



## **Faculty Engagement: A Personal Journey and Universal Mandate**

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**W**e are, by instinct, social beings regardless of our academic discipline. My history starts in 1939, in Pittsburgh, the Steel City, where Richard King Mellon reigned as the unofficial chief of economic and social planning. In 1965, I returned to the University of Pittsburgh to earn a Ph.D. in sociology after a fifteen-year hiatus. I learned some of the basics of U.S. political change. Mellon and his staff managed to remake Pittsburgh: implement health-care planning, stop railroads from polluting the city, and split up African-American neighborhoods to reduce ethnic political power. I saw how a large union, United Mine Workers (UMW), was able to achieve some progress with regard to health-care reforms, with the establishment of an excellent network of clinics and hospitals in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia. These UMW clinics were

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health-maintenance oriented under partial consumer control. A guarded faith in regional planning emerged in my psyche. Collective action, whether it be the elites (Mellon) or the organized workers (UMW), does get things done. I also learned how the elites can essentially stamp out the gains workers make, as the power elite did in

the 1970s when it demanded that the UMW dismantle its clinics and join the traditional health insurance world.

During my secondary-school years, I lived in South Charleston, West Virginia, in the "Chemical Valley" near the [union] Carbide and Dupont plants. Air and water pollution was a daily "given," to be tolerated as a necessary fact of life if my buddies' fathers wanted to remain employed. My six academic years at Miami University and Ohio State added skills in botany and rural sociology. Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* was published in 1962, and Fred Cottrell, author of *Energy and Society*, was my most influential teacher (1960). I also learned more about my grandfather, Ray Moore (Cadiz, Ohio), and his ownership of various strip mines in Ohio and West Virginia, and about my grandmother's early years in Shawnee,

Ohio, where coal fires still burn underground from the war between mine workers and owners in southeast Ohio. From my grandfather Moore, I learned to respect the entrepreneurial spirit. From grandfather Ingman, a hardware clerk, I learned respect for the low-paid, skilled, and ethical worker.

In 1963, I became a junior volunteer soil conservation engineer in Algeria, working under the US-AID and Social Conservation Service. We essentially operated a program for Civil War victims as we built small dams, irrigation systems, and terraces. We also planted 30,000 trees per year to preserve the local ecology. I remember an official asking us whether we could stop the Sahara Desert from steadily moving north. Although it was a ridiculous request given that we were twelve volunteers, I seriously tried to address the issue as I traveled through the western mountains north of the Sahara creating one more conservation project to keep eight

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hundred Algerians occupied every day. I heard the stories about how mountains become pure rock in less than ten years because of poor grazing and conservation practices.

Upon completing my doctoral training, I taught sociology to

medical students and residents in medical sociology and social gerontology at the University of Connecticut and later at the University of Missouri from 1969-1990. My research led me to study the national system of health-care delivery in Britain, Canada, and Switzerland. Starting in 1965, the blend of strong commerce and relatively good ecological preservation became a sub-theme for my repeated trips to Switzerland to visit my wife's family. However, I witnessed completely contaminated water tables in rural Switzerland because of the excessive use of liquid animal waste for fertilizer.

In 1990, I joined the School of Community Service at the University of North Texas in Denton where I was asked to create a collaborative program between the medical school in Fort Worth and the main campus in Denton. In 1995, I was asked to direct the Center for Public Service. At this point, direct and indirect service became my primary focus, and research and teaching shifted to supportive functions.

### **Why service and community outreach became the primary concern**

Given my assessment, let me outline why serious community outreach must become part of the mission of our universities and colleges. As the last geographic frontiers on this planet are explored

and exploited, and the carrying capacity of our planet becomes increasingly precarious, major institutions such as higher education need to assume a new mission. The complexity of the ecological challenge to human survival demands a shift in three traditions in the academy: research, teaching, and service. As one redefines the service role, research (evaluation) and teaching roles also will be redefined. Research and teaching will be enriched as outreach efforts become more entrenched in higher education.

