

# The Role of a College in a University-Wide Approach to Community Partnerships: The University of Nebraska at Omaha Experience

BY ALICE SCHUMAKER AND SARA WOODS

## Abstract

*The University of Nebraska at Omaha places community outreach at the forefront in its new strategic plan. Accomplishing this goal will be aided by efforts already in place through its College of Public Affairs and Community Service. With a strong dedication to community, current college initiatives include strong involvement with juvenile justice issues, neighborhood strengthening, service learning for students in the community, and mentoring programs for Latino children and families. This leadership within the University will move its outreach agenda forward, due to existing community networks and trust, expertise in outreach techniques, willingness to help others learn, and established funding avenues.*

A public metropolitan university, by definition, has a unique role in the community. To flourish, it must serve a population that has varied social interests and is socio-economically, racially, culturally, educationally diverse; strive for academic excellence; and be viewed as an innovative and respected member of the community. In addition to these challenges, the successful metropolitan university cannot portray itself as an isolated, elite institution or the gulf between the university and the community will continue to exist. The metropolitan university can be a part of the urban culture, but can rarely define it because of the wealth of other cultural influences present in a metropolitan community.

This desire to belong to the community in a meaningful way is illustrated in the vision of the University of Nebraska at Omaha's strategic plan, drafted in 1999: "to be of the metropolitan community, not simply in that community." This statement affirms a commitment to be an active participant in the life of the Omaha metropolitan area and a positive force in the community. Since becoming part of the University of Nebraska system in 1965 from its roots as a city university, the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) has seen steady growth in student population and community recognition. As the educator of a substantial portion of the citizens in the metropolitan area of 650,000 residents and many in the rest of the state, UNO has set its three priorities for the future: to be student-focused, to enhance academic excellence, and to engage with the community.

However, common sense and experience tell us that universities cannot simply set priorities and expect to achieve them within a short time frame. Universities are complex, de-centralized organizations that require a minimum of strong leadership from the top and a push from within in order to change direction. A good leader recognizes and draws upon the inner resources of the institution to facilitate change. This has occurred at UNO where the chancellor drew upon the expertise of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service (CPACS) as a partner in spearheading the Strategic Planning process and the vision for the future. Years of experience in community outreach gave CPACS the foresight in helping to move the university forward. The following describes the college and its dedication to outreach, its current community partnerships, and the knowledge it has gained through its outreach experiences.

## **Background**

The UNO College of Public Affairs and Community Service was founded in 1973 with a commitment to the community at its center. Its formation was recommended by the Regents Commission on the Urban University of the 1970s that said UNO should “develop new programs and provide new services focused upon community problems in order to offer fresh insight into these problems as well as to prepare trained personnel to engage in their solutions” and “direct a massive expansion in the role of the university in the community through the establishment of an Institute for Public and Community Affairs” (University of Nebraska Regents Commission). First organized as a school, the college soon took shape through re-assigned existing degree programs in criminal justice, public administration, social work, and the urban research center. New programs in gerontology and urban studies, and the Goodrich Scholarship Program were also added.

Now, 30 years later, dedication to community is stronger than ever. This is evident in two areas of the CPACS 2000 strategic plan “to conduct research, especially as it relates to concerns of our local and statewide constituencies,” and to “offer professional services to the community, including continuing education opportunities, designed to further personal, professional, organizational, and community improvement goals” (CPACS mission statement 2000). It should be noted here that the dean of CPACS was highly supportive of community outreach and did much to foster the work of departments and individuals. This sentiment was also expressed by the chancellor and other top administrators. Checkoway (2001) in his critique of research universities and outreach emphasizes that consistent commitment of this order by top administrators to a civic mission is hard to find today.

While the college and its individual academic units are now leaders in engaging faculty, staff, and students in addressing the needs of the community, this proactive stance was not always the case. During its first twenty years of its existence, CPACS outreach activities were primarily reactive in nature, stemming from responses or requests from community agencies or individuals, or outside funding activities involving faculty and staff. While CPACS continues to respond to the unique nature of metropolitan needs, its model for outreach over the past decade has become far more assertive. Faculty, staff,

and students are active in developing and implementing a wide variety of community-based outreach, applied research, and service learning projects. Rather than simply responding to requests for technical assistance or applied research from community organizations, the college's activities now more closely resemble the model of civic engagement suggested by the Kellogg Commission in its 1999 report, "Returning to Our Roots: The Engaged Institution." The college's outreach, research, and teaching activities now have been broadened, and in many cases redesigned, to include a significant emphasis on reciprocal, respectful, and productive interactions with the Omaha community.

