

University Students as Community Partners



A report from the
University of Minnesota Extension Service
and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs
September 1998

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Center for Urban and Regional Affairs
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A message from the Dean and Director of Extension

I am delighted to recommend this report on the value of working with students in community projects. The report showcases some of the unique ways in which students have been used in community outreach work. Its goal is to help Extension faculty think about new ways to incorporate students into outreach projects.

The profiles that follow highlight how students can become partners in community work. Students have been links and points of exchange between community and University resources, spreading those resources more widely throughout the state.

Extension-community partnerships are mutually beneficial. Students gain valuable experience in real-life settings. Communities receive access to a wealth of University research and academic resources. Student workers may also enable community organizations to complete projects they otherwise wouldn't have the personnel or resources to undertake.

The profiles in this report provide a few examples of the success of such partnerships. In one project, a landscape architecture student built a model of a planned EagleWatch Interpretive Center that helped generate significant legislative funding. In another, a student did background

research and surveyed local residents about their interest in agri-tourism as a regional economic development strategy. The student then organized an agri-tourism workshop that was very well received by the community.

These are just two examples of how University of Minnesota students have made positive impacts in Minnesota communities, helping them to realize projects, improve the quality of life, and enhance the economy and environment.

I am excited about the potential for using this great untapped resource in Extension educational programs. Student-community partnerships will enable us to expand the University's reach to all corners of the state. If you would like more information about the projects, or about potential student involvement, please refer to the directory at the back of this report. Any of the people listed would be happy to talk with you.



*Katherine Fennelly,
Dean and Director,
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University Students as Community Partners

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Value of University students as community partners

To consider University students as partners in community-based projects throughout Minnesota opens up a wealth of opportunities for all parties involved.

For communities

- Enthusiastic and energetic students bring specialized assistance.
- Projects can be accomplished at little or no cost.
- Projects can introduce new information and options.

For students and faculty advisers

- Projects offer the opportunity to apply knowledge in respectful ways.
- Students receive valuable work experience that frequently helps in finding future employment.
- Faculty fulfill their land-grant service obligation.

For Extension educators

- Student-assisted projects represent another response to community requests for assistance.
- Projects are an effective and time efficient way of responding to diverse community requests.
- Students can be a resource to communities that could not otherwise afford assistance
- Projects can begin an on-going and mutually beneficial relationship between the University and the community.

Project history

The project grew from a workshop at the University of Minnesota Extension Service's 1997 annual conference in which Collegiate Program Leaders discussed responding to community needs for information by placing University students in short-term community-based projects. From experience, many Collegiate Program Leaders were enthusiastic about the value of these projects for everyone concerned—communities, students, faculty advisers, and Extension educators. The program leaders requested a modest Collaborative Program Grant to develop a brief publication that would introduce Extension educators to the projects. An adhoc steering committee, consisting of Extension educators and Collegiate Program Leaders, was assembled.

Introduction to projects

The following projects represent a few of the hundreds completed each year. They illustrate the range of skills and knowledge students can offer, as well as some of the University programs dedicated to placing students with community groups. They also illustrate the key role Extension educators can play in connecting these links between community needs and University resources.

White Earth Indian Reservation Aki Planning Circle

Project description

The Aki Planning Circle is composed of people who live and work on the White Earth Indian Reservation, Mahnomen County Extension educators, coordinator of Pathways to Educational Partnership, Project Grow directors, master gardeners, and a variety of University of Minnesota representatives who are interested in developing and supporting educational partnerships. The planning circle allows all interested parties access and is building bridges in a community of diverse interests.

When the Aki group began meeting in 1996 they identified two main issues to be addressed: a lack of inter-generational bonding, and communication barriers between reservation communities and organizations.

