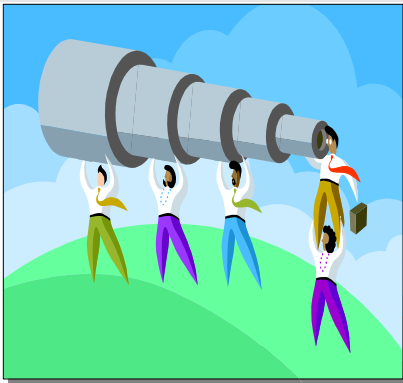


# Reversing the Telescope: Community Development *within* Colleges and Universities



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NEW ENGLAND RESOURCE CENTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION (NERCHE)  
WITH THE CENTER FOR YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES

# Reversing the Telescope

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Burack, Cathy and Mullane, Martha. *Reversing the Telescope: Community Development within Colleges and Universities*. The New England Resource Center for Higher Education, University of Massachusetts Boston and Center for Youth and Communities, Brandeis University, 2004.

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# Rethinking Civic Engagement

## Introduction

This report represents the culmination of a two-year project supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) that scanned the civic microcosm of our colleges and universities. Much attention has been paid, including by us, to the ways in which colleges and universities engage with their external communities. As we learned more about ways to support faculty and institutions whose focus was on their external communities we had this deepening suspicion that something was missing, namely, the community members who work on our own campuses, often in the lowest paid positions and from the communities the campus purports to serve. This is a story of our attempt to define the issue, to identify promising practices, and to understand where our own campus communities fit into campus civic engagement efforts. In some ways this is the best kind of project in that while we may have started it, it is you who will keep it going – sharpening the ideas, raising new questions, learning from new initiatives, and ultimately making our colleges and universities truly democratic institutions.

## Origins of the idea

NERCHE's work has always focused on the organizational side of colleges and universities, as captured by the title of its newsletter, *The Academic Workplace*. Its mission, to foster community within higher education through collaboration, extends to NERCHE's work in the areas of service and civic engagement begun in 1994 with its Program on Faculty Professional Service and Academic Outreach. Through this program NERCHE focused on how faculty could effectively carry out the service missions of their institutions (and, sometimes, their disciplines) through their teaching and scholarship, and how colleges and universities support faculty in that community-based work.

As NERCHE's thinking about service, civic engagement, and community building developed, so did our awareness that colleges and universities should be understood in

the context of democratic institutions and civic microcosms. At the same time three pivotal events further influenced the evolution of our thought wand, hence, the development of the project (1) a Wingspread meeting on the civic mission of the research university, (2) NERCHE's 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium, and (3) recent student activism on living wage campaigns.



#### The Civic Mission of the American Research University

In 1999 the University of Michigan, with support from the Johnson Foundation, hosted a Wingspread meeting that addressed the civic role of the American research university. The meeting participants included representatives from higher education associations and organizations, university presidents, faculty and students. Out of that meeting, Elizabeth Hollander, Executive Director, Campus Compact, and Harry Boyte, Senior Fellow, Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota, co-authored the Wingspread Declaration on Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University, which later became Campus Compact's President's Declaration. The Declaration asks how a vision of public engagement might be made manifest and answers through an examination of individual campus components. The section on "Staff" below was especially thought provoking and instrumental to the evolution of our ideas.

#### *What will it mean for staff to be filled with the democratic spirit?*

- a. Staff, in association with institutions, make their visible (and now largely invisible) experiences, talents, and contributions to student learning and to the community-building process at institutions of higher education. Further, their rich contributions to the broader intellectual enterprise of our institutions become more visible and recognized.
- b. Staff build upon and receive recognition for the often extensive ties that many have with the local community, seeing such community knowledge and connection as a resource for community-university partnerships, for student learning, for engaged scholarship, and for the broad intellectual life of the institution.
- c. Staff gain a voice in governance, receive fair salaries and benefits, and are encouraged to participate in ongoing intellectual conversation and public life. The staff assist in the creation of multiple opportunities for staff development and continuing education.
- d. Faculty and others come to recognize that educating students for democracy is an institution-wide enterprise in which staff play key roles in providing opportunities for public work, dialogue with others far different from oneself, and democratic practice on campus. Staff are encouraged to work with faculty to examine and change the campus culture to support engagement.

Here was a clear call to higher education to see staff as a campus resource in creating a democratic institution, consonant with other institutional efforts towards civic engagement.



Community Building: An Agenda for Higher Education and Its Communities

In 1998, NERCHE sponsored a symposium to celebrate the Center’s 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The theme was community building, both inside and outside of the academy. A keynote speaker Mel King, Professor Emeritus, MIT, former director of the Boston Urban League and a leader in building bridges between the academy and community in Boston challenged higher education to address the needs of its own community members with the same focus and intensity as it focuses on external communities.

