The People's College & The Street People:

Community Colleges & Community Development

(Part Two of Two)

PART ONE of this article appeared in the October/November issue of the *Journal.* It examined the history of the community development function of community colleges, and described the advocacy positions of key foundations that urge colleges to broaden their commitment to critical social issues.

By Terry O'Banion and Rosemary Gillett-Karam

In response to concerns about the quality of life in the nation's communities, a number of leading-edge community colleges are beginning to broaden and deepen their role in servicing their communities—they are "getting out on the streets." The "people's college" is beginning to respond seriously to the needs of the "street people"—the people who are homeless, on welfare, on drugs, and involved in crime. Some of the leading examples include the following:

Community College of Denver advertises itself as a nexus for community and uses terms like leader, convener, collaborator, facilitator, and partner to describe the roles it plays in the community. A few accomplishments of the college include linkage of their Women's Resource Center to the Denver Family Opportunity Program; development of a Computer Access Center for Persons with Disabilities; partnerships with the Denver Family Opportunity Program, Clayton Foundation, and Denver Social Services for Job Development Project; alliances with the Ford Foundation and other community agencies to improve the graduation rates of disadvantaged inner-city youth, and involvement as host and fiscal agent for the Colorado Institute for Hispanic Education and Economic Development.

The Bronx Community College, through the vision of its president, Roscoe Brown, has turned a burned and beleaguered borough of New York City into a model area. In central Bronx where the college is located, signs of burned and vacated buildings have disappeared; moreover, the college provided leadership for establishing senior citizen housing by rehabilitating the shells of private homes. The college also plays a key role in creating networks that assure that a growing number of Bronx residents move progressively through all levels of education; some of these partnerships include a citywide Science Articulation Committee working on a curriculum that takes students from kindergarten to college; programs to introduce senior high students to careers in sociology, social work, and psychology, and a neighborhood program in Bathgate focused on job training. In the Highbridge area, the Mosaic Program creates a "safe haven" where health care and information about education and careers are readily available. Brown has said, "Not every community college sees this as their mission. But we do. We are in the business of salvaging and improving lives. We're trying to rebuild the Bronx into a place of stability." (Urban Community College Report, February, 1992).

The Miami-Dade Community College Medical Center Campus in its Overtown Neighborhood Partnership has done as much as any other community college in the nation to "get out on the street." Miami-Dade Community College's Medical Center Campus has adopted an inner-city neighborhood across the street from the college called Overtown. The college is in the process of developing an intensive prevention program to address the resident-driven priorities in areas of health and human services, housing, education, economic development, and neighborhood building. The college is acting as "a community activist, an advocate for the neighborhood, and a convener of multiple community institutions, meeting the holistic needs of the poor and disadvantaged in the Overtown neighborhood. Faculty, staff, and students team to serve physical, environmental, economic, intellectual, and psycho-social-spiritual needs of the neighborhood" (Martinez Pollack, 1992).

