

The Center for Civic Engagement, Social Entrepreneurship,  
and Research



Concluding  
"Scoping Case Study" Report for the Development of a Community-Based  
Civic Engagement & Social Entrepreneurship Center  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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Center for Civic Engagement, Social Entrepreneurship, and Research  
Scoping Study Report

**Executive Summary**

**Purpose**

A qualitative "scoping case study" was approved to examine the idea of developing civic minded global leaders on a local level. The study examined the concept in two phases. The first phase investigated the feasibility of developing a community-based civic engagement, social entrepreneurship, and research center at the former Lone Star Masonic Lodge. The second phase concentrated on the history of UIUC'S African American community engagement and how various colleges, units, faculty, and administrators demonstrated community development through partnerships and collaborative projects as well as how they saw the idea of "civic engagement" manifesting itself in the local African American community and with other community groups.

**Data Collection**

Empirical data from historical documents and interviews were used to provide insight to various occurrences throughout the inquiry. Participants selected for the study were a collection of UIUC faculty members and community advocates who have been involved in partnership or collaborative teaching, research, and service-oriented projects both on local and state levels. High-level university administrators and faculty from the College of Education, College of Fine and Applied Arts, and Graduate School of Library Information Sciences (GSLIS) were interviewed. City of Champaign officials along with individuals who submitted proposals for North First Street Redevelopment initiatives were also interviewed to provide an external view of how UIUC has engaged the local community.

**Findings**

The study demonstrated that the cost to acquire, renovate, and operate the Center at the former lodge was not feasible.

- Building costs are currently \$675,000.
- The appraised value is \$360,000.
- Non-occupancy electrical costs are \$700 monthly.
- Renovations to create office space would cost \$300,000 to \$400,000.

The study also demonstrated that UIUC has a long history engaging with the African American Community on a local and state level. The African American Cultural Program, East St. Louis Action Research Project, and the Urban Exchange Center are three examples that reflect varying degrees of success with the academy.

## Recommendations

To root the idea or philosophy of developing civic minded global leaders that address issues that pertain to the local and statewide African American communities I recommend the following actions:

- Develop strategic relationships with civic minded community-based organizations such as Champaign Urbana Area Project, the Urban League of Champaign County, Champaign and Urbana school districts, and the Don Moyer Boys and Girls Club to provide resource support and knowledge to assist them in meeting the goals of their organizational mission.
- Institute a “professor of practice” within the various colleges to begin building a foundation within the academy for civically focused research, teaching, and service. This would in turn begin shifting the culture of the institution to better support scholars who already research, teach, and serve within the context of indigenous scholarship to educate students to be civic minded leaders.
- Develop a new interdisciplinary initiative within the African American Cultural Program called the ***Office of Black Community Partnerships.*** The African American Cultural Program would serve as the hub for galvanizing university resources internally for civic based research, teaching, and service, but also operate as a liaison to support the development of healthy civic life in local African American communities across the state.
- Utilize the Academy for Entrepreneurial Leadership as a strategic partner with the African American Cultural Program to create a plan for the development of the Office of Black Community Partnerships and use funds out of the Chancellor’s budget for civic engagement to fund the initiative in the fall 2007.

## Introduction

In 2005, Chancellor Richard Herman of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) formed a steering committee to develop a campus-wide task force to define and explore how to institutionalize civic engagement at UIUC.

“Civic engagement” is the most recent language being used to explore how universities and colleges, through partnerships, collaborations, and leadership development, can help strengthen the civic wellness of communities. UIUC’s goal, expressed in the most recent institutional strategic plan, is to educate students to be leaders in a global environment through a proposed multi-point initiative that provides new opportunities for faculty, students and the institutions.

The points of the initiative included:

- Create professors of practice within five colleges to lead civic engagement scholarship and education initiatives
- Increase student engagement with faculty in research or creative activity
- Strengthen honors programs that serve the most capable students
- Create opportunities for civic engagement and/or community-based learning within 50 percent of academic units
- Expand participation in study-abroad experiences and internships in international contexts
- Educate UIUC students to become leaders in a global environment

As a means to achieve the goal of preparing civic-minded “global leaders,” several subcommittees were formed to begin framing the idea. One of the committees, “Connectivity and Scaling Up,” had the unique opportunity to explore how various colleges, departments, and units were defining civic engagement and providing service to the local community. On behalf of the committee I submitted a research proposal to the civic engagement task force to conduct a scoping study to explore the concept of developing a community-based civic

engagement research center in the local African American community or within the campus. This paper presents the results of the scoping study and discusses how they can be used to support the university in achieving its goals of creating civic-minded global leaders.

In this “scoping case study” for a civic engagement center, the intent was to examine the concept in two phases. The first phase investigated the feasibility of developing a community-based civic engagement, social entrepreneurship, and research center at the former Lone Star Masonic Lodge.<sup>1</sup> The second phase concentrated on the history of UIUC’S African American community engagement and how various colleges, units, faculty, and administrators demonstrated community development through partnerships and collaborative projects as well as how they saw the idea of “civic engagement” manifesting itself in the local African American community and with other community groups.