I don’t believe in this movement for community building if we don’t have community building within the institution of higher education. For me, there are many, many examples of problems in the institution that replicate the problems in the very communities they would dare to think they can change and build. And if we aren’t doing that on the inside, then I don’t believe we can do it on the outside...

One of the questions I could ask, particularly at the university level, or any corporate level, is do all the workers in the institution have access to the same level and quality of benefits for themselves and their families? If professors can send their sons and daughters to school because its one of their benefits, is that benefit made available to every worker in the institution? Do all workers have opportunities for educational attainment within the university? We want to talk about building relations to the outside, where better to begin than with the people who you come in contact with every day, who live in these communities on the outside? What kind of contact do you have with the person who does the maintenance? What issues and concerns do they have not only about what’s going on inside the institution, but what’s going on outside? There are many, many people who you could be building meaningful relationships with – people who are your workers and who are supporting you.

I don’t believe in this movement for community building if we don’t have community building within the institution of higher education.  
Mel King, 1998

Mel King pushed the audience to think about concrete ways higher education could develop its community within, making it clear that unless the needs of internal constituencies were addressed, external community building efforts were incomplete. The questions he raises are still relevant.



#### Student Living Wage Campaigns

A third influence in the development of this project was growing student activism around the conditions of lower paid workers at campuses around New England. Especially visible were students at Harvard University and the Living Wage Campaign who in 2001 occupied an administration building to protest on behalf of the lowest paid workers at the university. The students framed the issue as an economic necessity stating, “Today, over 1,000 Harvard workers are paid wages as low as \$6.50 per hour without benefits. This is a wage that puts a parent with one child below the federal poverty line. The people who clean our buildings, cook our meals, and guard our dorms routinely work two and even three jobs--as many as 90 hours per week--and still struggle to support themselves and their families.” The sit-in forced the university to re-examine its pay scales and collective bargaining agreements.

As we focused on the lessons of NERCHE’s work, national conversations, current student political movements, and our own commitment to campus community we realized that it was time to explore the realm of campus efforts to address the needs of their community within. **We created Reversing the Telescope in order to:**

**conceptualize the idea of the community within.** We knew we were entering largely uncharted territory, so our initial task was to survey the landscape to understand how colleges and universities approached the needs of the community within. Further, we hoped to develop language that would enable us to begin to define these efforts as a natural extension of civic engagement;

**identify campus examples.** Hoping to bring promising practices and programs to light, we sought out models from such entities as offices of service learning and human resources and met with key stakeholders, or levers of influence. We knew that it would be critical to talk with these stakeholders both about our findings and their views and concerns about our developing concept in order to deepen our understanding of the issues that would arise in broadening campus notions of engagement.

## Findings

### Defining the “Community Within”

One set of questions that guided our research in this project had to do with language. We wondered whether we could capitalize on an already-defined vocabulary used by community service practitioners so that they we can be easily understood by others.

In seeking examples of good “community within” practices, it quickly became clear that we needed to develop language so that we could communicate a common understanding of the concept and our targeted population before moving forward. Our original intention was to look at the lowest-paid employees of an institution, namely those who clean the classrooms, prepare the food, manicure the lawn, and process the paperwork. Our early exploration began with a review of literature and Web sites to identify campuses that appeared to have programs or initiatives that addressed the needs of the target population. We also contacted colleagues on campuses in New England region to help us locate regional examples. Our early forays revealed both interesting results and a variety of challenges associated with describing this population. Some initial respondents assumed that we were most interested in the growing cadre of adjunct faculty, often the most underpaid academic professionals on campus. Others believed that we were focusing on sub-contracted workers, most of whom are hired by outside agencies and work in campus jobs for low wages and few campus employee benefits. Undergraduate and graduate students alike assumed that their personal situations as unpaid and/or underpaid members of the academic community fit the parameters of the project.

We expected that community service/service-learning professionals would easily understand our sense of the target population, but even they struggled to grasp the “in here” framework in comparison to the traditional “out there” focus on community. They could readily point out many projects that were happening off campus which benefited community members in surrounding neighborhoods. It was rare that the custodians and dining service staff, many of whom they knew quite well and interacted with on a daily basis, came to mind as community in question.

Defining our target population as “low paid workers” was not enough. Without a sharper, more quantifiable definition, people were quick to apply their own interpretation to the project. In looking at Lawrence Katz’s study of low-wage workers at Harvard University, we realized that these campus employees are most easily broken into three general staff categories: parking and security, janitorial and facility, and dining services. Though Katz recognized that secretarial, clerical, and laboratory employees are often poorly paid, these positions are most often salaried with clear connections to departments or divisions that can foster professional growth and development. For this reason Katz has concentrated his work on the full-time or part-time non-student employees who are paid on an hourly basis by the institution and not by stipend, subcontracted pay, or annual salary (Katz presentation, 3/17/03). By defining members of the community in a similar way, we could target staff who are in full-time or part-time positions at an institution, paid on an hourly basis, and not directly connected to the institutional mission as the population that we hope to highlight in our work.