Some of the projects that have emerged from the planning circle's efforts are:

- Integrating Grow Labs into

the curriculum in three local elementary schools

- Developing a partnership with the Nutritional Education Assistance Program
- Increasing the number of community gardens on the reservation from two to seven
- Training seventeen master gardeners at the University's Landscape Arboretum as part of the effort to make these projects self sustaining
- Starting programs to preserve and pass on traditional cultural practices
- Starting programs to integrate technology and traditional culture

Beginning in the summer of 1997,

the Aki group hired a student by combining their own funds with Nutritional Education Assistance and Extension Service funds. White Earth resident Kimi Snetsinger, an undergraduate horticulture student from the University of Minnesota-Crookston, was hired. Surpassing

Timeline:

Summer 1997 and 1998

Extension contacts:

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and Peg Braaten, 1-800-450-2226,
218-935-2226, or
mbraaten@extension.umn.edu

Affiliated University program:

4H Summer Program Assistants
Larry Tande, 612-625-3758,
507-280-2863, or
ltande@extension.umn.edu

U-ACT

Bill Wilson, 612-624-2842
or wilso066@tc.umn.edu

Location:

White Earth Reservation in Mahnomen,
Becker, and Clearwater counties

all expectations, Snetsinger started a community garden, taught nutrition and gardening classes to children, and became part of the planning circle. Snetsinger returned in 1998, along with two other students, as a 4-H Summer Program Assistant.

Extension educator's role

The Extension educators involved in this project have played a critical support role in providing access to information and University resources. Part of Mahnomen County Extension Educator Peg Braaten's role is to supervise students. She has found it useful to be clear in the beginning about the project's expectations and expectations for students, then allow students to follow up with questions that emerge along the way.

4-H Summer Program Assistants

The 4-H Summer Program Assistants project connects undergraduate students with Extension educators throughout the state. Students from Minnesota colleges and universities who are at least sophomores work with Extension educators, helping with youth development programs, event management, camps, and the state and county fairs. The 4-H program pays students, so Extension educators get help with projects and tasks for which they otherwise would not have the time or money.

A second White Earth project

Another organization on the reservation, the White Earth Land Recovery Project, was able to hire a student through U-ACT, a program that strengthens links between the University and Minnesota community organizations of color. The land recovery project is a nonprofit organization formed to recover the reservation's original land base and to restore traditional land stewardship practices.

Graduate student Laura McLeod researched different options for energy production, so the reservation wouldn't need to purchase energy from outside sources. She looked at the feasibility of producing wind energy and at political implications of such a project. She researched the history and status of federal and state energy production deregulation and identified potential organizational structures for producing wind energy on the reservation. She also used existing wind energy information, compiled by land recovery project staff, and consulted with representatives of the Minnesota Department of Public Service, Wild Rice Electric Cooperative, and other wind energy experts. The resulting report represents a valuable policy document and a connection to the University's technical resources for a community that otherwise would have limited access to experts.

Agri-tourism

Project description

Citizens in Wabasha, Goodhue, Olmsted, and Dodge counties wanted to develop tourism as an economic development strategy. Scattered scenic attractions in the region didn't bring significant numbers of tourists or keep them in the area. Citizens looked into using their livelihood, farming, to generate interest in tourism. The idea of agri-tourism emerged.

Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs student Marc Weigle began background research on how other communities have promoted agri-tourism. He developed a network of area people interested in exploring possibilities. He received names from Extension educators, contacted people over the phone, and held information sessions at local restaurants. The network of interested farmers expanded as they learned more about the project and spread the word.

In February 1997, Weigle organized a workshop for interested farmers. About 100 people attended. Speakers Gene Hugoson, Minnesota Department of Agriculture commissioner, and Steve Markuson, Minnesota Office of Tourism director, underscored the importance of the agri-tourism initiative. Workshop exhibitors shared their experiences, which ranged from giving farm tours to selling products such as

cheese, crafts, and meats. Participants had an opportunity to discuss the endeavor's reality.

Extension educator's role

Extension Educator Toni Smith was part of the initial team that developed the project's concept. Because the idea involved four counties in the south-eastern part of the state, Smith was instrumental in bringing together community members and connecting them to University faculty who could offer expertise in agronomy and tourism.

When the group decided to research other agri-tourism initiatives and how receptive local communities would be to the idea, Smith connected the group with the University's Rural Development Council to obtain funding for a student research assistant.

"My work with the student proved

Timeline:

November 1996 to April 1997

Extension contact:

Toni Smith, 612-565-2662 or
tsmith@extension.umn.edu

Affiliated University program:

Rural Development Council
Carla Carlson, 612-624-5260 or
ccarlson@hhh.umn.edu

Location:

Wabasha, Goodhue, Olmsted, and
Dodge counties



Marc Weigle

very rewarding once the right student was found," Smith said.