## **CPACS as University Resource**

The culture of CPACS, developed and refined over three decades, continues to embrace outreach as a means to enhance faculty interest in students, both in class and in their everyday environments. As UNO aligns itself more closely with the community, it draws upon CPACS' longstanding outreach experience. This experience is useful to the university at large in many ways.

Administrators, faculty, staff, and students provide leadership and mentoring to other university units that are pursuing outreach initiatives. In the UNO Strategic Planning process, CPACS personnel served as chairs, steering committee members, and facilitators. The chair of the public administration department and the UNO chancellor led the university-wide effort to establish priorities and action directions for the university. In the plan itself, CPACS successes are frequently cited as examples of what can be achieved through community partnerships. In addition, CPACS faculty served on the chancellor's outreach task force to identify and promote current outreach activities and to determine appropriate future ones.

Service learning is spearheaded by social work faculty who developed several successful service learning initiatives in north and south Omaha, the result of which was the impetus for a million-dollar endowment to continue the work. Now, they mentor faculty from other units who wish to undertake similar initiatives. In addition, they present brown bag forums and workshops where service learning is discussed with all interested UNO personnel. One faculty member spent the summer working in the faculty development office on service learning projects, defining and developing the elements of a successful service learning experience. CPACS' most successful service learning projects involve extensive up-front planning between the faculty member and the placement agency. This preliminary step includes frank discussions of outcome expectations of both partners and an up-front commitment by the faculty member to serve as a facilitator, not just an educator, during the service learning project.

Teaching Circles, sponsored by the university, provide opportunities for faculty from all disciplines to share information, resources, and expertise. These inter-disciplinary groups meet throughout the semester discussing ideas on teaching, research, service learning, and other topics. One Teaching Circle comprised of faculty from the CPACS

departments of social work and public administration, plus psychology, and foreign languages set a goal of increasing community outreach efforts of other colleges and departments.

CPACS units that have externally funded community projects invite faculty and staff from other units to participate. For instance, Options, an improvisational theater group made up of students and faculty from the dramatic arts department, provide a “mini-workshop” with participants in the Neighborhood Builders training program. The Options members act out scenarios commonplace in neighborhoods, displaying expected emotional reactions (e.g. neighbor consistently repairs cars in the street in front of your house) and invite participation from the audience. Audience participants leave with a better understanding of difficult social interactions and new ways of dealing with them.

## **Impact of University Outreach on CPACS**

As the university moves ahead to fulfill its commitment to outreach and community service, CPACS stands to benefit. The following highlights four major benefits to CPACS and other colleges as the university broadens its attention to community outreach.

As a practical matter, university-wide administrative procedures have become more flexible due to the necessity of accommodating partners who require different ways of processing personnel, purchasing, travel, and reimbursement requests. In fact, two new centers within the college, the Collaborating Center for Public Health and Community Service and the Neighborhood Center of Greater Omaha (NCGO), both the result of years of work in the community, would not have been possible without increased administrative flexibility. In particular, the NCGO, a place where neighborhood associations can work, meet, and access resources, would have difficulty if it were forced to deal with a complicated administrative structure, as it is governed by a fifteen member community-based board of directors and is supported by several funding sources outside the university. Working with community organizations requires simple, quick processes with minimal paperwork. Most of these organizations are small, poorly funded, and have few administrative rules. Imposing a complicated university administrative structure on them only serves to reinforce the public perception that universities are elitist and overly bureaucratic. While changing the rules for one college may not be feasible for university administrators, feasibility increases when several colleges or an entire university is affected.

A second, major benefit to having an entire university focused on outreach is an increased capacity of trained individuals and other resources. As more faculty and staff embrace the outreach model, a greater number will learn how to *do* outreach, becoming more comfortable with the notion of being a community partner and seeing themselves in new roles within the traditional university setting. This will benefit all, including CPACS, which at times has difficulty finding individuals to fulfill community requests or commitments. However, in training persons to work in communities, Corrigan and



Udas (1996) warn against university faculty making a frontal attack as experts. Instead, they will need to share their talents and participate with others in a collaborative system and respond to needs and problems that clients have identified. CPACS personnel with field experience can play a valuable role in mentoring others so they do not alienate community clients.