Given the scope of the inquiry, the paper is structured in a traditional research manner. The first section discusses the background, rationale, methodology, approach, participants, and data collection. The second part reflects the findings and theory for practice/implementation, recommendations, and my thoughts on how the UIUC may approach developing civic-minded global leaders.

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<sup>1</sup> The Lone Star Masonic Lodge at 208 N. First Street in Champaign, Illinois, was an African American–owned and –operated business. It became part of a business revitalization effort in the historic African American business district in the northern part of the city of Champaign.

## Background

Universities and colleges being civically involved is not a new phenomenon in America. In fact, the very premise of a land-grant organization is to offer resource and knowledge support to communities in the state where it resides. The land-grant concept was conceived at a time when the country was basically agrarian, but as we have become more and more urban there is a need to reexamine the extension model and apply it in the current context. The University of Minnesota, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Michigan, and Arizona State University are a few of many universities reflected in the literature with civic engagement models that demonstrate various forms of community collaborative and partnership models. These institutions have created cultures of service, collaboration, and partnerships that are recognized across the country.

## Rationale

Beginning in the mid-1990s the City of Champaign, Illinois, began implementing a plan to redevelop a section of the African American community where many black-owned businesses were located. The Clinton Administration had authorized monies to support the revitalization of businesses and neighborhoods in marginalized or low-resource communities under the Empowerment Zones Act, legislation designed to jumpstart the economies in urban America. The City of Champaign had created an initiative known as the North First Street Redevelopment Plan in 1996 with a "vision to, not only re-

establish the business uses along the corridor, but promote investment by local property and business owners along North First Street” (City of Champaign Report, 2006). The area was historically recognized as one where African American owned businesses operated.

The redevelopment plan was successful in completing a number of projects, which included the construction of new buildings and the establishment of new businesses. It also supported the reestablishment of historic operations such as the Rose and Taylor Barber Shop, Jackson’s Barbeque & Lounge, and the Lone Star Lodge. Much like Jackson’s restaurant, the Lodge’s goal was to rebuild and reopen its business on the parcel of land that was the foundation of its old facility.

Outside of those three businesses that were considered the anchors of the redevelopment plan, there may have been just two or three additional businesses over the past few years that opened their doors as part of that effort. According to a City of Champaign official, the limited interest caused the city’s developers to rethink the approach for developing North First Street. The person stated:

*Eleven years after the plan was adopted, I think it is time for us to come up with new strategies for how to achieve the goals in that plan because the original intent that existing business owners and people who lived near by would redevelop those lots, those opportunities were taken advantage of and are gone now, apparently. We still have lots available and we have the Lone Star Lodge. We went into this RFP process to get people to develop lots and we didn’t have any takers frankly, so what do we do? We have new interest in the corridor that isn’t necessarily coming from the African American community; we have a new chiropractor’s office and the Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation. It’s a fine development, and we think it is generally consistent with the plan, but it is not an African American owned small business necessarily, so I don’t know. We are probably ready to think of a new direction,*



*but the overall spirit is still what we want.* (City of Champaign official)

One of the things that this study showed was that the attempt by long-time community activist John Lee Johnson to instigate business development in the local African American community had only limited success because of the limited knowledge of that community's members on how to start and maintain a business, as well as the limited support offered to residents by the City of Champaign on those topics. I hypothesize that if the University of Illinois were to serve a role as a purveyor of knowledge to local residents in spaces such as the local African American community, there would be more residents inspired and prepared, like John Lee Johnson, to engage their local government with strategies on how to improve the conditions of their communities through initiatives such as small business development.

2  
→ C.P.L. initiative  
↑

## **Methodology**

The methodology selected to structure the inquiry was qualitative. Given the wide variety of thoughts and experiences from various stakeholders involved in a range of initiatives, it was very important that the methodology offer the flexibility to explore the historical landscape of service, partnerships, and collaborative efforts of UIUC in ways that would capture the culture, spirit, and intent of each unique initiative. In addition, I wanted to understand what motivated various stakeholders to work collectively in each project. This was important because in today's landscape of redefining knowledges, who

determines value and what is valued can help demonstrate the success and failures of various initiatives and how individuals are rewarded for their efforts.

Given past UIUC engagement efforts with the local African American community, it was important to approach this project as a qualitative scoping case study because of the need to examine variables that impacted the success or failure of each unique effort. With that in mind, the context, or what I like to call the "spirit," of the study was based on the rocky relationships that UIUC has had with the local African American community and how it has attempted to conduct research, teach, and provide services to this marginalized community over the years.

### **Data Collection**

Empirical data from historical documents and interviews were used to provide insight to various occurrences throughout the inquiry. Participants selected for the study were a collection of UIUC faculty members and community advocates who have been involved in partnership or collaborative teaching, research, and service-oriented projects both on local and state levels. Interviews were conducted with high-level university administrators and faculty from the College of Education, College of Fine and Applied Arts, and Graduate School of Library Information Sciences (GSLIS). City of Champaign officials along with individuals who submitted proposals for North First Street Redevelopment initiatives were also interviewed to provide an external view of how UIUC has engaged the local community.

