Our Urbanizing Society: A Search for Perspective

NUEA Division of Community Development Position

In July, 1968, the Division of Community Development of the National University Extension Association (NUEA) decided to write a position paper on our urbanizing society, as a response to an NUEA request. Division Chairman Otto Hoiberg appointed a distinguished committee for this purpose.* They developed a set of basic questions to be addressed, consulted other persons, and prepared four different drafts, each of which received outside review and reaction. The final paper was widely distributed in May, 1970. It points up broad outlines for university involvement in communities, with special emphasis on urban industrial society. The following article is excerpted from that final position paper.

The Community and the University

It's increasingly clear that contemporary society benefits and suffers from an explosion in knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge and the technologies related thereto. This knowledge explosion is the basis for the industrial, urban, and bureaucratic revolutions in the modern world. And it is these interrelated forces—industrialization, urbanization, and bureaucratization—that have produced the society, communities, and universities of today. These forces also provide the context within which attempts to deal with the problems of the nation, communities, and universities must be conceived.

The effects of these forces pervade every aspect of life. Industrialization has altered ways of work, greatly increased productive capacity, produced affluence, and, through widespread use of the automobile and the airplane, altered time and space relationships. Urbanization has led to increases in the size of

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cities, problems of attrition in non-metropolitan communities, the suburban sprawl, the rise in sophistication, the increased importance of education, the confrontation with race, and a continuing conflict in values. Bureaucratization has resulted in increased size and complexity of organizations, the concentration of power in a few major metropolitan areas, greatly increased interdependence, the emphasis on administration, and personal feelings of powerlessness and remoteness in work, community affairs, and universities.

Some Critical Community Problems

It is evident that one of the significant achievements of American society and American communities has become a substantial weakness—the creation of specialized competence and the placing of this competence in organizations and agencies. This came about in a natural and ordered way in both the public and private sectors. What has not been recognized until very recently is that this specialization has led to three classical forms of isolation and estrangement:

1. Specialization and isolation of agencies from each other.
2. Separation and isolation of specialized agencies from the community.
3. Estrangement of agencies from both the people they serve and those they might potentially serve.

Many factors have contributed to this isolation. Once agencies were established, they became possessive of programs or areas of work. This was their "property" and they were defensive about any intrusion by other agencies or by the community. At the same time, the community has tended to assign responsibility for particular programs to an agency, public or private, and from then on felt itself freed from general responsibility.

The isolation of agencies from the community, together with specialization and professionalization of the agency staffs, led to an estrangement from the people being or to be served. This estrangement was increased by differing conceptions of the way help was to be given. Conflicting values, goals, and methods, therefore, tended to force individuals further into a paralyzing passivity.

What has emerged within each community is an enormously complex array of specialized organizations, programs, and services with a built-in dilemma of major proportions.

On the one hand, there's the array of public and private services with interconnections between the local and national levels; on the other, both at the community and national levels, there is difficulty in relating these services to each other so an effective attack can be made on significant problems. These problems may be rehabilitation, poverty, unemployment, education, or youth services, or they may be the composite difficulties confronting neigh-

borhoods or communities.

The basic difficulty in solving the problems arises in part out of the human and technical complications involved. Part of the difficulty also, but only part, arises out of our inability as communities and as a society to mobilize and effectively use resources, including intellectual resources. Community mechanisms and patterns for solving problems have become inadequate. Individuals and families, in turn, do not receive the help they need. The rich potentiality of community life under today's conditions is unrealized.

The University and Knowledge Revolution

Higher education, and specifically the university, has played a major role in the "knowledge explosion" and in the resulting revolutions in society. It is essential, therefore, to reexamine higher education and the functions of institutions of higher education. Fundamentally, the functions of these institutions are the acquisition of knowledge (in research), the transmission of knowledge (in teaching), and the application of knowledge (in service).

An intricate interrelationship exists between the three aspects of knowledge and their institutional representations. James A. Perkins, former president of Cornell University, suggests:

Knowledge is, therefore, in many respects a living thing—it grows, it changes, and various of its parts are replaced as they be-

come obsolete. But the dynamic nature of knowledge is traceable to this interplay and tension connected with its acquisition, transmission and application. It is this interaction that creates the needs for new knowledge, that brings inaccurate teaching to account, that shows the world what could be rather than what is. Taken separately, the three aspects of knowledge lead nowhere; together they can and have produced an explosion which has changed the world.