Thirdly, because of increased expertise and capacity, research in the areas of community outreach, networks, and related matters is likely to increase. Inter-departmental research proposals and projects are more likely to happen if faculty and staff increase their shared knowledge. Various research methods could be applied depending on the researchers' preferences, the result of which would be a collectively rich theory and methodological bank using shared data. It will be important to highly encourage adherence to principles of community-based research. These principles recognize community as a unit of identity, build on strengths and resources within the community, facilitate collaborative partnerships in all phases of research integrating knowledge and action for the mutual benefit of all partners, and promote a co-learning and empowering process that pays attention to social inequities (Israel, Schultz, Parker, and Becker 1998).

Lastly, increasing UNO's outreach efforts should result in greater external funding. Opportunities will open up for intra-campus collaborative proposal writing and project implementation. This will broaden the types of grants pursued and the amount of expert capacity to draw upon to complete projects. The proposal process could also be more efficient if a pool of grant writers could be utilized by several entities. The current CPACS grant writer, considered by many as an expert in writing outreach proposals, presents grant-writing workshops to the nonprofit community. As anyone in academe knows, external funding provides opportunities for faculty research, collaborative work, conference travel, and other important rewards.

UNO's bold step into the world of community outreach is seen by CPACS as positive and a win-win situation for all. Individuals who have worked in outreach for some time will readily say that there is enough work for everyone, certainly more than one college can possibly accommodate. The demand for university personnel to share their expertise with community residents will likely increase in correlation with the greater complexities of life in a metropolitan environment.

During the early phases, CPACS will continue to be viewed by the rest of the university as the college that is in the community, but with time that will likely change as other disciplines find their community niches. Disciplines within CPACS, public administration, social work, criminal justice, urban studies and gerontology, will always have a major role since they fit naturally into a community outreach mode. Highlights of some of their involvement include: public administration's MPA capstone project course that requires students to gather data from community organizations for various social research projects, social work's service learning focus and a family mentoring program, criminal justice's involvement in youth violence prevention initiatives and community crime and police data-gathering, urban studies' day-long tours of local government

institutions, and gerontology's Center for Women and Successful Aging for women in the community to celebrate their lives.

Other disciplines, such as communications, environmental studies, black studies, geography, foreign language, business, psychology, and fine arts have a niche in community outreach. Neighborhood projects have a variety of needs that are required to make their planning and implementation complete and could easily draw on faculty, staff, and students from these areas for their expertise. In most cases, the university best serves if it *plugs in* where needed and facilitates, rather than directs, the project. Under this scenario, disciplines could stand ready to assist when the project has specific needs for them. To maximize effectiveness, the university-based person with most responsibility to the project needs to have a thorough knowledge of departments and individuals that could serve the unique needs of the community project. For those who are interested in working in community outreach but have little or no experience, the best advice is to find experienced persons and shadow them as they do their work. Perhaps this is a natural role for CPACS, to serve as a mentoring source for inexperienced persons. This could be a rich experience for both.

UNO is to be commended for joining other metropolitan universities in an enhanced outreach effort. Like them, UNO seeks ways to better prepare people for active participation in a diverse democracy, to develop knowledge for the improvement of the community, and to think about and act upon the public dimensions of educational work (Checkoway 2001). A broad view of the U.S. society shows both a need for citizens who are competent to interact in the society and that universities are key to fostering these competencies (Damon 1998; Hackney 1986; Harkavy and Benson 1998). This goal cannot be met if universities are distant and inaccessible, a status CPACS and UNO are striving to avoid.

## **Community Partnerships**

The college's historical roots in outreach are the foundation for some of UNO's most successful and productive community partnerships today. Separately, and collectively, the units of CPACS collaborate extensively with human service agencies, government, businesses, schools, and broad-based collaborative organizations in the Omaha metropolitan area. Their involvement is primarily in the areas of applied research, outreach, and student service learning programs. CPACS enjoys active partnerships with the United Way of the Midlands, the City of Omaha, Douglas County, the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Omaha Police Department, the Omaha Home for Boys, the Chicano Awareness Center, the Omaha Community Foundation, and the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce.