#### Refining the Community Within Concept

Though we could now define our target population, conducting an initial literature review on the topic was difficult without descriptive vocabulary. Initially we chose logical terminology such as “campus-based service projects,” “on-campus community service,” “employee benefits of service learning,” and “low-wage employee programs,” which yielded few results. Directly connected to our concept of community within was a March 6, 2003 posting by Lori Walters-Kramer at SUNY Plattsburgh on the service-learning listserv (<http://csf.colorado.edu/mail/service-learning/>) that asked for examples of “intra-campus service learning” initiatives, namely those programs that support internal community members. Examples included the student-maintained nature trail for the recreational and academic use of the campus community at Northwest Vista College (Carl H. Rush, listserv posting 2/24/03) and the American Association of Community Colleges’ Bridges to Healthy Communities initiative which creates service-learning projects that promote health and prevent high-risk behaviors among college students (Sarena Seifer, listserv posting 2/25/03). Examples such as these had clear service-learning components and institutional benefits and effects, but none directly related to the specific needs of the low-paid campus workers we had identified. Even among community service practitioners and scholars it seemed that this focus on the internal community was not a practice on many campus communities.



#### Help from the Business Sector

The concept (and related benefits) of strengthening communities from within is, perhaps, best modeled in the for-profit sector. Over the years, organizational theory and motivational practice has enabled business communities to understand the direct correlation between satisfied employees and work performance and output. Simply stated, when employees come to work with few concerns and stresses in their

personal lives, they are more likely to concentrate on the tasks at hand, engage in their work, and function at a higher level in their professional lives. In the end, if businesses can find ways to support their human capital, they are more likely to reap the benefits of a hard working and committed staff.

“The Corporate Social Responsibility Report,” published by *Business Ethics Magazine*, highlights annual corporations who recognize their employees not only as workers, but as valuable members of their corporate, public, and private communities. Similarly, regional publications like *Boston Magazine*, feature top-10 lists of the best companies to work for, selected because of their corporate commitment to their employees as people first and revenue-generating sources second. Many of these companies’ publications proudly highlight their commitment to “work-life balance” through programs that they support that help employees achieve this stability. Programs range from educational opportunities and professional development seminars to employee assistance benefits, child daycare initiatives, inexpensive legal assistance, flexible work schedules, and memberships to fitness centers, stress clinics, and weight loss programs. These companies have discovered that an investment in human capital benefits bottom lines, retention strategies, and corporate reputations.



Help from the Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation works to build better futures for disadvantaged children and their families in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. To that end AECF talks about the importance of “anchor institutions”—educational institutions, medical centers, and public utilities—that have significant infrastructure investments in communities and are unlikely to move out of those communities. Andrew Hahn et al, in a report for AECF entitled “College and Universities as Economic Anchors” makes the case that institutions of higher education should begin to think about their “economic anchor roles in a cohesive and coordinated manner, that is an integrated cluster of activities and practices, not as piecemeal and separate phenomena.” Two roles that the report highlights are colleges’ and universities’ roles as employer and workforce developer. The report argues that as employers, universities must develop buy-in from human resource departments in recruiting, training, and hiring employees from neighborhoods which surround urban universities. As workforce developers, universities can design and implement workforce training programs with local and regional businesses. Finally, the report identifies steps colleges and universities should take, which are delineated by degrees of difficulty. On the easy end of the continuum is “incorporating job training and professional development programs in employee programs to ensure that residents are fully prepared for employment.”

More difficult steps included:

1. Providing needed services for employees from the neighborhoods, such as childcare and transportation.
2. Providing living wages and other provisions that will build assets of local residents as part of a community economic strategy. Along the same lines, universities can provide living wages for its own employees.

Among the most difficult challenges is that “anchor institutions must know what they are anchoring into—giving rise to the question of how universities can learn to be better partners with community residents and institutions and what criteria they should use in determining which economic initiatives to pursue given the needs and make-up of local neighborhoods. These principles speak to broad stakeholder participation, integrating people and place strategies, building community capacity and collaborative relationship building.”

Business sector notions about investments in human capital and AECF’s ideas about community development and higher education as anchor institutions influenced our thinking about definition and language. We settled on “community development within” higher education as the concept that best reflected the elements we felt were important. It both captures current notions of the roles of colleges and universities as employers and allows for a broader way of thinking about engagement.

#### Language Matters

Since there is very little written on the community within as a variation of campus public service and no consensus on what “intra-campus service-learning” actually is, we are aware that we are creating not only a new way of thinking, but also a new way of talking about civic engagement and community service. We are relying on examples and particular models to foster this new dialogue. As noted above in Hahn’s challenges, we need to work together and with key stakeholders to find vocabulary that complements higher education’s existing language, while at the same time broadening our current notions of public service and community engagement.