The partnership was instituted to create a means for improving the quality of life in Overtown. The project addresses the underlying assumptions about the social causes of a poor human and community condition and establishes a prevention model to deter the
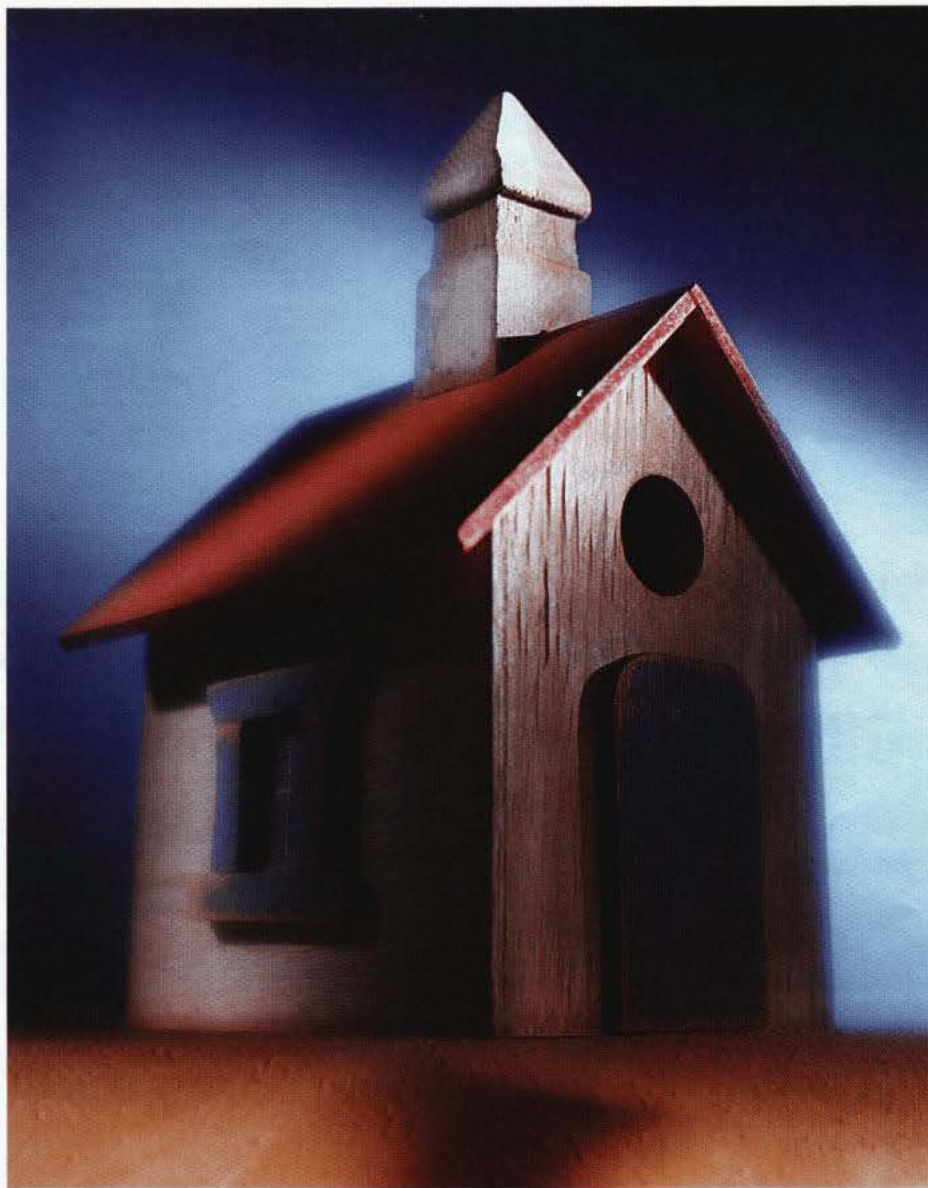
conditions brought on by poverty, including crime, drug use, gangs, teenage pregnancy and births, intellectual impairment of infants, and chronic unemployment. Prevention and treatment are essential goals of the Overtown Neighborhood Partnership as is the empowerment of the residents to work toward their desired quality of life. All priorities and strategies for change are resident-driven.

Residents and stakeholders within Overtown: (1) identify their own strengths and weaknesses; (2) develop a Quality of Life Index for the neighborhood, and (3) set their own priorities and strategies for change. The Miami-Dade Medical Center Campus and President Tessa Martinez Pollack, serve as conveners, catalysts, and coordinating brokers to facilitate partnerships that assist the neighborhood in effecting measurable outcomes.

In the examples mentioned above, community colleges are clearly becoming more

when their own record on traditional educational programs, such as transfer and developmental education, is not all that sterling?

- Where will community colleges secure the resources to support their expanded role?
- Do the faculty view community development as part of their role, and are they prepared for this new role?
- What is the proper role for community colleges in community development: critic, analyst, convener, catalyst, facilitator, collaborator, planner, service provider, or social engineer?

These questions and the issues they raise will be explored extensively in the coming years. The community college leaders who will lead this exploration must be aware of some of the barriers to the community college's deepening and broadening role in community development.

Why not use that money to solve part of the college's financial crisis? It is unacceptable that this is happening at the same time that they are depriving thousands of people of a college education. No wonder public confidence is at an all-time low" (William Skenner, *Miami Herald*, March 24, 1992).