These collaborations, built upon individual relationships and the good reputation of the school, between CPACS personnel and governmental and community organizations expedited additional partnerships in large, multi-agency initiatives that involved even more students, faculty, and staff. The college's long-term commitment to stronger university-community integration and a unified approach led to the development of comprehensive, community-driven projects such as:

- PACT (Pulling America’s Communities Together), a state-wide strategic planning process to address youth violence;
- Safe Futures, a collaborative youth violence prevention initiative directing its efforts to the metropolitan Omaha;
- Community Fellows Program, a student internship program for neighborhood-serving organizations. This program currently focuses on neighborhood associations located in the Omaha Enterprise Community. A survey of over 100 vacant lots was recently completed by a public administration student;
- Safety Net, a multi-agency school violence prevention program;
- Project Impact, a targeted, multi-jurisdictional gun violence prevention and interdiction initiative. Its main three areas of operation are: offender notifications, cease fires, and Operation Night Light;
- UNO’s Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC), a HUD-supported initiative that addresses community development and organizing, juvenile violence and substance abuse prevention, and community capacity building. This program is a demonstration to “determine the feasibility of facilitating partnerships between institutions of higher education and communities to solve urban problems through research, outreach, and exchange of information” (Housing and Community Development Act 1992);
- Family Mentoring Project, a holistic, research-based mentoring program for at-risk Latino youth and their families. This program was recently expanded through a new partnership with NAF Multicultural Development Corporation in the heart of Omaha’s Latino population; and
- Neighborhood Builders, a leadership training program for residents of Omaha’s economically distressed neighborhoods. An advisory committee of neighborhood and agency representatives selects training topics and presenters for its annual month-long program.

## **Things We Know**

The considerable growth of UNO’s community-based outreach activities in the last decade provides an opportunity to impart some degree of wisdom about what was learned along its journey. Certainly not all of UNO’s experiences in this regard have been positive, but they have far outweighed the negative or indifferent. Lessons learned include these ingredients for successful collaboration: a history of cooperation, good personal relationships including high levels of trust, simple organizational structure, informality and flexibility, clear and frequent communication, shared vision, balancing university/partner interests, visibility of the university, linking and integrating with university resources, and a commitment to sustaining programs.

## **History of Cooperation**

A history of effective partnerships is critical for long-term university/community engagement. Community agencies indicate that they seek partnerships with CPACS because of the reputation the college has developed through successful outreach and applied research collaborations. These activities, in turn, have brought new partners to

the table, including neighborhood associations, city government, public housing agencies, and private business.

Funding sources are much more likely to support programs that can demonstrate a record of funding, successful completion of collaborative projects, and effective management of funds. Clearly, this was the case for UNO. Without a reputation of successfully working with community organizations and government agencies, long term funding would have been unlikely. To illustrate, the successful implementation of the PACT project enhanced the proposal for funding from Department of Education for the Omaha Family Support Program. It allowed the university to continue efforts and build on previous successes. Likewise, the local Weed and Seed Strategy board of directors, by funding Neighborhood Builders for four years, had confidence that UNO faculty and staff could help build and manage an effective program. When federal funds dwindled for Neighborhood Builders, the local United Way offered to begin funding it as long as the university continued as the administrator and a community advisory committee sustained its leadership and direction. Funding for the COPC was based at least partly on the fact that UNO had already completed a number of collaborative projects and could enhance those projects and initiate new ones.

## **Personal Relationships**

Good personal relationships are a principal component of successful collaborative projects. They are important in two ways. First, the project proceeds more smoothly if the participants get along well. Secondly, the residents of distressed communities who are being served by the collaborative will gain faster and more complete access to resources if the key agency providers can work together. Absent that collaboration, the level and type of resources required for change are often not available. Absent coordination, existing resources are often ineffectively or inappropriately applied.

It is worth mentioning here that personal relationships formed prior to collaboration may be the very thing that brings collaborators together in the first place and also contributes positively to long-term collaboration. Key players in the PACT project had working relationships and shared vision prior to the start of the project. This served to shorten the early stages of organization since each knew what to expect from the others.

