

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 136 895

JC 770 234

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 TITLE Social Scientists and Citizens: Partners in Community Development.
 PUB DATE 16 Apr 77
 NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Eastern Community College Social Science Association (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 16, 1977)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.83 HC-\$1.67 Plus Postage.
 DESCRIPTORS *Change Agents; College Faculty; Community Agencies (Public); Community Colleges; *Community Development; Community Study; Interinstitutional Cooperation; *Junior Colleges; *Research Opportunities; *School Community Cooperation

ABSTRACT

Community colleges, because of their strategic placement within the community, are particularly well-suited to becoming catalysts in the problem-solving process of the community by performing the research which underlies community development. Social science faculty, given their methodological training, community orientation, and teaching focus, are the logical individuals to become community development agents. Students can serve as inexpensive data collection personnel. The community development process must begin with a careful definition of the community problem, project objectives designed to assist in the solution, and project evaluation criteria. Cooperation with community agencies must be sought, and the expectations of these agencies must be met. Hagerstown Junior College's cooperation with the local YMCA, the county school board, and a number of other community agencies serve as examples of college/community partnership in community problem solving. (JDS)

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SOCIAL SCIENTISTS AND CITIZENS:
PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A Paper Presented At The
Eastern Community College Social Science Association
Annual Convention.
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
April 16, 1977

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Introduction

Roland Warren, in his classic work on community development, summarizes the ideal relationship between college and community. "For people interested in community work, the local colleges offer excellent possibilities for aid and assistance Cooperation of students, faculty, and local community leaders may provide a means of . . . being of service to the local community." ¹ Too often, colleges fail to achieve the ideal.

Today's community colleges face a serious challenge. As the institutions seek to actualize their commitment to the community, their resources are being eroded by inflation and economic fluctuation. Yet, if the college is to survive and prosper as an educational resource, it must look to the uniqueness of the clients to be served rather than follow the routines of the past. Careful examination of community needs as they impact on the college is necessary.

A Community Development Agent

The National Advisory Council on Extension and Continuing Education outlined a strategy useful to the community college. "Few, if any, pervasive community problems may be solved at a one-stop service station. Problem solving is a process, a set of activities that must involve individuals, agencies, and institutions in continuing assessment-action--reassessment-new action." ² Because community colleges are part of the community and possess the human resources required to implement the "process" referred to above, they have the potential to perform the research which underlies community development.

Social Science faculty are uniquely suited to the role of community develop-

ment agents. The methodological training of psychology, sociology, geography, political science, anthropology, history and economics focus on the community as a data base. Further, the subject matter of these disciplines relies upon the community for example and vitality. Finally, the combination of methodology, data base, and students provides the ingredients required for community research.

Is it valid for students to be involved in community research? Aronstein and Olsen suggest:

In order to provide a full educative experience for youth, we can no longer limit teaching-learning situations to the school. If we seek to develop new values and attitudes ... toward life roles, careers, and perceptions of society, we must develop new avenues of approach. We feel that outside-of-school experiences are as important as in-school experiences and that teachers must be willing to explore new pathways into the community through such approaches as the community service project. 3

The ingredients exist for a synergetic interaction. Communities have problems; they seek assistance. Community colleges have expertise and inexpensive data-collection personnel. The critical task is bringing the components together.

The Community Development Process

There are several ways to implement the process of community development. The community college does not exist in a vacuum. Its' programs place students in jobs in the community; faculty live in the community; community leaders serve as college trustees. Through these links to the community, awareness of college interest and expertise can be developed.

Once the ingredients have been mixed, the process of development begins.

Talbott suggests some guidelines to be followed:

Carefully define the community problem to be solved, the project objectives designed to assist in the solution, and the evaluative criteria for measuring the project's effectiveness. Seek inter-institutional cooperation from ... various governmental, social,

and community agencies in planning and implementing a ... project. Choose projects ... in areas where the college already has competence or should develop expertise. Be prepared to deliver what you promise in problem solving. ⁴

Talbott's guidelines will produce accountable development activity.