Weigle successfully followed up on information Smith and other community members provided and carried the project well beyond what was initially envisioned.

"It's best to find a balance between giving the student adequate direction and the flexibility to complete the project," according to Smith.

Said Weigle: "I learned a lot about small town life, and was surprised by how much I liked it. I had always had more international ambitions, life-style wise this experience may have altered my plans."

About the Rural Development Council

The Rural Development Council was established to provide University of Minnesota leadership in community and rural development and to ensure that the University service Minnesota citizens effectively and in measurable ways. Chaired by G. Edward Schuh of the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, the Council serves as a catalyst. It taps a range of University strengths that can benefit rural communities. It also is a conduit, reaching into the state to provide research, education, and outreach support to citizens.

The Council works in areas of rural issues and policy research, curriculum development, and institutional partnerships. The Council's ten initial student-community pilot projects have expanded into a partnership among the University, the Initiative Fund of Southeastern Minnesota and South Central Minnesota, and communities in a twenty-county area in Southeastern Minnesota. The Council hopes that the partnership initiative will expand so that student expertise and technical assistance can become an integral part of rural community projects throughout the state.

Sibley County Youth Leadership Academy

Project description

The Sibley County Youth Leadership Academy is a school, business, and county partnership. It came about in response to a lack of skilled workers in the area that led to concerns about business retention. After interviewing over eighty community business leaders, the partnership was established to teach leadership and job skills to high school students in four communities. The program aims to remedy two problems that local businesses face: lack of worker readiness and movement of skilled workers to the Twin Cities.

Youth leadership skills are developed through a variety of activities including mentoring, job shadowing, workplace communication skills development, community service projects, and community learning projects in the students' areas of interest.

Audrey Moore, a Humphrey Institute student, applied evaluation and research skills that were very useful to the project. She developed a pre-evaluation form for the students to establish a skills benchmark. She developed forms to help recruit local

businesses for mentoring, job shadowing, and apprenticeship opportunities, and helped create a mentor guide for participating businesses.

Community member Wanda Nielson and Extension Educator Sue Engelmann said Moore brought a commitment to the work and a passion for the project that far surpassed their expectations. Moore spent as much time as possible in the community—attending meetings and Youth Leadership Academy sessions—and was an integral part of the project team.

Extension educator's role

Sue Engelmann worked with the Youth Leadership Academy when the idea was developed and initial needs analysis surveys were conducted in 1988. She played a leadership role in getting the project off the ground and in working to improve it. Engelmann said the student contributed to the

project's success by offering a neutral perspective. Moore did research that freed time for Engelmann to work on other aspects of the project.

Timeline:

Fall 1996 through Winter 1997

Extension contact:

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or kasche@extension.umn.edu

Affiliated University Program:

Rural Development Council
Carla Carlson, 612-624-5260 or
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Location:

Sibley County

University of Minnesota Extension Service- Hennepin County Welfare Reform Task Force

Project description

The University of Minnesota Extension Service formed the Hennepin County Welfare Reform Task Force in response to the McKnight Foundation's \$20 million commitment to community collaborations that address the challenges posed by welfare reform legislation. The Extension task force sent representatives to four of the seven community collaboratives to educate them about services Extension could provide and to participate in program and grant proposal development. One representative was a public health student who had come to Extension through the Finding the Missing Link Program to complete her practicum requirement. Finding the Missing Link is an internship program designed to help graduate students from the School of Public Health and the School of Nursing gain practical understanding of their field while contributing to the work of Extension educators.

Public health student Kathleen Lenk brought special expertise on welfare reform. She had recently



Kathleen Lenk

completed a course on the subject and was familiar with subtle changes in the legislation. As part of a community subcommittee, Lenk researched, developed, and refined a plan for a family mentoring program. Lenk's academic skills were especially useful in developing the program's evaluation component. Lenk found that Episcopal Community Services (ECS) already was running a family mentoring program. ECS became part of the community collaborative and has continued to explore Extension partnerships.