A vital but poorly understood component of successful coordination and collaboration is trust among leaders and staffs. Trust has been defined as a relational state between individuals and/or institutions. In essence, if individuals are trusted, then the institutions with which the individuals are affiliated are trusted also. We often judge organizations by the people we know in those organizations. Fostering trust involves several *musts*: predictable behavior so others know what to expect, agreement on desired outcomes, faith in the good will of partners, ability to critique the situation without inciting distrust, and open dialogue (Sockett 1998). Trust and relationships played a key role in the evolution of community outreach at UNO. The most solid and long lasting relationships are based on having vital elements in place: a mutual vision of community

needs, a history of working well together, and a general belief that individuals can be trusted to maintain integrity and not breach confidences.

## **Simple Organizational Structure**

A flat, simplified organizational structure generally works best for collaborative activities. It streamlines implementation and fosters better relations if partners have equal or near equal rank in decision-making. However, methods and frequency of communication, task delegation, and decision-making avenues need to be agreed upon by all parties. Otherwise, the lack of structure will be a barrier instead of a benefit.

The PACT process is a good example of how a horizontal structure can work. Partners decided early in the process how decisions would be made and who needed to be involved in which decisions. They decided that all critical process design factors required strong consensus among all since the design was the foundational framework for subsequent activities. Logistics and other working decisions could be left to the discretion of one or two persons.

Another advantage of a flat structure is that the weighty decisions will have the tone of the group's thinking rather than that of a single person at the top. A group decision is likely to be similar to that of the community partnership rather than that of an individual.

## **Informal Process**

Collaborative projects can get bogged down by a complicated infrastructure, requiring very formal processes and procedures. Pared down, informal process design, on the other hand, enables the working team to maintain flexibility and be ready for quick changes. The PACT team determined its process early during statewide planning meetings. Debriefing these meetings helped the group in planning the overall PACT process, a process virtually invented along the way. Team members need to be familiar with the sequence and flow of the process to minimize misunderstandings and frustration.

Of key importance is the ability of the team to maintain efficiency. It is the nature of collaborative projects to be complicated and time consuming, making it ever more critical to pare down the red tape. Operational flexibility allows the team to analyze the current environment within the realm of recent project experience and be able to make rapid changes if necessary. Naturally, not all projects can operate informally, but even within restricted environments flexibility should be retained if possible.

## **Communicate, Communicate, Communicate**

In a community partnering process, there simply cannot be too much communication among internal and external project partners. This means not only meeting together often, but making sure all participating partners are informed so they feel included, thus fostering trust. With so many means of communications available to us, there is little excuse for not letting everyone know what is happening. Whether by face-to-face

meetings, email, newsletters, telephone conversations, regular timely minutes of meetings and so on, communication must be continuous to sustain the collaborative.

Communication was a high priority for the Omaha Family Support Program (OFSP). The project manager met monthly with provider agencies and other UNO faculty and staff to share the vision of the project, current progress toward completion of tasks, and commonalities across tasks and among agencies. Minutes and agendas were distributed prior to meetings. Any other news was communicated by phone or e-mail. Although most meetings were held on the university campus, some were held in the community partners' offices. This gave the partners a chance to showcase their operations and relay their successes as well as their needs. The result of building a team among partners, partially attributed to good communication, has been an on-going effort to implement programs and activities among the original partners even though funding for the initial effort has ended.

## **Shared Vision**

All members of a partnership must share a similar vision. Without this, the ordinary stresses of collaborative work (i.e., distrustfulness, personal and political agendas, lack of common goals, and resource constraints) can torpedo a project and relationships. It is important that the vision be kept in front of the group even if it means repeating the reasons they are working on the project in the first place. Although the programs described here changed directions several times, they remained aligned with the original vision.

## **Balancing University/Partner Interests**

While a shared vision is critical, the partners of any collaboration often come to the table with very different interests. Interests of the university may include a need to meet current program needs; satisfying faculty need for tenure and promotion rewards based on research, not community service; and conforming to university procedures for hiring, procurement, etc. Community organizations may come to the table with interests such as being grant-driven, holding a certain mistrust of research and planning, recognizing that the university has a negative history in working in their neighborhood, and having to compete with other organizations for scarce resources.