## Findings

The Center for Civic Engagement, Social Entrepreneurship, and Research is a great idea, but operating the center at the former Lone Star Lodge is not feasible. The study demonstrated that the cost to acquire, renovate, and operate the facility would not be a financially sound decision for the university.

Documentation from the City of Champaign indicated that the building has considerable debt due to its falling into foreclosure, and in reacquiring the facility the city assumed the debt from the former tenant. A council study session report and dialogues with city planners revealed the following:

- Building costs are currently \$675,000.
- The appraised value is \$360,000.
- Non-occupancy electrical costs are \$700 monthly.
- Renovations to create office space would cost \$300,000 to \$400,000.

Without significant negotiations to buy the property at a reduced value or to develop a collaborative partnership with the City of Champaign, approximately a \$1.2-million initial investment would be required for UIUC to secure a physical presence in the African American community at the former Lone Star Lodge location. During a focus group discussion, senior faculty resisted the idea of using funds in that manner. Instead, they indicated interest in supporting one or more projects centered more on direct service to the community. They also suggested that having the initiative be need-driven is important. This is where community advocacy becomes important, and an advocating agent becomes key. A city official suggested:

*I think that without that grassroots effort, there might have not been the focus on First Street. You know the city has a lot of different, I don't want to say efforts, sort of underway in the community and*

*has over the years, whether it be a neighborhood wellness or comp plan updates or planning area, what do I want to say, but a look at defined areas and having a land use plan in place for future growth, we look at downtown, during this time. Downtown was also, you know it was kind of declining, and we were losing investors, if you'll call it investors, we were losing businesses out of the downtown so that was a major focus for us, too. I think without the community support for North First Street, it might not have been a high priority for us. So from that perspective, I think it was important that that occurred. John Lee was always here, though, he was always at Council meetings, I don't know that he ever missed a Council meeting and was always bringing items for awareness if nothing else (City of Champaign official).*

A senior faculty member reinforced the idea of community engagement at the onset of any initiative that is community-based in a follow-up email after the focus group discussion. She stated:

*I think that the first thing that should be done is to create an Advisory Board which would consist largely of successful members of the communities this center would serve — specifically, members of the African-American community, the Hispanic community, and any others that are underrepresented in local businesses. I'd like to see, for example, successful business people, church leaders, service providers, and any others who could offer accurate insights to the group of people who are putting this organization together.*

*With the assistance of the Advisory Board, the next step I would suggest would be to develop a survey that would be conducted within the populations that the center would serve. I suggest that the Advisory Board be involved in the creation and delivery of any such survey, because I am afraid that otherwise the questions themselves might not be crafted properly, and any good statistician knows that the questions you develop drive the answers you get. In other words, before it is ever decided what services and programs would be provided, I think we should know what the people themselves think they need, as well as any problems, assumptions, preconceived notions, etc. that they have. This is, as I indicated yesterday, the equivalent of doing "market research" before launching a new company or product (University official).*

Baum (2000) has suggested that outlining clear expectations before any community–university collaboration is established can help offset any form of conflict that may result from potentially false assumptions brought by various stakeholders to the relationship. In this instance, the assumption had been made that having a sort of “interfacing center” in the north Champaign African American community is what the community needed. A University administrator suggested:

*What I think our role would be is if someone came up to us and said, this is our problem, and then we work with that person for solutions to the problem, and it might be that let's say, you decide that at-risk students in Champaign would benefit if there was a physical facility on First [Street], one block near the police station where after school they could go and there would be tutoring and whatever.—but to do this, it's going to cost us for a building. Well, let's help you develop a budget, and now we've got that. Let's help you identify other places that have tried similar things so that we can study and see what their outcomes were, and now let's help you identify people who are in the business to fund those kinds of things and then we'll help you create a non-for-profit organization that can do it, and now it's a community-based thing that has its own mission. And now that we've given you all of the knowledge we have, whether it's ed policy, public policy, you know, go for it rather than us saying, Well, we'll have our development people go and raise money to build this building. Now we've gone into another line of business. Now that may be where the University wants to go. All I am saying is that once you go down that road, you have to understand all of the real consequences of it (University administrator).*

The reluctance of some University officials to support this initiative was also the concern of City officials:

*We've got a building that is empty, own it free and clear now. It took us about \$670,000 to foreclose on it and get it back, and we just had to pay an outstanding tax bill of \$26,000 that someone had lost. I think that was all finalized in the summer, so we haven't done anything with it in 6 or 7 months, and we have to decide, what are we going to build on that. We've gone to Council a couple of times.*