## Program Models

Colleges and universities, similar to businesses, recognize that in order to attract quality faculty and staff, they need to offer competitive salaries, as well as fringe benefits such as health insurance, dental coverage, and other services. However, it is not clear that these standard employee benefits are meeting the most basic needs of low-wage campus employees who often have to overcome personal obstacles, such as a lack of English proficiency. We need to assess what is being offered so that we can think creatively about the specific needs of the community within and the reasons why campuses might want to address these needs more directly.



#### Human Resources as a Starting Place

Unlike the many public service initiatives offered through campus offices and programs such as the student affairs, community outreach or service-learning programs, programs that directly affect employees tend to be offered through the human resources or personnel departments. This is an important distinction. In this organizational framework, employee issues and needs, especially those of the lowest-rung workers, are not handled by those working with students and community outreach, but rather by a department that is often perceived as somewhat ancillary to the academic mission of the institution.

In many ways, having human resources handle employee-related issues and needs makes good sense. Because they have the best overall sense of employee concerns and are privy to confidential compensation information, they could be positioned well to advocate for, institutionalize, and assess policies and practices. As the department that has oversight responsibilities for employee benefits such as work and vacation schedules, health and dental insurance and Employee Assistance Programs, all of which may help to paint a more comprehensive picture of individual circumstances, they are equipped with the right kinds of information to provide valuable insight into the particular needs of staff. Charged with employing quality and responsible professionals at every salary level and providing for the needs of these employees as they work at the college, the human resources department plays a key role in shaping and dictating the employee experience.

We did not, however, come across any intentional organizational links between human resources and the work of leaders in public service efforts on campus. Therefore it is safe to assume that their recognition of employee needs rarely translates into a wider mobilization of students, faculty, and staff. Similarly, that human resources reports to financial administration suggests their commitment to campus staff must occur within the context of compliance, risk-management, and fiscal management. The traditional split in the academic and administrative areas of colleges and universities can hamper the development of integrated programs for our target population.

#### *Relevant Human Resources Benefits and Programs*

When scanning the landscape of American higher education to find current programs that embody the spirit of the community within project, it is often the human resources--sponsored programs that jump to the forefront. In fact, when asked about what a particular institution is doing to support the lowest-paid members of their community, campus leaders often pointed to specific aspects of the employee benefit package as a way to demonstrate their campus commitment to this group of staff.

Programs such as the *Bridges to Learning & Literacy Program* at Harvard University offer ESL, GED prep, and computer training to hourly employees twice a week as paid work time. The University of Hawaii's *Blue Collar Supervisory Leadership Development Program* offers management and supervision training programs to those on the bottom rungs of their profession, in hopes of empowering them to move upward. Middlebury

College offers an employee mentoring program which partners lower-paid employees with higher-paid, more established professional role models to fostering informal professional development and coaching.

Trinity College, Connecticut, with wide publicity about its local urban renewal efforts, boasts of a generous retirement plan, flexible tuition remission programs, reduced personal insurance rates, and free access to the college art and athletic facilities available to all employees. Salem State College, Massachusetts, advertises certain fringe benefits such as free memberships into a local credit union, sliding-scale childcare, dependent care assistance and referral program, and reduced flu vaccines as being particularly beneficial to the lower-paid workers on their campus. Yale University, Connecticut, has recently embarked on a new venture to offer low-interest rates to faculty and staff who buy property within a certain radius of campus in hopes of revitalizing the surrounding neighborhood (Lewin, New York Times, 3/12/03, p. A6.)

### **Additional Examples**

#### **Brandeis University, MA – The ESL Initiative**

Students teach GED and ESL classes which are free and offered after work hours, to Brandeis regular and contract employees. The Office of Human Relations and Employee Relations is in full support of the program and encourages managers and supervisors to provide employees with program information.

#### **Harvard University, MA – Bridge to Learning and Literacy Program**

The Bridge Program began in 1999 as a pilot program for a small group of workers at the Harvard Faculty Club. It now offers education and career development to 500 workers from across the university. Courses include ESL, basic literacy, academic reading and writing, GED preparation and computers.

#### **Harvard University, MA – The Boston Health Care and Research Training Institute**

This is a new collaboration of eight major employers in the health care and research sector. Harvard Medical School and School of Dental Medicine are participating in this collaborative to build the skills of Harvard employees. The institute's goals are to address shortages of critical skills among health care and research employers, thus enabling them to fill vacancies requiring skilled staff.

#### **IUPUI, IN– J. Herman Blake, Former Vice Chancellor for Undergraduate Education**

Written by a colleague: "When Herman Blake came to IUPUI, he made the rounds to visit his new colleagues. Each time he met a faculty member he asked, 'What is the name of the person who cleans your office each day?' I was one of the embarrassed persons who didn't know. You can imagine that I corrected my ignorance from that time on, but there is certainly more that we must do to address needs of our campus staff members who are so often overlooked."