A second facet of the development process is choosing a delivery system. The choice depends upon the situation, including the nature and scope of the problem, the time allotted, the funds available, and the expertise of the personnel involved. The emphasis needs to be placed on planning and articulation of objectives. As Fischer, Jr. and Gollattscheck indicate "a successful working arrangement with any community organization emanates in part from the community college's ability to assess the community organization and its objectives, mission, effectiveness, resources, leadership, and channels of communication." ⁵

Finally, the college must meet the expectations of the agency being assisted. The agency is aware of its weakness; it sought help with its problem. Cooperative efforts by the college and the organization will provide services that neither could accomplish alone. Further, the cooperation will compensate for the weaknesses of both the college and the agency. Overall, the beneficiary will be the community itself. Failure to cooperate will discredit the college, dishearten the agency, and detract from the community.

Gollattscheck, et al., summarize the essence of the community organization process as "a relationship between the college and the community in which both work together for total community renewal and improvement ... through such arrangements the abilities of the college to serve the community will be multiplied manyfold." ⁶ Is Gollattscheck's assessment merely theory or an achievable reality?

Hagerstown Junior College - A Case Study

Hagerstown Junior College in Hagerstown, Maryland has been functioning as

a community development agency for the past five years. Members of the college's Social Science Division have been engaged in a series of projects designed to actualize community development. A brief review of selected projects will prove illustrative.

In 1972, members of the college's sociology faculty, assisted by approximately 150 students, designed, conducted, and evaluated a needs analysis survey for the local YMCA. The purpose of the project was to help the agency determine whether a need existed for a branch facility. The survey indicated that no facility was needed; the agency did not expend scarce resources on a superfluous project and the college students learned the mechanics of survey research, first hand.

In 1973, a community council composed of over two dozen social service agencies requested assistance with a survey of community problems. Members of the college's sociology, psychology, and political science faculty participated in the project. The faculty and students surveyed over one thousand households. The results were prioritized, cross-referenced by six variables, and evaluated. Six problems emerged which were of major concern to community residents. The Community Services Council used the results in program planning; the faculty and students exercised survey and data analysis skills.

In 1975-76, the college cooperated with the county school system and a number of other county agencies in conducting a Speak-Out on issues related to school system structure and function. Sociology and political science faculty served on the planning committee; students and faculty participated in the group dynamics sessions. Outcomes were analyzed by a team including members of the social science faculty. The findings are being used by the elected board of education as part of the system's comprehensive long-range plan. The college staff who participated gained insight into community group-dynamics.

Also in 1975-76, the Community Services Council requested a follow-up of its problem survey. The study was designed and evaluated by members of the college's social science staff. The project resulted in a series of recommendations regarding new roles for the council. Further, two federal proposals requesting funding emanated from the study. While the proposals were submitted by community agencies, they were designed and written by social science staff. The survey-analysis-recommendation-request for funding model is an excellent example of synergy in action.

These projects were selected from a number that could have been discussed. They present social scientists and citizens working together for community development. In 1974, Alan Pifer, President of the Carnegie Corporation, articulated a new function for the community college "... community colleges should ... regard as their primary role community leadership." ⁷ These studies indicate that Hagerstown Junior College takes the suggested role seriously.

Conclusion

In 1971, the National Advisory Council on Extension and Continuing Education encouraged institutions of higher education "... to assist the people of the United States in the solution of community problems." ⁸ The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it suggests that community colleges, because of their strategic placement within the community, are particularly well suited to becoming catalysts in the problem solving process. Second, social science faculty, given their methodological training, community orientation, and teaching focus are the logical individuals to become community development agents. The Hagerstown Junior College case study reinforces these generalizations.

In 1940, Edna St. Vincent Millay penned some prophetic lines:

"No man, no nation, is made free
By stating it intends to be
We live upon a shrinking sphere--
Like it or not, our home is here;" 9

Over three decades later, her words should spur us on. The challenge exists;
we must engage it.

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