*I think you came to the north meeting. It was in light of the smoking ban, which, it was a really funky night. I don't think that we got any real good direction that night, there were a couple of off-the-cuff comments, but it was nothing really. We've talked with Council members individually since then, and I think that they all agree that the way to go would be don't just dump the building, sell it, yet there is potential here. First Street is changing; we're still trying to figure out what our goals are. Why don't we lease the building for a year or two? So then the question is, how do we lease it? We've had unsolicited proposals. I think we have decided that if we are going to lease it, we are going to do some kind of open, competitive process. So that is where we get to the RFQ, to say that we are accepting requests to lease this building for 12 to 18 months. And I know that there are many Council members that want to see something happening there sooner than later rather than having an empty building sitting on the street, owned by the city. I don't know how many taxpayers are lining up at the door complaining about all of the money that was spent and nothing is happening with the building right now, but I think as time goes on it will probably become more of a question, you know—what are we doing with that building? So that is why I ask about the timing, like 6 months, 12 months, 18 months. Non-feasibility was only one concern that some of the interviewees echoed. How it would be staffed, who would provide the funding, and what role would the community play in the project were some additional issues that were illuminated over the course of the study (City of Champaign official).*

Overall, the study showed that it is not necessary to have a physical building in a community to be civically engaged. In fact, the more that citizens are prepared to deepen their involvement in civic government structures that impact their lives—i.e., housing, employment, and education—the more successful community development initiatives will be, largely because they will be driven by well-prepared, well-informed community leaders. The leaders will collaborate and partner with University faculty in Cogenerative Inquiry-based research initiatives that utilize the expertise and knowledge of community residents and professional researchers to motivate City officials to support the

development of marginalized communities through the spirit of civically engaged residents who are well prepared to implement and maintain community development initiatives.

### **What We've Already Done**

The case study also reflected that UIUC has an extensive history of relationships with the local African American community as well as organizations statewide in the context of what now would be considered examples of “civic engagement.” The African American Cultural Program, the East St. Louis Action Research Project, and the Urban Exchange Center are three examples of UIUC engaging with the African American community. The next few pages will review those efforts.

### ***Afro-American Cultural Program***

One of the longest standing engagement efforts that UIUC has had with the African American community is the African American Cultural Program (AACP). The program was formed in 1971 during Chancellor Jack Peltason's administration as a result of black student and community protest in the turbulent 1960s. To help quell campus tension, a faculty–student commission was formed to examine Afro-American life and culture. Three distinct arenas were addressed: academics, culture, and service. As a result, UIUC developed the Afro-American Cultural Program, the Department of Afro-American Studies, and a public service program as attempts to improve the University's inadequate involvement in the

academic, cultural, and public service activities associated with black life (UIUC Memo 1974).

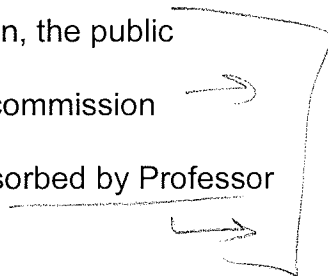
The commission's goal with the Afro-American Cultural Program was to empower black students on campus as well as black people in the larger community with a growing sense of pride and of objective knowledge related to the Afro-American experience. The coordination of visiting artists and lecturers as well as workshops in dance, music, self-awareness, and creative writing was the initial focus and charge of the unit.

In addition, the cultural program performed these functions:

- Encouraged black students and the black community at large with a sense of pride and dignity.
- Created on campus a quantity of valuable information about the black experience that could be used as a source of objective and accurate interpretation of the experience through performing arts, classes, seminars, and media activities.
- Assisted the campus community with relevant cultural feedback regarding the black experience in order for non-black's to understand the significance of their own performance.
- Established and maintained a dialogue with various faculty, department chairs, administrators, and staff regarding the policies, procedures, and courses that served the cultural needs of black students in order to provide them with a rewarding cultural experience.



Although some of the programs and staff have changed, the African American Cultural Program remains a hub for students and community to identify with and a space to tap into the black cultural experience at the University of Illinois. Some components, including public service, should be revisited within the context of civic engagement. When the cultural program began, the public service recommendation that came from the faculty–student commission operated out of the cultural program, but it was eventually absorbed by Professor Rupert Downing of the School of Social Work.



### ***East St. Louis Action Research Project***

In 1987, Wyvetter H. Younge, an Illinois state representative, approached the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to gain technical support for developing East St. Louis in the areas of housing and community development. The School of Architecture, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, and the Department of Landscape Architecture were the three initial campus units that gained administrative support to provide faculty and students to conduct research and service projects with residents of East St. Louis who were spearheading community revitalization efforts. A UIUC faculty member stated:

*The project is twenty years old with this fiscal year; we celebrate the twentieth anniversary. It was initially founded as the East St. Louis Revitalization Project with assistance in the state legislature from Representative Wyvetter Young, and the emphasis was on providing technical assistance to underrepresented communities and in distressed economies, specifically East St. Louis—that was the district that Y Betty Young represented. In 1990—well, let me back up a little bit—the first three years of effort worked on pretty much infrastructure, and large-scale studies pretty much generated from City Hall in 1990. We had a shift to a participatory process and adopted a slogan: “Neighborhoods First.” We were watching City*