This is not just the voice of a lone citizen. In a new national report from the Committee for Economic Development, *Putting Learning First* (1994), the authors say, "But schools are not social service institutions, and they should not be asked to solve all our nation's social ills and cultural conflicts. Other state and community agencies, not the schools, should pay for and provide needed social services" (Executive Summary, p. 2).

Under current funding mechanisms, colleges cannot be expected to serve their communities beyond providing their present programs and services. Already, colleges experiencing financial exigency are cutting

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active in their communities, even to the extent that they are addressing critical quality-of-life issues. Community colleges are beginning to move out into the streets and into program areas where they have never been before. In some cases, "the street people" have become their students. If other colleges are to embrace this kind of community development, certain questions must be addressed. They include the following:

- To what extent should community colleges become involved in deepening and broadening their commitment to their communities?
- How can community colleges help resolve problems of crime, drugs, welfare, and poverty when other social agencies have failed?
- How can community colleges help resolve these critical community issues

Barriers to Community Development
Finance: Currently, all community colleges are funded by their states on the basis of some student contact ratio—ADA or FTE, from student tuition, and, in most states, by local taxes. There are no systemic resources for funding community colleges that want to provide social services to their communities. Community colleges are not likely to be funded to take on these new roles, and many leaders feel that present resources are not sufficient to support present priorities.

Some citizens in Miami have been vocal in opposition to the role of Miami-Dade Community College in the social issues addressed by the Overtown Project. In a letter to the editor, one citizen said, "The *Herald* reported on March 5 that MDCC plans to spend $500,000 a year to cure Overtown's social ills. Why is the college taking over the role of governmental and social agencies?

back on community services, and many require these programs to be self-supporting. In most of the cases cited in this article, colleges have turned to other sources for funds. A few have been successful in securing funds from local and state agencies, and these colleges are blazing the trail to convince social service agencies that the community college can assist them in their efforts. If these pilot programs are successful, these agencies may look to other community colleges in the future to provide leadership for community development. In several community colleges, national foundations have provided grants for pilot efforts, but foundation support is always for a limited period of time. Community and state foundations are also likely sources for funding because many of these foundations are committed to addressing critical community issues and may welcome involvement from their local community college.

Locating sustainable resources to fund very expensive programs will be the primary challenge of community colleges that plan on moving out "on the street" to serve their communities by providing direct social service. Such service will probably always be provided in collaboration with a number of other agencies, and this creates an additional problem because the community college is likely to be viewed as resource-rich by its partners who have struggled for decades to survive and serve in a resource-poor environment.

Community college leaders should be cautious in committing to projects and entering collaborations in which they will be expected to contribute more than their resources allow. And, most importantly, community college leaders must make long-range plans regarding the sources of future funding when funds for pilot projects expire. If community colleges fail in these highly visible community leadership roles,

derprepared student, responding to the needs of the most diverse group of students ever to enter college, meeting workload requirements of large teaching and advising assignments, and understanding and applying new information technology.

To ask faculty now to get out on the streets to help with these very difficult social issues, where so many others have failed, is asking more than can be delivered. Some faculty, however, have strong commitments to serving their communities and are actively engaged in addressing critical social issues. There is very little institutional support for their activity in most community colleges, however, and these faculty can easily "burn out" trying to function in this challenging role when it is added to their established duties. These active faculty may also be subtly punished by their peers for doing what no one else in the institution wants to do.

Another key issue related to faculty is that

Community developers are often well trained for their jobs. They have very strong commitments to providing resources and support for "the street people" in helping them address and overcome their problems. While community college faculty members can learn a great deal from community developers, they must keep in mind that they are absolute novices when compared to community developers with a long history of commitment and experience.

Community colleges will experience a great deal of resistance from community agencies if they decide to get out on the streets. Agencies will see community colleges as skilled competitors for a small pool of resources. Most of the community development organizations live from hand to mouth and do not have staff to develop proposals for funding. Community colleges are well-skilled in this area, often with highly trained staff who specialize in writing proposals for funding. Community develop-

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Faculty resistance: While many faculty members hold values congruent with the desire to solve social problems, many of them do not feel that this is the proper mission of the community college. Community college faculty members feel more comfortable working within the context of the "educational" mission of the institution—the mission they agreed to fulfill. Faculty members are also unprepared to work out on the street with other community development organizations in addressing social issues. A master's degree in a discipline does not prepare a faculty member for dealing with a group of teenage drug addicts.