#### **Middlesex Community College, MA**

All full-time and part-time, benefited and non-benefited employees are eligible for the services provided by MCC's Employee Assistance Program. In addition to counseling

and support on a wide variety of issues, offerings include free legal and CPA consultation. All services are offered at no cost to employees.

**Regis University – College, CO**

The Center for Service Learning is overseeing a new pilot program for the sub-contracted custodians. ESL classes are taught by student volunteers who are working to fulfill service-learning requirements in courses, including immigrant and refugee issues.

**Simmons College, MA – Community Classroom**

Community Classroom is a new program for entry level workers, from both on and off campus, to obtain a “youth worker certificate.” The program is part of a larger partnership with the Home for Little Wanderers.

**Swarthmore College, PA – Learning for Life Program (L4L)**

First implemented in 1999, L4L is a campus-based community service organization that focuses entirely on the community of Swarthmore. It is based on “learning partnerships” between students and staff in a wide range of topic areas – from computer literacy to handwriting skills.

**University of Massachusetts Amherst – Workplace Training and Development**

Human resources offers classes that include adult basic education and ESL to campus employees. The Community Service Director is working to build links to service-learning classes.

**University of Vermont**

The Community Outreach Center has done a lot of work on campus as part of their focus on the employment and purchasing impacts of UVM, including encouraging the purchasing department to increase local purchasing, working with the employment office to increase hiring of local residents facing barriers to employment, and with physical plant and residential life to help low wage workers take fuller advantage of their benefits. Much of this work was carried out by students under a larger COPC project.

**Wheaton College, MA – ESL class for staff**

In 2003 Sherri Stevens, a student, started teaching ESL to native Portuguese speakers, all Building Services staff, once a week during a lunch hour.

As of this writing services for lowest-paid workers with specific needs tend to be either educative and skill based. Most are within the purview of human resources; however, we are beginning to see campus service directors and service-learning faculty and students develop initiatives. What is most rare at this point, yet holds the most promise, are programs that are born of partnerships between human resources and faculty, students and staff. This collaboration is expressed in Rensselaer’s description of its communities in the “Rensselaer Plan,” “Make Rensselaer an employer of choice among faculty and staff by developing uniform policies and approaches to critical human resource activities, and partnering between Human Resources and other academic and administrative divisions to establish optimal strategies, policies, and procedures.”

While all of these programs can be comprehensive and potentially helpful to those in low-paid positions, these benefits are not always advertised in ways that are convenient

and appropriate for workers without access to computers and websites, and who may have little knowledge of the larger institutional framework at their job sites. For example, a casual poll of hourly workers at a public campus revealed that many did not know how to access or receive relevant information related to their employment, including upcoming state holidays. Many saw their immediate supervisor as their primary ally and link to the campus, while those proficient in English referred to staff bulletin boards for institutional communications..

When programs are available at institutions to support employees in need, it appears that most began as a solution to a growing problem for the institution, rather than as a proactive concern for employees or in response to lifestyle trends (interview with Ken Reardon, Cornell University, 4/03). For example, while the creation of an emergency daycare service for sick children at one institution helps parents ensure that their children are cared for, it reduces last-minute absences or sudden departures from the workplace which inconvenienced supervisors. Another institution, after receiving numerous complaints from families about the appearance and safety of the neighborhood, purchased and renovated several homes in the surrounding neighborhood to rent to faculty and staff. There are programs that are created out of genuine concern for employees, exemplary leadership, student initiative, or as a component to academic work, but these tend to be rare, less formalized, and lacking in institutional support unlike programs spurred by a response to a growing employee problem. The following are among the notable examples we came across .

At the Massachusetts College of Art, the incoming students are introduced at orientation to the people who will be cleaning their residence halls and serving them meals. The fact that the workers are paid for their participation in the orientation is noteworthy. With this simple action – putting names to faces that may have otherwise remained anonymous--the college sets a tone of regard for the dignity of all members of the campus community.

Emerson College's English Exchange with its employees brings students and low-wage workers together for weekly dialogues across language, culture, class, and status. The program was initiated by a student who had become friendly, through hand gestures and smiles, with the Spanish-speaking janitor in her residence hall, and recognized that a partnership between the two entities could be mutually beneficial in her quest to learn Spanish and his need to learn English. During the 2002-2003 academic year, 12 students and 10 employees participated in the program, and a grant from Campus Compact, won by this student, provided funds to help expand this program to an even broader set of interested students and staff. Similarly, a program at Regis University encourages a greater sense of justice/ equality on campus among people of different communities by employing student volunteers who are working toward their ESL certification to teach ESL lessons for non-English speaking workers (submission from Melissa Nix, service learning listserv, 3/03).

