply them, the university can clarify its role to itself and the community. Implicit are *ethical* lessons for itself and others.

The simple sounding offer belies its complexity. Lacking the distance, local students are vulnerable to the fatalism regarding social problems and their own economic plight. Being dangerously close to the problem may cause them to draw back. The university's education may prove useful in supporting with sound theory the students' proclivity to help themselves and their neighbors. Service learning has a special purpose in this context.

6. Perhaps the most important challenge for the future is to make the distinction between university community service for character development and a feeling of usefulness and service for citizenship. I believe that they are not as separate as Boyte suggests, but the caution is extremely important. This is the university's great task: to give meaning and power to the impulses, if not the habits, of the heart.

7. Especially at the local institution, the university can demonstrate its intrinsic value to itself and to the community outside its walls. At a time of diminishing funds for public higher education, this offers the university survival benefits. At a time when career choices for its graduates are scarce and obfuscated by conflicting values, the implication that service is a worthwhile vocational pursuit and professional consideration has importance for both university and its communities. ❧

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Notes

1. The administration building is named after an early board chair who was also the mill owner's representative in the forced settlement in Lowell of the 1912 strike. A single community-helping moment from Textile's past was recently recalled: the opening of the classrooms of the Textile Institute to some of those displaced in the 1936 flood in the city. Then, with considerable magnanimity, the temporarily homeless were given shelter.
2. Interviews with Diane Lugo, assistant director, California Campus Compact, August 28, 1991, September 8, 1991.
3. Interviews with Sister Gabrielle Husson, August 29, 1991, October 12, 1991.
4. Interview with Roger Nozacki, project coordinator, Campus Compact, August 28, 1991.
5. R. N. Bellah, R. Madison, W. M. Sullivan, A. Swidler, and S. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).
6. Harry Boyte, "Community Service and Civic Education," *Phi Delta Kappan* 72 (June 1991): 765–67.
7. *Campus Compact: The Project for Public and Commumity Service*, September 1991, 39–44.

8. Ronald Dale Karr, "Shelter the American Way: Federal Urban Housing Policy, 1900–1980," forthcoming.
9. Lewis Mumford, *The Urban Prospect* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, 1969), 59.
10. Mark D. Levine, "Working it Out: A Community Re-creation Approach to Crime Prevention," *Journal of Community Psychology* 14 (October 1986): 378–90.
11. Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), 286.