As importantly, faculty are already overextended in addressing tasks of the more well-defined and accepted missions of the community college. Faculty members feel overwhelmed in dealing with the un-

colleges would have a difficult time fitting community service into faculty load formulas. While some colleges provide recognition for faculty members who serve on special committees in the community, it would be quite difficult to work direct social service into a faculty-load concept.

Resistance from community agencies: There are thousands and thousands of community agencies across the nation already involved in trying to address the social issues that community colleges are now beginning to consider. Churches, civic organizations, local community foundations, and hundreds of different kinds of community development organizations have a long history of advocacy for responding to social problems. These leaders are not likely to welcome the community college as a full partner in efforts to which they have long been committed, nor are they likely to relinquish their "turf" gracefully.

ment leaders may be angry and jealous of the community college's ability and should not be expected to cooperate when funds are allocated to the community college rather than to the community development agency.

Philosophical differences: The educational process is generally described as a rational process. Educators tend to identify issues, gather data, analyze and consider alternatives, respect and welcome divergent views, discuss options openly, arrive at consensus, agree on a plan, write it down, and monitor and evaluate the extent to which goals are achieved. The reality that this rational process is not always practiced does not lessen it as an ideal held by most educational leaders.

For example, Boone's seminal article on "Community Based Programming: An Opportunity and Imperative for the Community College" (1992) is a masterpiece of the

rational process as he suggests specific "guidelines for engaging the community college in community-based programming." Boone suggests that community college leaders and community leaders follow a series of rational steps in identifying and resolving critical community issues. In this regard, educators do live in an ivory tower. Citizens on the street make decisions based on emotion, power, and self-interest; reason often takes a back seat. The experience of educators with citizens on the street is very limited. Perhaps experiences with faculty unions come close to this type of decision-making, but this is a child's game compared to the political processes engaged in daily by citizens.

There is another major philosophical difference between community development

role of community colleges in community development? The key foundations and the leading community colleges noted in this article advocate an assertive role in which the community college moves out onto the streets to engage the street people in direct services. In this role, the community college becomes a social service agency providing services and programs that extend the community college's educational role considerably beyond established convention.

The barriers to community development reviewed in this article—lack of funding, faculty resistance, resistance from community agencies, and philosophical differences—will inhibit most community colleges from becoming social service agencies. Only a small number of institutions can take on this more assertive role, and they

tion regarding the proper role in its own terms, and there will continue to be a variety of approaches to community development. All community colleges, however, will address the question, for the leaders of these institutions are well aware that, "If the community goes to hell, the college goes to hell."

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"Bronx Community College Turns the

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and community colleges that serves as a barrier for increased involvement by community colleges. A basic principle of community development is that the people who are targeted for development must be totally involved in the process. No decisions can be made unless those affected by the decisions are intimately involved in making and carrying out the decisions. This basic principle is illustrated time and time again in the literature of community development and in the action of community developers.

Educators make noises that sound like this basic principle, but the practice is entirely different. While educators say they involve students in decision-making, they truly do not. The curriculum and the schedule and the tests are all designed by the faculty, and instruction and classroom interaction are all managed by the faculty. This traditional behavior is exactly the opposite of the principle that guides community development activities and functions.

Conclusion

The question remains: What is the proper

will bear watching for what they can teach other community colleges—both about their successes and their failures.

Most community colleges will continue to provide community development through more established roles. If the community college is a catalyst, it brings diverse elements together for a purpose without disturbing the nature of the elements themselves. If the community college is a convener, it provides a neutral base for group formation. If the community college is a facilitator, it encourages group decision making and empowerment of new leaders. If the community college is a collaborator, it seeks shared visions and understands how to deal with conflict. If the community college is a planner, it demonstrates those tasks necessary to address and resolve community issues.

Community colleges are not monolithic institutions, even within state systems, so there is no one answer to the question regarding the proper role of community colleges in community development. Each community college will answer this ques-

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