

# The People's College & the Street People:

*Community Colleges & Community Development*

*(Part One of Two)*



**W**HAT IS THE PROPER ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE in serving its community? For decades, community colleges have struggled with this question. The answer is easy if it is couched in terms of established educational services provided to the community such as transfer education, developmental education, and workforce education. But, when it comes to extending the college into the community beyond these programs, the role becomes less clear. The variety of terms used to reflect this community development function illustrates the lack of clarity: community service, continuing education, adult education, noncredit programs, and community-based education. **By Terry O'Banion and Rosemary Gillett-Karam**

Almost all community colleges provide some programs and activities that can be bundled under the name of "community development"—and that suggests a more focused question: In the area of community development, what is the proper role of the community college?

Here again the answer is not difficult for most community colleges as they provide noncredit classes for retirement planning, hobbies, personal development, and recreation; courses and programs to promote cultural and social awareness; facilities for use by community organizations; and a variety of training programs to upgrade job skills. But, if the question is even more sharply focused, should the college venture "out on the streets" of its community to engage "the street people" in solving critical social issues? The answer does not come easily. (The term "street people" is used here as a metaphor for a variety of groups that suffer from violence, inadequate housing, poverty, racial conflict, change in family structure, drugs and alcohol addiction, etc.)

community colleges are not "out on the street" addressing the needs of "the street people."

In this article, the authors trace briefly the historical emergence of the community development function, describe the advocacy positions of several key foundations that urge community colleges to broaden and deepen their commitment to addressing critical social issues, describe several community college initiatives that illustrate how community colleges are responding to the advocacy urged by foundations, and review a number of barriers that community colleges must address if they wish to get "out on the street" to serve "the street people."

### COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Community services, originally offered by private and rural colleges as cultural centers for their communities, is a concept adopted by public community colleges originally in the 1930s (McGuire, 1988). By the mid-1940s, community college faculty were urged to become involved in community

Three seminal works published in 1969—Harlacher's *The Community Dimension of the Community College*, Cohen's *Dateline 1979: Heretical Concepts for the Community College*, and Myran's *Community Services in the Community College*—defined how community colleges should be involved in community service: Colleges, as community-based institutions, assisted their communities by providing the educational resources necessary to meet the social, economic, and civic needs of their communities. Although each of these writers suggested that colleges should work with other community agencies to resolve social and political problems, the community service dimension was viewed as ancillary to other dimensions of the community college mission. It was not until Pifer and Gleazer that the idea of community involvement was highlighted as the preeminent function of community colleges.

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Some community colleges have been on the streets of their communities for decades. In the turbulent '60s, the newly established urban community colleges attempted to respond to the issues created by racial conflicts in their communities, and they have built on these early community connections to create a formidable community presence for addressing current social issues. Some rural community colleges also engage their communities in activities, especially around the theme of economic development, that extends the community development function considerably beyond established models. But, most community colleges today still do not play key roles as community agencies of social change in areas of complex social problems except as they provide traditional "educational" services such as courses, forums, and publications to address these issues. In this sense, most com-

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functions as the college's expression of its interest in the community. In the 1950s and '60s, colleges expanded community services to program planning, offered their facilities for public functions, and cooperated with community agencies on a variety of issues and problems. By 1965, Ervin Harlacher reported that, "the scope and effectiveness of the community services (educational services which were above and beyond regularly scheduled classes and which served as a catalyst for community development) provided by the community college determined the extent to which the community understood and supported the several functions of the community college" (p. 16). No doubt impressed with the national trend on community development, Harlacher urged community colleges to expand their services to their communities. He was soon joined by others.

Pifer, president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, suggested that "community colleges should start thinking of themselves from now on only secondarily as a sector of higher education and regard as their primary role community leadership" (p.23). Almost simultaneously, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, under Gleazer's leadership, issued the statement: "The mission of the AACJC is to provide an organization for national leadership of community-based, performance-oriented postsecondary education" (Gleazer, 1974, p. 6).