Is the planet really in such a sorry state that we need to ask for academic institutions to remake themselves? (Brown 1998). As a sociologist with some background in biology, I have concluded that consumption patterns of the ever-increasing population are leading to a general form of slow or incremental "genocide." As I grew up

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through the '60s and '70s, I believed or had hopes that the forces of progress would slowly correct the socio-economic disparities between rich and poor people, as well as nations. In the '80s and '90s, the idea of progress became tarnished and more people doubted whether human progress was likely. In North Africa, in my twenties, we sat and

debated the question, "Is progress possible?" and pondered whether we should leave traditional cultures alone and let them remain uncontaminated by the modern world. The rapidity of global change, and status of the planet's eco-system and traditional societies make such debates seem trivial today. As human survival is jeopardized by a declining eco-system and one witnesses expansion of the gap between rich and poor, complacency evident within most nations that "the current global capitalism" will usher in the golden age seems misplaced. Does this mean that we are not making any progress? Of course we are (McKibben 1993; Tokar 1997). If I were a total pessimist, I would not propose reforms.

In some ways space exploration is a less daunting challenge, since it has fewer political implications. As soon as we call for ecological preservation, questions of consumption patterns and limits to growth are brought into focus. And thus, the political issue of limiting economic accumulations and also redistributions must be addressed.

### **University transformation**

Due to the current non-sustainability of our socio-economic and bio-ecological systems across Texas and worldwide, my

colleagues and I have initiated steps to respond to the challenge (Ingman et al. 1995). "Greening of the campus" is a simple way to express the mission. "Green" means more than mere traditional environmental issues; it means we must focus on socio-economic issues as well. Sustainable development programming across various faculties and units is the unifying concept (Bowers 1997).

There are examples to help us understand the vision and mission of this reform. Two British colleagues claim that closer links between universities and local government are occurring around the world and they call for more formal partnerships (Agyeman & Evans 1997). Hutchcraft (1996) calls for government and university practitioners and researchers to be in both camps,

that is, the world of community programming and the world of the academy, if we are truly to create sustainable cities.

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A remarkable initiative exists in Houston at the UT-Houston Health Science Center. With an interdisciplinary team and a sustainability officer, they have created an academic building which reflects a total array of

the best environmental practices. Water, air, energy preservation, and recycling, along with reforestation, are integrated into the design. The organization Natural Steps out of Sweden and Portland, Oregon, provided consultation for the multi-million-dollar creation ([www.naturalstep.org](http://www.naturalstep.org)).

## **Sustainable communities**

In the late 1980s and early 1990s faculty became involved, albeit on a somewhat irregular basis, in assisting neighborhoods in Fort Worth and Dallas. Faculty worked with the Stop Six area for many years, and in the early 1990s, Stop Six established its own large-scale, satellite, primary-care clinic. Other area neighborhoods received periodic attention from faculty and students.

In February 1995, UNT was host for the conference "An Aging Population, An Aging Planet, and A Sustainable Future." After the conference, the Center for Public Service contracted to direct community services at the Parks at Wynnewood, a restored low-income housing facility for approximately 404 families in south Dallas. The center was provided with 15,000 square feet of community service space; its initial yearly budget was approximately \$150,000. We had our successes and failures and learned a lot about direct service and how to create community partnerships to fulfill our mission. Due to our emerging reputation as a service-oriented university, public and private developers contacted us to establish

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educational, environmental (social), enterprise, and empowerment programs at their sites. With these partners the, Healthy Neighborhood Program emerged at the Center for Public Service. Some seven sites are under development. In 1997, the Department of Housing and Urban Affairs (HUD) awarded the HNP \$400,000 to support neighborhood initiatives in Dallas and Denton Counties.

In these various sites we try to assist local residents, property owners, and managers in a collaborative effort to create "healthy neighborhoods." Our straightforward, four-part paradigm involves engaging (empowering) residents in improving educational, entrepreneurial, and environmental (physical and social) dimensions of daily life in the target areas. Self-sufficiency is the goal toward which we strive.

On campus, the task is to encourage faculty to become engaged in the outreach endeavor and to convince them that they can enhance service as they enrich their university research and teaching

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roles. Some departments we have worked with include: theatre, dance, music, behavioral analysis, gerontology, criminal justice, anthropology, therapeutic recreation and health promotion, rehabilitation, social work, and sociology. The process involves getting faculty to develop their own programs that subsequently become focused at the neighborhood level. From our involvement with theatre, dance, and music faculty, the idea has emerged to develop an Arts and

Community Development Council to encourage the use of the arts to promote human development at the neighborhood level.