Extension educator's role

Extension Educator Barb Bethel saw the experience as a mutually beneficial learning opportunity. Lenk brought a public health perspective and knowledge of welfare reform. The program stipend, subsidizing 160 work hours, allowed Lenk to focus on one project, which others working with the task force couldn't.

Timeline:

1997

Extension contact:

Jeanne Freiberg for a list of extension educators familiar with the Finding the Missing Link program

Affiliated University program:

Finding the Missing Link
Jeanne Freiburg, 612-625-7625 or
freib001@tc.umn.edu

Project location:

Hennepin County, Minneapolis

Hale Page Diamond Lake Wetland Study

Project description

The Hale Page Diamond Lake Neighborhood Association in South Minneapolis wanted a background study of the Diamond Lake Wetland—its current state and ideas for wetland management strategies. They wanted to use the report as an important part of educating the community about the wetland, to improve and ensure its future health.

Through the Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization program, the neighborhood association hired Charity Miller, a University of Minnesota undergraduate in natural resources and environmental studies, to do the research and write a report for them. Miller began with contacts and information provided for her by involved community members. Their personal histories and stories about the wetland became an important part of the report, as well as the information they shared from their own



Charity Miller

research on the area. Miller then found other information from agencies such as the Minnesota Historical Society, the Minneapolis Parks and Recreation

Board, and the Department of Natural Resources. She gained a greater knowledge of how the agencies deal with conservation issues and an understanding of how many agencies are connected and the collaborations necessary to accomplish complex tasks.

The Diamond Lake Wetland report and the community research assistant's work have served the neighborhood association and community in many ways. The report brought the community to the same level of understanding about the wetland. Miller's presentation made the information clear and easy to understand for lay people of the community. The community received recommendations on how to maintain and improve the area. And the work helped catalyze the neighborhood organization's efforts to protect the area.

Timeline:

June through August 1997

Affiliated University program:

*Neighborhood Planning for
Community Revitalization*
Kris Nelson, 612-625-1020 or
nelso193@tc.umn.edu

Project location:

Minneapolis

Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization Program

Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR) is a consortium of Twin Cities area colleges

and universities, the Minneapolis Neighborhood Revitalization Program, and Minneapolis community representatives. The consortium's goal is to provide research assistance to neighborhood associations through graduate and undergraduate student research assistants and faculty directed research for policy questions. The consortium assists communities with locally defined projects, and students and faculty have opportunities to do community research.

Another NPCR project

In the Powderhorn Park neighborhood, Humphrey Institute graduate student Joel Spoonheim was hired to write a report that would evaluate and rate commercial areas using industry data, standard consumption information, and neighborhood preferences. The report responded to findings of a 1996 Minneapolis Community Development Agency report indicating Powderhorn Park did not have lively commercial centers.

Spoonheim lived in the Powderhorn Park neighborhood and served on the association's economic development committee.

He worked with the association's executive director to define the scope of the project and decided what questions they wanted answered. Spoonheim met with local business representatives to review his findings, which showed the

community as economically thriving. The neighborhood association has used the report to update important community data.

Spoonheim also met with the directors of the Minneapolis Community Development Agency and the Minneapolis Planning Department to discuss the issue of criteria presented in the agency's initial report.

Spoonheim's work provided needed information the community would not have otherwise had the time or exper-

tise to gather and updated a database on businesses that has been used extensively.

Spoonheim also benefited from the project. He learned a lot about how the city of Minneapolis works and met with key people in his field of com-



**Joel
Spoonheim**

munity and economic development, and urban planning. He has had two job offers that can be attributed to his experience and contacts. He also had the chance to write a report for a client instead of for a class.

"That helps students switch skills from the academic realm to the public realm," Spoonheim said.

EagleWatch Interpretive Center

Project description

The EagleWatch Interpretive Center started in 1991 with a group of volunteers trained by the University of Minnesota's Raptor Center and staffing the Wabasha Eagle Observation Deck and Outdoor Information Center. The volunteers reported on the eagles' activities and educated the public about the birds. The year-round open water of the Mississippi River near Wabasha makes it an ideal eagle haven. Interpretive center supporters believe that educating the public and speaking out on the eagles' behalf is the best way to ensure the birds' survival. They envision EagleWatch Interpretive Center as a national and international advocacy and education center.