## An Institutional Commitment: Laying the Groundwork

In June 2003 and May 2004, NERCHE convened meetings with community-based scholars, department heads, students and higher education leaders and foundation representatives in order to further refine the concept of community development within, to identify stakeholders, to foster collaborations, and to continue to identify best practices. A variety of ideas and issues related to laying the groundwork emerged from these conversations.

For instance, for our community within conception of community development to truly support the lowest-paid members of an institution in the same spirit as community outreach programs, we need to step beyond the human resources benefit program model and think about how to (1) help campuses understand the value of supporting all members, even the lowest paid members of their staffs and, (2) institutionalize this commitment so that these communities become part of the institution's civic engagement agenda. We need to find ways to broaden the conversation about employee benefit programs so that more voices are included. When caring for the needs of low-wage workers is an *institutional* priority, rather than a human resources responsibility, we say that a campus is developing their community within.

### Approaches to Setting the Stage

Colleges and universities can send powerful messages to the community within in hiring diverse faculty and senior administrators who are also personally committed to these issues. A Caribbean background, for example, can signal that a dean or department chair has some cultural understanding of workers of similar origins, though an ascriptive commonality is insufficient on its own. Such an administrator would also need to demonstrate a commitment to the wellbeing of those workers by developing a receptive climate. We found a working example of this at a university where an

African American dean had created a community in which a janitorial worker, threatened with job loss, was able to ask the dean directly for support. The dean subsequently rallied members of the college to come to the worker's aid and, ultimately, preserved his job.

Campaigns for a living wage are taking place with increasing frequency on the nation's campuses and are finding support among certain groups of faculty, students, and staff. Actions involving labor issues may bring to light what institutions are failing to do to protect the interests of their workers. While it is essential that institutions be aware of the circumstances of lower-rung workers, such disputes can have a polarizing effect on a campus, and are best pursued with clarity about the intended and unintended outcomes.

Academic approaches to fostering engagement with the internal community locate the civic intention within the educational mission of the institution. For example, in geographic areas where low-wage workers are overwhelmingly Latino, Latino studies program or institutes can undertake research that examines the work and life issues of this population. Colleges and universities nationwide similarly can incorporate the demographics of campus workers and advance scholarship in the service of equality.

Institutions interested in collecting data about low-wage workers on their campuses can access any number of national and local organizations that have either made this population their focus or that gather information relevant to this group. Among the suggested organizations are:

UCLA Labor Center

Center for Third World Organizing; Oakland, CA

Student Labor Action Project (SLAP)

United for a Fair Economy; Boston

Global Working Families Project; Harvard University

Labor centers, sustainability and environmental justice programs, committees on the quality of life on campus

Educational networks, K-12 partnerships

Schools of education and nursing

Representatives from business who have spearheaded progressive programs for low-wage workers

Departments that deal with foreign policy and/or immigration policy and labor rights

*Dollars & Sense* magazine

*Fast Company* magazine

Local organizations that work with immigrant populations

Students who come from low-income families

Labor representatives on boards of trustees

## Challenges



Current campus commitments

One participant in our meetings with stakeholders who is part of a national higher education association commented, “Oh no – another constituency that needs attention!” This comment underscores a key challenge in introducing these ideas to campus leaders. Presidents, unit directors, and faculty already feel overburdened by the need to attend to new initiatives, especially in the context of tight resources.

Unless the community development from within model is genuinely tied to learning on campus, it will be difficult to gain buy-in from administrators. A meeting participant noted that “if there is learning tied to it, then it may work – if it simply something ‘good’ or ‘right’ to do, this won’t work! . . . We have already increased the demands of faculty to include service-learning projects, and now we will need to ask them to tweak this further and think internally about their civic engagement initiatives – is there anything new or additional that this model does to improve or accent learning beyond what they are doing with existing civic engagement initiatives?”

Three areas of potential concern or push-back can impede widespread campus implementation.

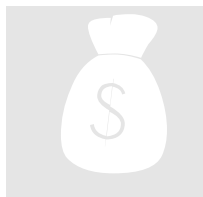
**Faculty:** We are already asking them to do more and more. To encourage faculty involvement we need to find ways to tie these initiatives to ones in which they are engaged, rather than presenting them as something extra for already overburdened faculty to do

**College Business Managers:** Responsible for the “bottom line,” these administrators may be reluctant to undertake costly initiatives, unless they are seen as making good business sense.

**Fiscal Constraints:** It is difficult to ask campuses to go forward with new initiatives unless we acknowledge the fiscal constraints in which they operate. A key strategy then is to make sure that these initiatives and discussions are tied to existing ones on campus, for instance in discussions of civic engagement or campus worklife. One meeting participant noted that “when a new idea like this gets introduced, everyone

instantly thinks about institutionalizing it—there is a belief that, unless it is directly built into the mission and endorsed by high-level administrators, it won't advance. However, this is not true. . . . This seems like a good model to implement 'under the radar screen' because it won't be seen as requiring anything 'extra'— just a new way of looking at what we already do!"