*Hall pour lots of money into these studies and into development schemes—and I use that word pretty deliberately—without seeing much results and seeing the conditions in the neighborhoods continue to deteriorate. So the shift of participatory approach and a slight change of the name to the East St. Louis Action Resource Project moved our mission to providing technical assistance to neighborhood and community-based organizations through service learning and action research. So that's essentially the tag line for our mission statement; so it's a three-part, it tries to align with the university's mission of teaching, research, and service through service learning as the teaching component; action research, which is putting expertise and talent of faculty and particularly grad students to work on issues brought to us by community partners; and then finally the technical assistance, which comes pretty much from those other two sources—from the coursework, from the faculty, and for a short time we ran a neighborhood technical assistance center in East St. Louis where we delivered technical assistance in a very direct way with staff on site (UIUC faculty member).*

In order to create an access point for the venture, the East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center (NTAC) was developed to provide UIUC with a local presence in East St. Louis as a means to assist local residents and neighborhood organizations with their economic, physical, and social development projects. The ESLARP website suggests that NTAC's goal was to enhance the quality of life in East St. Louis and the Enterprise Communities of Alorton, Brooklyn, Centreville, and Washington Park. Its mission read:

*The NTAC is a place where residents and organizations in the Greater East St. Louis Enterprise Community can request one-stop technical assistance, training and volunteer assistance. Through the NTAC residents can be connected with class-based assistance (ESLARP website, <http://www.eslarp.uiuc.edu/ntac/aboutnew.htm>, n.d.)*

Over the years, NTAC provided technical support to East St. Louis residents and organizations such as churches in community organizing, neighborhood development, non-profit management, grant writing, technology, and urban design. UIUC faculty and students served as one of the primary resources in those support efforts. NTAC specifically assisted residents, non-profit groups, faith-based organizations, and municipal agencies in formulating strategies for meeting their technical assistance and training needs in the areas of community organizing, neighborhood planning, building and urban design, grant writing, digital technology, and non-profit management. The website mentions:

*NTAC has been funded by the Enterprise Community, the St. Clair County Intergovernmental Grants Department, HUD-COPC New Directions, the Corella and Bertram F. Bonner Foundation, Illinois Workforce Advantage, and the University of Illinois. These partnerships have allowed the NTAC to offer increased technical assistance to local nonprofit and community-based organizations, connect local colleges and universities to the community in mutually beneficial relationships, and maintain our open door policy as a locally based resource for the University of Illinois East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP website, <http://www.eslarp.uiuc.edu/ntac/aboutnew.htm> n.d.).*

Unfortunately, NTAC had to close its doors due to budgetary constraints. The discontinuation of funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of University Partnerships placed a larger strain on UIUC's various colleges and departments participating in the effort to provide support. The College of Fine and Applied Arts continued to provide services, but in a more

direct manner by placing students and faculty to work directly with community service organizations and residents in their neighborhoods and facilities.

Unlike the successful East St. Louis project, UIUC has struggled in the local Champaign-Urbana community with its research and engagement efforts, particularly in the African American community. Over the years, various UIUC administrations made attempts to lessen the criticism by supporting community–university engagement efforts. One example was the Urban Exchange Center.

### ***Urban Exchange Center***

During my tenure as director of education and youth development at the Urban League of Champaign County in the mid-1990s, I served on a committee with University faculty called the Consortium for Collaborative Community Research (CCCR)<sup>2</sup>, which examined ways for the Urban League and UIUC to work collaboratively on issues that impacted the local African American community. One outcome of the committee’s work was a joint initiative called the Urban Exchange Center.

The Urban Exchange Center, funded during Chancellor Michael Aiken’s administration through Partnership Illinois, was set up to respond to the deteriorating economic, housing, and educational infrastructures in the local African American community. Residents and community-based organizations such as the Urban League were seeking solutions to those problems and felt that the rich resources of UIUC could assist in resolving issues impacting the black

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<sup>2</sup> The Consortium for Collaborative Community Research was a group of UIUC faculty interested in community-based research, service, and teaching.

community. Language in a proposal for the project suggested that the primary purpose of the center was to “harness the impressive spiritual, intellectual, technological, and financial resources of the community and the campus to solve the most pressing community development issues facing the region’s poorest neighborhoods and communities” (Urban League of Champaign County, 1997).

The proposed objectives were these:

- Establish a community-based center where residents, businesspersons, civic leaders, and municipal officials could secure competent technical assistance on community development projects they were seeking to implement
- Create both digital and physical repositories of historic and current studies, reports, plans, and designs describing existing neighborhood and community conditions that would be available to community residents, municipal officials, and university researchers
- Organize a series of action research teams involving the interested neighborhood residents, municipal officials, and University personnel, committed to a search for innovative solutions to the region’s most serious community problems
- Pursue the rigorous implementation of community-generated planning recommendations that seek to solve critical problems undermining the quality of life in the poorest neighborhoods and communities of the region
- Enhance the organizing, planning, development, and management capacity of the community-based development organizations

- Establish a website of research reports and plans to provide for the widest possible dissemination of knowledge emerging from this unique community–university community development partnership

Though the Urban Exchange Center was a laudable concept, it was flawed in a number of areas, including staffing, location, and overall direction, which in turn impacted the effectiveness of the initiative. A faculty member stated:

*I think that it was under-researched; so it had really big goals, but they really didn't have the infrastructure to be able to do the things that they wanted to do. I thought it could have benefited from some sort of—and maybe it was existent and I wasn't aware of it—some sort of a steering committee or advisory group that gave it some clear direction and priorities. They were sort of looking at all educational research, and I thought it would have been better if they had picked a target area like discipline or the achievement gap or whatever, and then we focused our limited resources on those particular areas; I thought making it so broad diluted its impact, particularly when it was under-resourced (UIUC faculty member).*

Ultimately, the Urban Exchange Center perished, and suspicion and resentment have since overshadowed any new attempts by the University's current administration to become a better partner with the historically disenfranchised local African American community.