There can be little doubt at this point that universities will continue to develop new knowledge, at an even more rapid rate than in the past, given the expanding research investment. It is also clear that new knowledge will always threaten what is established and accepted. It is also likely that universities will continue to be expected to help society and the community to adjust to change and to achieve a higher measure of human potentiality. The question is how the assistance is to be given to be most helpful to society and contribute most to the basic functions and goals of the university.

Universities and Classical Forms of Isolation

Today's major public and private colleges and universities are vast reservoirs of resources relevant to building an environment of quality for human living and solving community problems. Their basic resource is knowledge and the rea-

soned examination of what is accepted as knowledge. The university's power to help communities and society lies in the development of new knowledge, the education of people, and the application of knowledge to the self-identified problems of communities.

The classical forms of isolation and estrangement characteristic of the community also characterize the university. Not only has the university suffered from its isolation from other major institutions, it has in a sense become isolated within itself. Colleges, departments, professional schools, centers, institutes, and bureaus have become separated from each other and no adequate integrating mechanism has been found. Lip service is paid to interdisciplinary work, but little takes place.

Relationships between universities and communities have always been tenuous. They remain so. In an urban, industrial society, with its high dependence on knowledge and education, the isolation of the university from the community requires a fundamental reexamination.

The third classical form of isolation, that of institutions from people they serve, has high significance for the university. It screams in the headlines, in the revolt of students, the disillusionment of faculty, and the plight of administrators. It is evident in the growing frustration of community leadership as it tries to relate to and obtain help from universities. Some leaders seem to be giving up on the university and are looking elsewhere for help.

Fragmentation of the University's Response

University-society-community relationships continue to suffer from a gross simplification of the basic issues involved. Only in a very abstract sense does a university have impact on the society or the community as a corporate whole. The impact comes in the separate responses of the colleges, departments, professional schools, centers, and institutes—the units of the university. In this sense the responses of these separate units have made the university a "multiversity."

It is unlikely that anyone in the university has an accurate picture of the extent to which it is involved in the society and the communities through its separate units, its faculty, and its students. This is to be expected; it grows out of the very nature of what the university is today.

Inadequacy of Present Concepts of University Functions

It must be recognized that the old concepts of university functions —teaching, research, and application—are now inadequate to describe the intricate and involved operations of a contemporary university and to help it resolve its conflicts of interest. What is urgently needed is a new statement of purpose—a position statement—that will protect and strengthen the basic academic core and the basic teaching functions, assure freedom and

conditions for the discovery of new knowledge, but at the same time will recognize that universities do exist in societies and communities and that under today's conditions, the very functions of the university have great impact on the society and the community.

Universities, being what they are and concerned as they must be with the basic functions of knowledge, are forces for change, whether or not they wish to be. The things they teach, the ideas they represent, the research they do, the standards they suggest in many fields question things as they are and question the establishment. In some senses the very nature of the university forces it to accept an agent-in-change role. The question is: How can the university become more involved without imposing its values on the community or without becoming the major advocate for change?

Basically the question is: How can the university deal with its change role and the leadership role that is its logical responsibility? There is no final or complete answer to this question. It needs to be critically examined, however, in terms of basic relationships and basic strategies.

The university, then, is threatened by fragmentation from within and by heavy demands on knowledge in an urban-industrial-bureaucratic society. There is increasing concern for the university itself as an institution. It must maintain contact with all parts of society to keep open the doors to research and free

inquiry, to continue its acceptance and relevance as the highest order of a free and open institution, and to obtain support from its constituency.

It must, at the same time, be a university in keeping with its basic traditions. But, these traditions must be reinterpreted in relation to the new situations it now confronts, and specifically to the society and communities of which it is part.

The struggle to maintain the university as a university and simultaneously to maintain contact with the relevance to communities may be the best avenue to strengthen a free, open, and democratic society.

Community and Community Development in an Urban Industrial Society

The community as it has been known and experienced in the past —the traditional community—is in disarray or has ceased to exist. Some scholars insist community is not a useful concept under today's conditions. Others see community in a transitional state, requiring redefinition and reconceptualization. This is the view accepted in this position paper.