For this model to take hold it will be important for a range of higher education associations to work together and create synergy around this model of community development. No one should "own" this model; rather it should be embraced by all.



#### Class and race

Meeting participants made it clear that the notion of "invisibility" on campus is relative. For example, African American men on a white campus are very aware of the security staff on campus who are NOT invisible to them. People with different social class backgrounds think differently about these "invisible" staff people.

We need to be aware that when we call them "invisible," they are not invisible to their own internal peer groups and/or those administrators and professionals from like backgrounds. One meeting participant noted that there are many administrators and faculty of color who are aware of and committed to these workers.



#### Subcontractors

A disturbing issue that surfaced in the discussions is that many low-wage workers on campuses are employed by subcontractors over which the college or university has little or no employer jurisdiction. Simultaneously, colleges and universities make investments in their permanent staff, such as job training and tuition remission, that they

do not make in contract workers who can, by omission, become second-class citizens of the institution. Here it may be that universities have the most clout as purchasers, encouraging their vendors to adopt policies that enable their employees to benefit from campus services and offerings.

Though many businesses embrace the theory that satisfied employees ultimately help generate more revenue, it is hard to define what the buy in is for college and university leaders. Is it simply enough to say that supporting the community within is the right thing to do, and therefore campuses should do it? Higher education is not a profit-driven endeavor, nor is it willing to put employee satisfaction and happiness above and beyond student learning. In order to translate this concept into something that makes sense to campus public service directors and fiscal managers alike, we need to carefully think through its implications for all aspects of campus life and formulate approaches that are in line with both the mission of higher education and its financial realities.

*Unionized employees*

We did not investigate the role of campus unions to a great extent in this project. We speculate that unions might support these new efforts because they strengthen and provide additional services to employees. However, as is often the case, offering auxiliary services could also be seen as a way to distract unions from wage issues, adding to the complexity of labor concerns.

Workplace questions to consider include:

When do employees take advantage of these services/support?

If services, such as English-language classes, take place during the workday, can they count the hours as work time?

Who determines which employees are in need?

When companies recognized that turnover was costly to the organization, Employee Assistance Programs were introduced as a way to increase the retention of employees. Providing EAP services is not terribly expensive to the company, but is a demonstrated way that they can illustrate their commitment to employees and their family members, all of whom are eligible. Some campuses, such as Boston University, have decided to extend their EAP program to contracted employees. This may spawn similar initiatives that would garner union support.



#### Links to Service-Learning

While we have concluded that community development from within is consistent with the mission of campus service-learning efforts, and in fact, can be a powerful component of a service-learning program, we are also aware of challenges. Recognizing the mixed ways in—such as variability in project duration—which students can implement service-learning projects, it is important to think about and be concerned with the ways these initiatives are carried out so that they are not destructive or not beneficial to campus employees. For instance, is there a way to create continued attention or sustainable efforts so that when students leave, the employees are still served? The history of the service-learning movement provides powerful data on transforming charity work into social justice efforts. The same kind of thoughtful stewardship that accompanies the best service-learning project—including careful analysis of political, organizational and social justice concerns—must be brought to bear in programs and projects to support the lowest paid workers.

Like all service-learning projects, unless these projects are presented and coached correctly, there is no guarantee that students and their faculty advisors will inherently do this right. Perhaps campuses could offer a module or training to help students and/or faculty learn the “best practices” for this kind of work.

## A Model of Engagement

Pennsylvania State University is one model to reference as we move forward and think about ways that campuses can institutionalize a commitment to providing for the community within. Committed to viewing all staff, regardless of income, as the university's most valuable resource, it is a community that has successfully articulated their obligation to supporting staff and has linked this dedication to creative action and comprehensive programming.

This commitment is voiced--not just from an office of community service or a center charged with a specific mandate--but from the president himself.

“We are fortunate to have a highly dedicated workforce, willing to make an extra effort on behalf of the university, a commitment that is essential to Penn State's quality and success. At the same time, we have made an institutional commitment to address the important challenges of children, youth, and families in our society, an academic initiative that would be highly ironic were we not to be sensitive to the family needs of Penn's own employees.” - Graham Spanier (President, Penn State)

Penn State's commitment is made operational through myriad initiatives functioning on multiple levels. In addition to the standard benefit programs administered by its human resources department, the university, motivated by a voluntary, but well attended Weekly-Paid Staff Assembly meeting, created a Quality Worklife office, which is charged with keeping a finger on the pulse of the current needs and climate of the staff community. The office proposed and implemented a flexible workday model, an emergency daycare service for sick children of employees, a variety of forums to handle local issues, such as school strikes, and a successful mentoring program for low-wage women staff members. Similarly, the Community Outreach and Urban Renewal Group agreed to subsidize any home purchase within 15 miles of campus for those full-time staff who have an annual income of less than \$30,000. In addition, this office has worked with student organizations to provide targeted programs to meet the needs of low-wage workers. Recent programs include a fully student-staffed homework center for the children of staff members, a mentoring program between students and teenage children of staff members, and a Lend A Hand program which pairs able-bodied students with staff members in need of help with household tasks such as painting or carpentry. Penn State's creative and effective approaches clearly demonstrate the depth of its commitment to the needs of the lower-paid staff and give us hope that other campuses can follow their lead.