### **What We Learned**

In traditional research, the community historically simply serves the role of specimen and is subjected to a series of batteries, probes, and tests that too often leave the community bewildered, upset, and distrusting of the University. We know that both the university and the community benefit when collaboration occurs to address issues relative to the concerns of the community. Likewise,

students, faculty, and staff benefit from the applied learning that occurs through civic activities. It is the applied theory of classroom instruction and learning from being in the environment that makes civic engagement so significant from an instructional perspective. In fact, many institutions have adopted this philosophy.

For example, the University of Michigan–Dearborn’s Civic Engagement Project is part of a 219-campus initiative recognized as the *American Democracy Project*. According to the website, the project operates under the civic engagement philosophy of Thomas Elrich, who argues that civic engagement is about being prepared and motivated to make a difference in communities politically and nonpolitically. It also means gaining the necessary knowledge and skill to participate effectively in the governing processes (<http://www.aascu.org/programs/adp/default.htm>).

Greenwood and Levin (2005) suggest that institutions of higher education should be restructured to serve and operate with an action focus, with professional researchers and local stakeholders serving as the expert knowledge sources. Each has a unique role in impacting how communities can be served or developed to enrich the lives of indigenous folk. One of the points of UIUC’S civic engagement initiative is to hire “professors of practice” and establish processes where their action research efforts can be recognized for merit review and for tenure. Too often faculty at universities suggest that they would like to be more involved in the communities where they reside, but because their efforts in communities are not recognized as counting toward tenure, they are reluctant to get involved. Their focus ultimately becomes job security and career

advancement (the indigenous culture of higher education organizations). A

tenured faculty member at UIUC explained:

*It's good that we have energy around this topic now, but how are we going to sustain this in the long term, and what is it going to take to do that? And a part of that relates, I think, to faculty, which is our promotion and tenure system, and our incentives within this university do not heavily reward civic engagement or public service. They don't, and you can see civic engagement having a relationship with research and teaching and it certainly does, but the reality is that doing things in the real world is a lot harder than doing things in a lab or in some kind of contrived setting, so it's going to take longer. It's going to be a little bit more compromised, and so you can say to a junior faculty member, Yeah, you can go out and work with schools on this and you can get some research out of it, but the reality is that that research might take longer. It may have to have multiple authors on it, which sometimes in our incentive system is of less value. It may have to represent a shared agenda and not just what that faculty member wanted to do, so there is a little bit more risk involved in engaging and working in the local community with faculty, and I don't think that we have completely attended to that in looking at our reward system within the university (UIUC faculty member).*

Checkoway (2001) suggests that higher education organizations have a role in maintaining the idea of democracy by preparing students to be civically active in a diverse democracy. However, the concern has been that institutions of higher education have lost their path in preparing citizens for social democracy, both because of the inconsistency of administrators in keeping universities on the path of civic engagement and because professors do not place preparing students for this role as an integral part of their responsibilities as scholars. Checkoway further mentions that civic leaders are discovering obstacles and resistance from organizations of higher education as they attempt to gain support to address issues central to the development of their own communities. If UIUC



is going offer legitimate and credible scholarship through its civic engagement efforts, there must be a concerted effort to engage local marginalized communities based on the various needs that the indigenous folks reflect.

Ehlich (2003) mentions that the more educated a citizenry, the more likely they will be involved in public affairs such as city and county governments as well as school boards. Since higher education organizations are agents of social reproduction, the idea of civic engagement may be only as credible as the paper it is printed on because, as Carpini & Keeter (2000) implies, civic engagement is not the same as service learning. Civic engagement is much broader in scope and may involve multiple aspects of engaging the university community in efforts to teach, to conduct research, and to serve the communities where it resides in a manner that is beyond the reward or evaluation structure in place to sustain faculty involvement in community development efforts.

### **Theory of Indigenous Scholarship**

John Lee Johnson consistently advocated for UIUC to work more closely with African American organizations and community residents, particularly those interested in providing services and developing their community. He believed that UIUC, as a land-grant institution, had a responsibility to extend its mission of teaching, research, and service to the local community generally, but particularly to the north Champaign and north Urbana communities where the largest concentration of poor African American or marginalized people historically resided.