CPACS' most effective partnerships have been those in which the myriad interests of its partners have been clarified in the initial planning process, and honored in the implementation phase. The Family Mentoring Program provides a good illustration of this. The Family Mentoring Program provides extensive mentoring services for low-income youth and links their families to services, some provided by project partners. University faculty designed the program, hired a coordinator, and conducted an evaluation. While each of the partners in the program shared the goal of providing a holistic, family-based approach to mentoring Latino youth, all came with different interests, such as expanded service provision, access to university resources, and opportunities for academic research. In the project design phase all partners shared and validated their interests. A



cautionary note: all partners must step forward with complete honesty in discussing their self-interests, otherwise distrust will immediately take over and damage the project.

## **University Visibility**

When the university is the center of a community partnership, the community needs to be aware of it. It is important to hold meetings on campus, invite university officials to pertinent meetings of the partnership, and to speak publicly about the project and the university's role in it. This is not simply to brag about the university, but to solidify the public's view of the university as an institution with expertise, interest, and enthusiasm in working with the community. Faculty and staff should be invited to facilitate meetings, report data findings, provide training, and other activities that bring them and the university closer to the community. Whenever possible, student resources such as internships, practica, and service learning projects should be integrated into outreach activities to broaden involvement, impact, and visibility.

One of the dividends of being a good friend to the community is that the community holds the university in high esteem, often matching loyalty with endowments. Other rewards include prestige, respect, pride, and trust.

## **Linking and Integrating University Resources**

One of the key issues facing CPACS and UNO as it began to assess its increased role in community outreach was how to capitalize on its strengths as an institution and limit its activities to those consistent with its mission or within its abilities. This assessment led to a clarification of what roles the university is best suited to play.

First, the key was to engage students in various aspects of the outreach efforts. As a result, graduate assistantships were seen as a primary area for funding. In this way students could help pay for their education and gain valuable experience in public and nonprofit agencies. The agencies themselves gain staffing support they otherwise could not afford. Staffing for the outreach efforts drew heavily from recent graduates or current students in the Masters of Public Administration and the Masters of Urban Studies programs, and from doctoral programs in public administration and criminal justice. Over 50 students have been involved in outreach activities since CPACS expanded its efforts in this area. Their involvement with a host of community partners has been as community consultants, program assistants and coordinators, technical assistants, trainers, and researchers. In addition, over 100 students have been engaged in service learning projects such as program evaluation, survey research, and tutoring. This involvement provides a strong linkage among the service agencies, students, and the university. Second, CPACS approached its involvement in a way that integrated faculty and staff in projects. They acted as project directors, project managers, facilitators, experts in project design and strategic planning, to name a few. When possible, these personnel were paid directly for their efforts. At other times, their salaries were part of the project match. This type of integration takes a dean or other official who knows the kind of expertise available in the college, as well as knowing who has time and interest in becoming involved in the project. Not every faculty or staff member has an interest or the capability to work in community partnerships.

Many CPACS faculty participate in applied research projects related to the college's outreach efforts. While these projects often have been the basis for academic journal articles, faculty have made careful efforts to ensure that knowledge gained through the projects benefits the community. For example, a faculty member responsible for the evaluation of TEAM Nebraska, a drug prevention education effort in the schools, also assisted in the program's redesign based on the outcomes of the evaluation.

The location of initiatives within the academic units and departments seem to be more successful than if they were all delegated to a separate institute or center. Generally, department personnel are closer to their faculty and staff than a center would be, coordination is smoother, and there is a higher degree of understanding and enthusiasm within a department if the entire project is contained within. However, because a goal is to increase intra-college and interdisciplinary collaboration on university projects, some kind of coordinating mechanism is needed.

Finally, it was the view of CPACS that facilitation, management, and research were much more appropriate activities for the university than were direct program delivery efforts. For this reason, where program delivery was needed, efforts were made to identify and collaborate with existing provider agencies that had both adequate capacity and appropriate orientation for the task at hand.

UNO is viewed by many in the community as a willing and able partner in community efforts. This partnership is one where the university can truly contribute to the community in ways other than providing education, its primary mission. Community involvement enables the university to enrich its students and faculty by providing expertise and service on the one hand while receiving knowledge and experience from the community on the other.