New ideas and new concepts are needed to more adequately define community in a systems sense, in terms of the relationships among people, and to clarify the meaning and effects it has on people. This reconceptualization is basic to the development and redevelopment of communities.

Like "community," the term "community development" also denotes different things to different people. For some, the emphasis is on processes. For others, the emphasis is on results and outcomes or sequences in development, or on programs carefully planned in terms of procedures and content, or on a movement for widespread citizen involvement.

We conceive of community development as the process through which people develop more adequate patterns and mechanisms for building an environment of quality and through which they can deal with specific problems. It is the process whereby those who make up the community arrive at collective decisions and take action to enhance the social, economic, cultural, and physical well-being of the community. It is basically an educational process through which people come to understand themselves and their environment, and become more able to design and carry out action programs. The goals of the education and the action are stronger individuals, stronger relationships among people, and stronger communities.

Redefining the Interface of University and Community

The university, like other major social institutions, is caught up in the tensions, conflicts of interest, and movements in communities and in society. It is urgent that it become more actively, more realistically, and more creatively involved. In so doing, it must carry out its historic function as an educational institution.

Education is change . . . change in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and relationships of individuals, which in turn becomes the basis for changes in the way problems are understood, the way planning is done, the way decisions are made, and the way action is carried out. These become the bases for changes in institutional arrangements, in institutions themselves, and in communities.

What is needed for universities at this time is not retreat from the problems nor more of the same kind of programs currently underway. Commendable as some of these programs are, they have not made the contribution the university is capable of. Knowledge and competence are urgently needed to help solve the problems of societies and communities—but knowledge and competence are not enough.

A new relationship must be established that enables the university to make its knowledge resources more available to communities. This in turn helps create in the community opportunities for learning that will lead to the development of men and women more competent in the resolution of the problems that interdependent living produce.

Recommendations

The Division of Community Development of the NUEA therefore recommends that member insti-

tutions of the NUEA take the following steps to strengthen their involvement in the community and in the macro–society:

1. *Make the university commitment to help communities.* Only as the university clearly specifies its sense of responsibility to communities will the institution be able to fulfill its obligation.

2. *Assess the capability of the university to help communities.* Universities need to assess their present and potential resources for helping communities. Knowledge of what is being done and what could be done with present expertise should come before any consideration of additional resources—human or material—or restructuring of the "machinery" through which help is provided.

3. *Build linkages to ongoing community efforts.* Not only must universities look within to assess, strengthen, and coordinate their resources, but they must also look without to build effective, ongoing relationships with communities and community-serving organizations and agencies.

4. *Coordinate university efforts in communities.* It is recognized that universities vary widely in structure, and that this will have consequences for the way they go about organizing to help communities. Never-

theless, the establishment of a university community-service clearinghouse function and of linkages among community-serving units of the university is necessary if the university is to increase its capacity for community service.

5. *Strengthen the research base for community development.* In this fast-changing and rapidly urbanizing society, we must continuously add to the sum of knowledge if we are to solve problems intelligently. Only as consultation and technical help to communities are supported by a well-established data base and a thorough evaluation of attempts at community change can we hope to be effective.

6. *Foster academic training in community development.* Success as a community agent-in-change calls for special skills in devising new organizational structures and strengthening existing ones, developing linkages and community channels among organizations, eliciting citizen participation, and seeking out and using resources and technical help on specialized problems. Universities need to determine where and how, within the existing structures, these skills can be learned and what modifications may be required in structures and curricula to provide the education and training needed. The community itself should

become a center for learning and a significant adjunct to the university's classrooms and laboratories.

Summary

The Division of Community Development of the NUEA believes that the above recommendations will help universities increase their relevance and significance to the community and to society. The ultimate success of this effort will, of course, depend largely on the interest and motivation of students, faculty, administrators, and other members of the university community in devoting time, energy, and know-how in developing programs in the community.

The problem is serious, the need urgent, the task complex. Universities cannot avoid the challenge of becoming involved and influencing social action. The question remaining is whether their involvement will be piecemeal and unorganized or rationally conceived and executed.