Often, John Lee argued that UIUC should be replicating the success of its East St. Louis Action Research Project (ESLARP) in north Champaign. Johnson also believed that residents should be involved in their communities' local government, education, and economic development. He felt that government and education should work collectively to support residents in their quest to be civically engaged, and he often spoke of the need for collaborations and partnerships with higher education organizations. With his passing in 2006 the need to recapture the spirit of the First Street Redevelopment is one of the things that encouraged me to learn more about how UIUC could support African American residents in furthering the development of their community.

As an indigenous scholar who was raised on the streets of Champaign and Urbana's "North End" black community, I saw the First Street civic engagement initiative as an opportunity to reconnect the campus mission of teaching, research, and service to my community in a manner that was a total reflection on my upbringing, where community leaders were clearly informed on the issues relative to community development educationally, socially, and politically. During my adolescent years, my mother, Fannie Patterson, worked closely with now retired UIUC psychology professor Dr. Julian Rappaport, a community psychologist who worked with the local African American community and developed programs such as "Our Gang Day Care," a day care program for low-income families that hosted undergraduate and graduate students in a clinical experience.

My mother taught a course for seven years in the late 1970s and early 1980s called "Adolescent Diversion: Delinquency Prevention" that was listed in the community psychology department. The program was an extension of TARGET (teens, adolescents, guidance, education, & training), a residential treatment program structured to prevent teen delinquency. Community outreach was an extension of that program. During the years my mother taught the course, I recall graduate students spending quite a bit of time in our home. Having potlucks and meeting around the program formed one of my most vivid memories of that experience. I was always proud as a kid to say that my mother taught at the University of Illinois, which was hard for some people to believe because my mother does not have an advanced or terminal degree in psychology, or any college degree. But the culture of the university at the time suggested that the knowledge she possessed as a professional youth and family advocate was of value and should be offered to the students at the University of Illinois. As I further rewind the memory band that anchors the roots of my indigenous scholarship, I would be remiss to not mention the impact on my professional development of the local African American community, particularly North First Street.

North First Street was a business haven for African American residents seeking to develop and provide a brighter future for their families. In fact, my father, Will Patterson, realized his dream of owning his own business in the late 1970s and eventually found the capital and maintained the perseverance to open the doors of Will's Open Pit Barbeque and Lounge, right next door to Knits and

Pants clothing boutique, Brown's Café soul food restaurant and Brown's Pool Hall. All of that happened right down the street from the old Lone Star Masonic Lodge, Banks' Barbershop, Eagles Motorcycle Club, Tommy's Barbershop (which eventually became Rose and Taylor's Barbershop) and Tommy's Record Shop. When I think about civic engagement, it is rooted in this context, where the home and neighborhood serves as the backdrop for an emerging young scholar to see community activists, civic and religious leaders, pimps, players, and prostitutes as well as winos and dope fiends congregating in a space that may be the corner block, neighborhood business, or back door stoop to share a meal, a conversation, or a word of inspiration with their neighbor about how to make a better world.

I remember my mother taking me to Tommy's Barbershop every week to get my hair cut, in that space I received more than a haircut. It was a place where a young black boy or girl could see and hear community activists like John Lee Johnson and Roy Williams talk about issues pertaining to maintaining the spirit and pride of the black community. I remember overhearing, as the barber cut my hair, conversations about City Hall and the importance of black people being engaged in the governing process that impacted our community.

I had no idea then that those experiences would provide me with the motivation, courage, and passion to incorporate this idea of "civic engagement" in my life's work. Many of the spaces that I mentioned above no longer exist, and many of today's young people have not been exposed to the indigenous spirit that is at the root of authentic civic engagement. Civic engagement is not

something that you can mandate—it is what you live and breathe because your life, your community's life, depends on it.

When I first became spirited to write the proposal for the development of a civic engagement center, it was right after John Lee Johnson had passed away. His work motivated me to originally name the proposal “The John Lee Johnson Center for Civic Engagement.” However, when I began my informal research about the idea, it was suggested that I remove his name from the proposal because it might affect the necessary political support needed for funding. This was largely due to how John Lee challenged the political, education, and economic structures in the community. When I worked at the Urban League of Champaign County as director of education and youth development, John Lee often came to talk to me. As a scholar who had the privilege to receive a Ph.D. from the University of Illinois, he often mentioned that I had the duty to engage UIUC's black students in becoming well informed regarding their responsibility to uplift the black community. Mind you, he did not mean only the local students: he meant that all black students had the duty to be civically engaged, wherever they were from, at, or going.

The conversations may have begun on First Street when I was a child, but the spirit of the discourse evolved into a scholarly lecture some thirty years later when I became a professor at the University of Illinois and began teaching the indigenously influenced and structured course “Black Leadership Development.” Through this course I challenged African American and other students interested in leadership in marginalized communities to interface with community activists

such as John Lee Johnson, who often expressed to students his disdain for what he considered the self-centered and irresponsible lifestyle and choices of African American young people.

## **Recommendations**

Civic engagement at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign can become rooted in the local African American community if that goal becomes a priority of the institution at the administrative level. The finding of this study provides a platform for UIUC to consider at least three recommendations to demonstrate a civic engagement presence in the local African American community. Though the study determined that creating the Center of Civic Engagement, Social Entrepreneurship, and Research at the former Lone Star Lodge was too costly to be supported at \$1.2 million, the East St. Louis Action Research Project's Neighborhood Technical Assistance Center is a model that could be implemented locally by developing strategic relationships with community-based organizations interested in working collaboratively with the University. That is my first recommendation.