Gleazer's initial enthusiasm for community-based education as "a learner-centered system of lifelong learning committed to the renewal of the community and its citizens" (1974, p. 16), was more sharply defined in his later work, *The Community College: Vision, Values, and Vitality*.

For all intents and purposes, Gleazer favored education for direct community development, the expansion of community colleges beyond their role in postsecondary education, and continuing education as the community college's main purpose. He based his enthusiasm for community-based education on the concept that the community college was "uniquely qualified to become the nexus of a community learning system, relating organizations with educational functions into a complex sufficient to respond to the population's learning needs" (1980, p. 10).

Meanwhile, Gollattscheck proposed that successful community-based programs demonstrate commitment to the needs of society and work as a catalyst to create community renewal of all people, "even perhaps the moral and spiritual renewal of our great nation" (1976, p. 12).

Harlacher and Gollattscheck (1978) viewed community services as a way to expand community college education, affirming Myran's (1969) suggestion that colleges

community colleges added courses and programs to promote cultural and social awareness and to upgrade job skills. In some cases, through public forums, newspapers, radio, and television, they sponsored programs to increase awareness of social issues.

Community development in these early days, however, was really education in a "clean, well-lighted place" (to quote Hemingway). It was designed to serve the community in a fairly safe and noncontroversial way. Although the early thinkers sometimes used social problems as a basis for discussing their ideas of community development, community colleges did not venture far from their traditional educational role or move out onto the streets to engage the community in its more critical social issues.

In the 1980s, community development began to change as community colleges deepened and broadened their concept of community. Community colleges were asked to cooperate with the community and to serve as catalysts in the renewal of society. Not coincidentally, sociologists (Bel-

volvement when the issues are not strictly educational. While the report uses the grand language of placing the community college in a catalyzing role for responding to larger social issues, revealing quotes limit the concept of "building communities." For example, the report begins strongly—"we propose, therefore, that the theme 'building communities' become the new rallying point for the community college in America...the term community should be defined not only as a region to be served, but also as a climate to be created." Immediately thereafter, it states, "This brings us to our most essential point. At the center of building community there is teaching...thus building community through dedicated teaching is the vision and inspiration of this report" (pp. 7-8).

The report conveys that building communities should be limited to responding to educational needs, and most specifically, focusing on the community college as a teaching institution. The commission missed the opportunity to broaden and deepen the

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move beyond their traditional campus-based activities to include community-based education. They urged community colleges to cooperate with social, governmental, professional, educational, and neighborhood agencies in mutually supportive relationships.

Myran (1978), interested in expanding the scope of community services beyond degree and certificate programs, reminded colleges that extension and adult and continuing education services provided by universities and public schools could be models for community-based education.

While the aims of these thinkers were idealistic, the results of their leadership were practical. These early leaders saw community development translated primarily as a series of noncredit classes largely limited to areas of retirement planning, hobbies, personal development, and recreation. Com-

lah, Etzioni) and political theorists (MacIntyre, Sandel) were urging citizens to renew their communities through recommitment and responsiveness.

Not since the 1960s had educators, sociologists, and political theorists so urgently committed their ideas to a resurgence of community based on citizen and group involvement. A new AACJC commission was formed and charged with reexamining the community college's role in community development. The publication that resulted, *Building Communities: A Vision for a New Century* (1988) asked colleges to serve as problem-solving centers for community and educational issues and to become focal points for improving the quality of life in the inner city.

An examination of this document reveals the hesitation with which community college practitioners approach community in-

community development concept of reaching out to communities and responding to their social needs. The domain of the community college prevails in its "educational role" and its return to an internal focus on building community rather than an external focus that views community development as outreach in response to social issues and problems.

This observation may be confirmed by examining the section of the report titled, "Connections Beyond the College" (p. 35). In this section, examples could be cited to show how community colleges reach out to other community agencies to solve social problems. However, the only examples cited are partnerships with schools, partnerships with senior colleges, and partnerships with employers. These are, again, the established and safe alliances that community colleges have historically built in their communities.