## Small Steps

Change often occurs incrementally, and participants at project discussions offered strategies for moving this issue onto campus agendas. Ideas included:

1. Learn more about the life circumstances, interests and needs of lower-paid staff through a variety of methods, including research on local immigrant and economically disadvantaged populations and focus groups with workers on campus.
2. Help campuses conduct a “quality of life” survey for all employees. This may be a good next step in identifying the employee assistance needs that individual campuses have. The results could then be the internal driver of new initiatives.
3. Look for opportunities to apply strategies crafted for one group on campus to others. For example, one campus had great difficulty getting students to the city immigration center (transportation issues, time constraints, scheduling problems) for a service-learning project, and worked hard to resolve these issues for students. Many of the workers on campus; however, were also in need of the same supports. The key is developing the awareness that there are others on campus who may benefit from efforts that support students. These are win-win solutions.
4. Students are important and can be encouraged to initiate programs a through their work on living wage campaigns or other student-driven efforts already on many campuses.
5. Consider bringing this to the attention of policymakers at the federal level, where decisions about such things as the allocation of work-study funds are made. Tacks to pursue can include targeting some federal work-study funds for daycare centers that care for the children of lower-wage workers or for agencies and organizations that care for the specific needs of this population?
6. Employ selected strategies from corporate America to mobilize constituents for the betterment of the workplace.
7. Intermediary organizations can conduct research, such as surveys of random colleges, to develop a target list of campuses that might be open to change, to design a mobilization strategy, and to formalize assessment protocols to strengthen the argument for this type of change on other campuses.
8. Use the rubrics created to assess diversity on campus as a way to assess this type of civic engagement work. Though this suggests a more institutionalized approach, the rubrics are applicable for non-institutionalized efforts. The benchmarks for diversity assessment include: (1) goals (are the goals for diversity broadly and deeply understood and easily articulated by all constituents on campus?); (2) resources (is there adequate human capital, resources, and time

resources dedicated to diversity?); (3) capacity; (4) leadership; (5) centrality (how central are these efforts to the mission of the institution?).

9. Develop a practitioner-focused document that talks, in plain language, about the community development within model and provides examples of ways to introduce this on a campus. This “tool kit” approach might offer concrete suggestions such as including teams of Residential Life staff and facilities workers in student orientation. Start with campus examples that have been documented.



#### Shared Fates

Perhaps one of the most menacing developments looming on the horizon for low-wage workers on campuses is the plight of public higher education, which is suffering as a result of strained state budgets. Traditionally, public higher education has been the access point for economic and social mobility for low-wage earners and their children. As public support continues to dwindle, so do viable opportunities for these populations to escape poverty and social isolation. So, in a sense, a focus on the community within is a reaffirmation of one of the central components of public education’s mission. A firm, united position on issues of access and equity from leaders in higher education can enable all members of the internal campus community—much in need of a galvanizing moment in these dispiriting times—to see that their work stands for something larger than the bottom line. In addition, by presenting a clear and consistent message to external constituents, public institutions are more likely to be heard than if they lobby individually for the needs of specific campuses.

## Conclusion

Many might argue that the best thing that a college or university can do to support its community within is to pay a living wage and thus ensure the economic stability of their employees. Paying a living wage is absolutely critical to building a strong and sustainable community. However, as the Penn State example demonstrates, it is not the only thing that campuses can do to foster a caring and supportive environment in which respect for each other is an institutional priority.

As we move forward in our work with the community within project, it will be important for us to remember that we are asking campuses to re-shape the way in which they currently view and talk about their commitment to social responsibility and civic engagement. In this shift towards greater intra-campus awareness, new language will evolve and new service-learning philosophies will be embraced. We will strive to build healthier communities not from the outside— in, but rather from the inside— out.

Despite the examples cited, this is a relatively untapped subject, with room for great exploration and further discussion. Very little research has touched upon the importance of building community from within, nor are there many campuses that

seem to have truly incorporated the spirit of this project into their institutional outreach priorities. We believe the issues raised by this project suggest powerful possibilities for campuses that can be pursued in economical and mission driven ways, and can serve as an excellent foundation for future community development from within initiatives.