Organizations including the Champaign Urbana Area Project, the Urban League of Champaign County, Champaign and Urbana school districts, and the Don Moyers Boys and Girls Club have a history in working with UIUC on a variety of initiatives structured to address issues that impact the black community. Establishing the philosophy of civic engagement within existing organizations allows the University to play its appropriate role as a knowledge purveyor. Utilizing approaches such as Cogenerative Inquiry to support

indigenous community folks with research expertise and applying the formidable knowledge of university professors and students can lead to spirited and feasible ideas, such as reinvigorating a black business locally that contributes to improving the quality of life for African Americans.

Greenwood and Levin's discussion of Cogenerative Inquiry provides civic minded faculty, or "professors of practice," with a legitimate research approach and methodology for their work to be peer reviewed in a manner that contributes to career advancement as well as job security. My second recommendation is that UIUC institute a "professor of practice" within the various colleges to begin building a foundation within the academy for civically focused research, teaching, and service. This would in turn begin shifting the culture of the institution to be authentically civic focused, supporting its goal of educating students to be leaders of global environments.

As a third recommendation that is internally focused, I suggest that the African American Cultural Program serve as the agent for galvanizing university resources internally to meet the external needs of creating healthy civic life in local African American communities across the state. To accomplish this task I suggest developing a new interdisciplinary initiative within the African American Cultural Program called the ***Office of Black Community Partnerships***.

The Office of Black Community Partnerships would serve as the hub for strategic relationships that utilize the three pillars of research, teaching, and service to support the development of indigenous communities within the philosophical context of civic engagement. Partnerships begin at home;

therefore, creating strategic alliances on campus with academic units, student organizations, and administrative offices would create an organic network through which the idea of civic engagement can become philosophically rooted in research, teaching, and service.

The African American Cultural Program has the historical directive as well as empirical data that suggest that it is best positioned to civically link the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to black communities on a local and state level. In addition, as part of a national network of cultural programs, it can share and contribute best practices in the field with other higher education–based land-grant and private institutions that have a civic engagement focus.

I further recommend that the Academy for Entrepreneurial Leadership serve as a strategic partner with the African American Cultural Program to create a plan for the development of the Office of Black Community Partnerships and that the initiative be funded out of the Chancellor's budget for civic engagement, funds already allocated for that exact purpose. The initiative should begin in fall 2007.

## **Conclusion**

Because of the undeveloped properties and failed businesses that are part of the legacy of indigenous civic leaders such as John Lee Johnson, I was encouraged as part of my inquiry to form follow-up questions: *Why didn't the local residents secure the empty lots to develop and start new businesses? What infrastructure support did community residents have in developing their business ideas? How many business plans did not result in African American–owned retail*



*outlets, and why? How could the University of Illinois play a supporting role in working with residents to develop their ideas into formal business plans?* These questions helped provide the rationale and context for conducting an inquiry into using civic engagement to support local business and community development in the African American community.

In a report submitted at the Association of Institutional Research forum, Akdere & Egan (2005) suggested that supportive institutional structure and a commitment to providing resources are crucial in developing successful community partnerships, particular in the current climate of accountability and civic engagement. UIUC has significant success in public service-oriented activities. Whether it's the deeds of students, a research project of a faculty member, or a project coordinated by a unit such as University of Illinois Extension, the UIUC community has been involved in service at many levels. On a state level, the East St. Louis Action Research Project is one UIUC community-based research project with a track record of engagement in a city that is predominately African American. However, on a local level UIUC has struggled with its research and engagement efforts in the African American community, and the result has often been contempt.

If modeled after the Phoenix Urban Research Laboratory (PURL), an Arizona State University communal engagement initiative, the UIUC Center for Civic Engagement and Social Entrepreneurship must be not only "*an information-rich environment for researchers, decision makers, industry professionals, and students to debate, collaborate, and seek new solutions to the most pressing*

*design problems facing cities today,*<sup>3</sup> it must also be a physical facility where community residents can be stakeholders in the research and action that helps government officials make well-informed decisions about residents' neighborhoods.

The shared or collaborative relationships between institutions of higher education and disenfranchised and marginalized communities too often become power struggles of accountability and authenticity rooted in race and class, ultimately perpetuating a culture of distrust and apprehension that mars any sincere attempts at collaborative initiatives established to address issues in a community.

As institutions of higher education further their collaborative or service efforts, how they are received in communities depends on the authenticity of the institution. The faculty or staff who conduct research or support community development efforts that are civically focused must be rooted in the institution in the same manner as other faculty, with their efforts recognized in areas that count toward tenure and other promotions. This is the only way that authentic and long-standing "civic engagement" will occur, enabling the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to achieve its goal of developing "civic-minded global leaders."

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<sup>3</sup> Arizona State University's "New American University," <http://www.asu.edu/caed/purl>.

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