The report does not really break new ground by calling for more aggressive outreach in the community to redefine community development. It has, however, created a largely symbolic reference to—and appearance of—community involvement by community colleges. The title and importance of this document made many leaders believe that community colleges were, indeed, in the business of “building communities,” when the reality is most do not view their mission in such broad terms.

#### **FOUNDATION SUPPORT**

In the 1990s, this reality began to change as major foundations led the charge for educational institutions to confront the social issues of our time. The Ford Foundation, with its urban community college project, is committed to exploring how community colleges can work with their communities to address social problems although these

its commitment to universal access and equality of educational and economic opportunity. Perhaps most importantly, community colleges play a leading role in their communities and regions. Serving as a frequent hub for local networks dealing with community problems, they are accustomed to working collaboratively with all types of community groups” (LeCroy, 1993, p. v).

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation has also encouraged community colleges and other higher education institutions to broaden their commitments to their communities. In a new program brochure (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, undated) titled “Strengthening the Community Orientation and Active Involvement of Higher Education,” the foundation states “higher education has yet to fully realize its potential in addressing the nation’s societal problems.” The foundation is committing its resources to assist higher education in realizing its potential:

project to develop leaders has responded to Kellogg’s call by revising Kellogg-funded leadership programs to include a focus on community development. Santa Fe Community College in New Mexico also received Kellogg funding to “strengthen the role of the community college in acting as a catalyst for constructive social change.” The college is developing an intercultural model for promoting collaborative community leadership (The Intercultural Community Leadership Project), designed to demonstrate the value of shared leadership and consensus-building in a culturally sensitive setting and to strengthen the role of the community college in acting for constructive social change. The Citizens Leadership Institute at Gulf Coast Community College in Florida is also a Kellogg-funded project to teach citizens how to become involved in solving some of today’s societal problems at the community level.

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projects are still strongly couched in an educational context.

In 1991, The Hitachi Foundation funded a project for the League for Innovation in the Community College under the title “Catalysts for Community Change.” Guidelines were developed for community colleges to conduct community forums on critical issues facing their communities. Pilot forums were held at various League colleges: At Kirkwood Community College, IA, the community forum was on crime; at Lane Community College, OR, the community forum was on the timber crisis; and at Maricopa, AZ, the Phoenix community forum addressed inner-city housing.

In these guidelines, Julie Banzhaf, program officer at The Hitachi Foundation, said, “Community colleges, as yet largely untapped resources, are emerging as the nexus for the resolution of both local and national concerns. Community colleges reflect this country’s democratic idealism and

“Grant making is directed toward universities and colleges, as well as organizations and institutions whose programs encourage colleges and universities to assist communities in solving high-priority problems.”

The community college is specifically targeted for support by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation under a heading in the brochure “Broadening the Community Orientation of Community Colleges.” In that section the foundation indicates, “Grant making in this area will promote the broadening of the community orientation of community colleges through increased outreach efforts and the extension of programs to the underserved. Cooperation among local government, service organizations, community leaders, and community colleges will be necessary. Such cooperation will allow for the development of collaborative, creative efforts to help solve diverse community problems and strengthen the overall community.”

The League and The University of Texas’

ACCLAIM, a Kellogg-funded project at North Carolina State University in Raleigh, is helping community colleges understand how better to serve their communities through community-based programming.

Community-based programming incorporates the ideas of the early framers of the community-based education, community services, and continuing education functions of community colleges while adding essential elements of the university extension model. It defines the community college as a change agent in its community while incorporating the ideas of strategic and environmental scanning and issues programming to benefit a defined community group.

As perceived by Boone (1992), community-based programming envisions the community college as a “moving force in effecting and facilitating greater collaboration among the people, their leaders, and community-based organizations and agencies in identifying and seeking resolutions to major

and complex issues that have a negative impact on the people" (p. 1). Eight pilot community colleges in Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, after a year's training in the community-based programming process, are engaged in the early stages of establishing environmental scanning committees to prioritize issues affecting the quality of life in their communities.

Part two in the December/January issue of the Journal will look at what community colleges are doing to service their communities.

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