## **Up-front Commitment to Sustaining Programs**

All of the initiatives described in this article, and many other CPACS activities, were initially supported by federal grant funds. Most of these activities continue today, sustained through new sources of internal and/or external funding. Corrigan (1997) argues that communities often feel that universities are not willing to have long-term commitment to collaborative projects, largely because of their history of working with communities only as long as outside funding was available. In addition, faculty are often seen as having a separate culture with a desire to change other entities, while the university remains the same (Corrigan 1997). In contrast, the central focus of all these activities was, and continues to be, a focus on their long-term sustainability. This commitment to continue participation in community initiatives, despite changes in funding and/or personnel, has been critical in CPACS community engagement activities. It requires that advance planning and specific sustainability strategies be incorporated into the initial design of each partnership. For example, representatives from the Omaha Community Foundation and the United Way of the Midlands are often invited to participate in CPACS' collaborative activities, and have been pivotal in securing

long-term local funding for many projects. Evaluation mechanisms incorporated into many of these collaborations have been critical in convincing funders of the impact and value of these programs and then gaining ongoing funding support.

## **The Future of Outreach at UNO**

Projects described in this article comprise a progressive effort at community outreach. The past six years have been valuable opportunities for university faculty and staff (and administrators) to see just what community outreach is, what it takes to do it well, and where the university fits in the partnership. With a new emphasis on service learning in higher education, universities with experience in their communities should have a distinct advantage in developing programs. In a climate where taxpaying citizens are asking for greater spending accountability, universities need to strengthen their relationships with their citizens as they are dependent on the citizenry for students, tax support in the case of public institutions, and endowments. CPACS finds that its community-based outreach projects have raised local awareness about its efforts, subsequently increasing support from local leaders and decision makers for its academic programs. Because of the shared vision of community service and track record of good community partnerships within units of the college, CPACS will be well positioned for future community relationships as proposed in UNO's strategic plan.

### **References**

Checkoway, B., "Renewing the Civic Mission of the American Research University," *The Journal of Higher Education* 72 (2, 2001):125-147.

Corrigan, D. and Udas, K., "Creating Collaborative, Child-and Family-Centered Education, Health and Human Service Systems," in J. Sikula, ed., *Handbook of Research on Teach Education* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York: McMillan, 1997): 893-921.

Damon, W., "The Path to a Civil Society Goes Through the University," *Chronicle of Higher Education* (16 October 1998): B4f.

Hackney, S., "The University and its Community: Past and Present," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 488 (1986):135-147.

Harkavy, I. and Benson, L., "De-Platonizing and Democratizing Education as a Basis of Service Learning" in R. Rhoads and J. Howard, eds, *Academic Service Learning: A Pedagogy of Action and Reflection* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

Housing and Community Development Act, 42 U.S.C. § 851 (Sept. 1994).

Israel, B., Schultz, A.J., Parker, E.A., and A. B. Becker, "Review of Community-Based Research: Assessing Partnership Approaches to Improve Public Health," *Annual Review of Public Health* 19 (1998):173-202.

Sockett, H., "Levels of Partnership," *Metropolitan University* (Spring 1998): 75-82.

University of Nebraska, "University of Nebraska Regents Commission on the Urban University of the '70s" (UNB: 1971).

### **Author Information**

Alice Schumaker, Ph.D. is Assistant Professor in Public Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She has an extensive background in rural community and economic development strategic planning, neighborhood strengthening, local government training; and facilitation of planning initiatives, including UNO's.

Alice Schumaker, Ph.D.  
Department of Public Administration  
Annex 27  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
60<sup>th</sup> and Dodge Sts.  
Omaha, NE 68182  
E-Mail: [aschumak@mail.unomaha.edu](mailto:aschumak@mail.unomaha.edu)  
Telephone: 402-554-2589  
Fax: 402-554-2682

Sara Woods, MPA, is Assistant Dean of the UNO College of Public Affairs and Community Service. Having written many successfully funded grants, she serves as the grant writer for the college; manages several grants; and acts in an outreach capacity with neighborhoods, local government, and federal grant initiatives in the Omaha area.

Sara Woods  
College of Public Affairs and Community Service  
Annex 26  
University of Nebraska at Omaha  
60<sup>th</sup> and Dodge Sts.  
Omaha, NE 68182  
E-Mail: [swoods@mail.unomaha.edu](mailto:swoods@mail.unomaha.edu)  
Telephone: 402-554-3914  
Fax: 402-554-4871