With help from the University of Minnesota Extension Service, the project began to move forward beginning in 1995. The city of Wabasha donated land for the EagleWatch Center. The center was able to hire University students who created community links that have been instrumental to the project. College of



Architecture and Landscape Architecture students studied land use issues, built a model of the center, and created designs for the building and surrounding land. A Carlson School of Management student conducted marketing research for the project. All of these efforts, especially the model, have been instrumental in helping to raise funds for the project's construction.

Extension Community Resource specialist's role

Toni Smith, Wabasha County's Extension community resource specialist, sees her position "as a good fit with this community." It has provided access to University students and helped create connections between the

community and University faculty and departments. The University's Tourism Center analyzed area tourism and how the EagleWatch Center would impact it. Extension was also

Timeline:
1995-1997

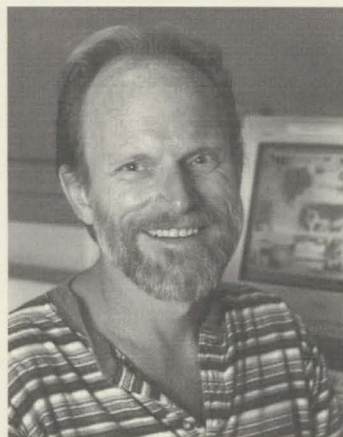
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Rural Development Council
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ccarlson@hhh.umn.edu

Project location:
Wabasha County

the community's access point for students to work on the project. The successes the community experienced kept them coming back with more student projects. The University of Minnesota Extension Service helped this project

access a variety of student expertise in areas ranging from research and feasibility studies to marketing to design. One of the first students helped to establish links through-



Stephen Roos

out the community and across organizations to facilitate communication and cooperation. Landscape architecture student Stephen Roos built a model of the EagleWatch Interpretive Center that helped secure \$750,000 from the Minnesota Legislature in 1996. He also conducted a land-use study, which was used when the county completed a comprehensive land-use plan. A county administrator and consultant team working with Roos were quick to point out how much money his work saved the county.

Marshall's Master Park Plan

The City of Marshall in Lyon County also used the design skills of College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture students. Marshall had a public park system that had grown randomly with the growth of the city. Now city officials were looking to connect green spaces, create a cohesive system, and make parks more accessible.

Through a Rural Development Council grant, College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture Collegiate Program Leaders brought two of their graduate students—Katherine McFadden and Roxana Esparza—into the project. By looking at institutional and public green spaces, traffic circulation patterns, and properties that could be developed, the students created design sketches and recommendations for the project.

The students and the Collegiate Program Leaders presented sketches and recommendations at a town meeting. Their recommendations are being implemented in incremental phases.

Elements of a successful project

As the profiles show, students can make valuable contributions to many different kinds of projects. While it is difficult to generalize, the following list combines what has been learned from several programs that help place students in community-based projects.

1 The community must identify a clear need, issue, or problem that the project will address. Multiple opportunities to shape and clarify the project's goals and requirements must occur.

2 Student interests and abilities and project requirements must be matched carefully by a thorough interviewing process. Community members must have final say in selecting a student with whom they will feel comfortable working.

A different approach to student assistants in the community

In addition to the students profiled in this report, many University of Minnesota students in professional programs have practicum requirements. Students from programs such as law, medicine, social work, and dentistry work along side professionals in internships. If your community could benefit from the work of such students, contact:

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Hubert H. Humphrey
Institute of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota
301-19th Ave. S., Room 154
Minneapolis, MN 55455**

**612-624-5260
ccarlson@hhh.umn.edu.**

3 The community supervisor, Extension supervisors, student, and other interested parties must meet and develop a work plan that clearly defines responsibilities of all project participants.

4 Students must be able and encouraged to pursue the project independently, to see how the project fits into the broader community's work, and to use available community and University resources. Periodic check-ins and adjustments to the work plan need to be made if necessary.

5 Opportunities for evaluation and closure at the end of the project also are important.

Directory

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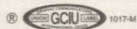
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**University Students
as Community Partners**

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