As the Center for Public Service moved forward with neighborhood renewal and the provision of social services for new and rehabilitated housing projects, our colleagues in Arts and Sciences were making inroads on the environmental front. Across Texas and the nation, the Institute for Applied Sciences (IAS) at UNT had established a solid reputation for water and watershed restoration and protection. Recently, a new Environmental Education Building was erected, with the first floor devoted to community environmental education. Contracts with two local school districts in Denton and Lewisville were signed and environmental teachers assigned to the program and the building. In five months, 8,000 K-12 students have toured the building, visited the exhibits, and participated in educational programs from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 a.m. during school days. With our assistance, senior citizens have become the core of the volunteer staff (Ingman 1998-99).

The city of Denton and the IAS cooperated to establish a citywide water and air-monitoring system. The city sponsored in part CPS's recent conference titled "An Aging Planet, An Expanding

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Population, and A Sustainable Future: Changing Attitudes and Values." IAS provides the CPS with an office for our Sustainable Communities Program.

In the fall, IAS will sponsor two conferences. "Building for the New Millennium: Energy Efficient and Environmentally Friendly Homes" will focus on "green" home building. The second conference will focus on how institutions such as universities can build toward "greening" the entire campus along the lines of the work of Natural Steps. The Advanced Technology and Engineering faculty on our campus took steps to enhance their knowledge and expertise with regard to alternative energy. They developed the "Cool Car," a vehicle powered by liquid nitrogen, and bought an electric bicycle for students to use. This fall, CPS will take the initial steps in expanding our familiarity with skills in solar energy technologies. It is our hope that through partnerships across campus and with local government, the entire campus can be encouraged to adopt the sustainable development philosophy and to encourage sustainable community development locally and globally.

## **Barriers**

Agyeman and Evans (1997) point out barriers to faculty involvement, including the fact that "academics are often driven by the need to publish research findings for peer group assessment" (p. 229-230). Promotion status and future research opportunities often depend solely on such writings. In the School of Community Service (SCS), promotion and tenure guidelines allow for strong, reflective service roles to count toward tenure. However, the traditional norms with their focus on publishing still dominate our local life in academia.

At UNT there is debate about whether we ought to strive to become a Carnegie Research II institution. I feel we are fortunate not to be trapped on the publish-or-perish treadmill so common to many major research institutions. Since the amount of federal external grants and contracts help to secure Carnegie Research II status, those federal grants that support outreach activities are the quickest route to success for institutions like UNT.

Many academics and administrators believe the federal government will not address the major questions of equity and environment in the United States or globally. Large federal programs are out of fashion. Realizing those issues remain, policy makers need an inexpensive alternative. From a pragmatic point of view, latent consequences could be that universities and colleges would secure funding from federal sources to initialize community outreach within the academy (Boyer 1996; Sjoberg 1998; Gurwitt 1999).

## **Conclusion**

I have reviewed in brief why community outreach is not merely some individual or unique preference for a faculty member or institution. After my sixty years of living on this planet and after

visiting eighteen first- and third-world societies, I see a great "genocide" of life on this planet. Events like the Holocaust in Germany, the Rape of NaKing, the relatively slow extermination of native populations in the Americas, and the tribal conflicts in Africa are but iterations of the genocidal phenomenon.

In this paper, I have focused upon the declining "carrying capacity" of the planet. As the global population and its concomitant, per-capita consumption continues to expand, the quality of air, water, land, and ecology continues to decline overall. Presidential candidate and Vice President Al Gore, a mainstream politician, predicts the existence of a serious challenge for the earth in his 1994 book *Earth in the Balance*. My colleagues and I have decided the traditional academic model of laissez-faire research will not be suitable for preserving our global eco-system. It is clear that nations are linked and constrained by their common ecological base, and more recently, by the "expanding network of environmental law covering land, the oceans, island waterways, the atmosphere, and the animals and plants that inhabit the earth." Global government of some sort is with us — ready or not" (Greider 1997). ■

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#### About the Author

Dr. Stan Ingman (Ph.D., the University of Pittsburgh) is director of the Center for Public Service at the University of North Texas at Denton. With early academic training in botany and rural sociology, Ingman worked as a volunteer soil conservation "engineer" in North Africa. For the past thirty years, his interests have broadened to include an examination of the interrelationships between generations. This interest has led to the development of collaborative projects among the university, community and business groups that encourage a sustainable quality of life in urban and rural environments. Ingman co-edited the 1994 book *Eldercare, Distributive Justice, and the Welfare State*.