

*This paper examines the urban extension role of the Donaghey Project for Urban Studies and Design at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in assisting small and large towns in Arkansas cope with the problems inherent in development. Drawing its faculty from across the UALR campus as well as professionals in the field and student interns from multiple campuses, the Project assesses assumptions and problems caused by urban growth and renewal, and provides consulting and referral services to professionals and informational programs for the public.*

# The Future by Design:

## *The Donaghey Project at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock*

“Urban Institutions,” wrote Wayne State President David Adamany in the September 1992 issue of the *Educational Record*, “should also address urban issues in their scholarship. But in making critical decisions that shape their future -- such as organizing institutional structures (e.g., research centers), allocating funds, and making faculty appointments -- urban institutions should advance their scholarship on urban subjects generally and on their own communities specifically.”

A study of Arkansas demographics in the late 1970s by John Miller and Manuel Jones concluded that “the way in which urban problems are addressed or ignored in Central Arkansas will have ‘ripple effects’ throughout the state . . . . As the state moves toward the 21st century, ‘Little Rock problems’ are increasingly likely to become ‘state problems’.” The study recommended heightened interaction between university and community in order to address racial, economic, ecological, and governmental urban development problems. A decade later, one can point to several highly interactive and effective university initiatives aimed at serving government and small business needs.

The most recent program, the Donaghey Project in Urban Studies and Design, the subject of this paper, originated in the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Major funding for the Donaghey Project was provided by the Donaghey Foundation Trust established by and named after a former Governor of Arkansas. The Foundation has been far-sighted in its support of the arts, programs recognizing academic excellence, and projects that enhance the quality of life. The Donaghey Project was presented in 1991 and funding began in the 1992-3 academic year.

UALR is located in the cultural, economic, and governmental center of Arkansas. Within 20 short years, UALR evolved from a struggling junior college to a metropolitan, doctoral granting institution with 12,000 students. It experienced its major growth in faculty during a time when young and highly qualified teachers from some of the nation's best research universities could be attracted to Little Rock. As the campus matured, so too did faculty attitudes and community expectations for their university. Noticeable, however, was the absence of a clearly focused mission.

Change, as Russell Edgerton has pointed out, is often determined by three factors:

1. changes that occur in the external environment or culture,
2. issues raised by new leadership, and
3. a study or report focusing on an issue of national importance that influences the local institution.

The arrival of a new chancellor with requisite planning stratagems, together with changing relations among institutions of higher education prompted by system-wide role and scope statements, stirred questions at UALR about institutional identity. A consultant's report on campus/community relations further contributed to bring about important changes.

Under the rubric "changing conditions," a reexamination of academic and service missions was prompted by the spate of studies about higher education that appeared in the decade of the 80s that described the erosion of public trust and heightened expectations concerning quality and the undergraduate degree. UALR responded to the challenge by reformulating the institution's role and scope statement. To assist in the process Harold Enarson, president-emeritus of Ohio State University, served as an external consultant to lead the university in a process of healthy self-analysis, resulting in the development of a coherent mission statement which reflected a broader national perspective. In his "Report to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the Stakeholders in the University," he challenged UALR to take to heart the importance of interaction with external constituencies as it related to academic programs and institutional values.

Contemporaneously with Enarson's report, Gilley's book, *The Interactive University: A Source of American Revitalization*, also began to influence the self-image of the campus. More importantly, the report and the book, taken together with other events affecting higher education nationally, had the important effect of influencing our campus to develop a responsive institutional mission statement that placed service and community responsibility at the heart of institutional purpose. Thus, planning would, in the future, be directed from both an internal and external perspective.

At the same time as Gilley's publication became required reading on campus, Ernest Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* stimulated lively conversation and contributed the impetus for a cabinet retreat where issues pertaining to institutional mission and its relation to criteria for faculty rewards were set squarely upon the table.

These publications, a campus-wide effort to focus a core curriculum, and new parameters for describing institutional mission, all contributed to create a few extremely invigorating and challenging years. Uppermost in the minds of faculty and administrators was the earnest desire to accept new definitions that would serve to distinguish UALR from the state's land grant research campus at Fayetteville,

and that would more accurately focus the campus' programs and energies to meet the needs of its constituencies. By the late 1980s, the campus concluded, perhaps late and naively, but nevertheless importantly, that it was an urban institution. More recently it has embraced the full significance of the title "metropolitan university" and, with the appointment of Charles Hathaway as Chancellor, has made an institution-wide commitment to the values inherent in the definition.

### **UALR: An Urban-Grant Institution**

Following the model of applied research through an extension network which was common for land grant institutions, UALR now sees itself as an "urban-grant" institution committed to urban extension activities. Urban grant institutions should focus on urban issues in their region just as land grant institutions addressed agrarian problems. As David Sweet described in an earlier issue of this journal, with the city as its subject, a metropolitan university provides its teaching and research skills to advise on a wide variety of urban issues confronted by small towns and communities undergoing the pressures of development.

It is now commonplace on the UALR campus to accept the definition "urban-grant" and to reward faculty for applied research serving the stakeholders of the university. Among the new institutes at UALR that collaborate on urban problem solving and information generation, are the Arkansas Institute for Economic Advancement (AIEA), the Arkansas Small Business Development Center (ASBDC), administratively housed in the College of Business, and the Arkansas Institute of Government (AIOG), located in the College of Public and Professional Affairs. Strategically located at the political, economic, and cultural center of Arkansas, these programs, together with the Donaghey Project, offer state-wide advice on management, public policy issues, economic development questions, and design problems through faculty service and student internships and assistantships.

The Donaghey Project was conceived as one of the means for the university to extend its research-service mission to address problems in the metropolitan environment. Because it is part of the university, it is able to participate actively in setting development priorities because it is without power, authority, and claims to spoils, and because its research capabilities are highly regarded. The Project plays a unique role in focusing and assessing urban issues from multiple perspectives including demographics, economics, cultural history, and design. It provides opportunities for both the liberal and visual arts to respond to the institutional challenge for interaction by means of applied environmental, architectural, and planning design, informed by other disciplines with a strong human or societal dimension.

The primary mission of the Donaghey Project for Urban Studies and Design is to interrelate teaching, research, and service through a process of bringing real world design problems into the classroom and taking the creative research design classroom out into the community. This two-way path of interaction enhances the University's reputation across the state as a serious "can-do" problem-solver while students and faculty are challenged to learn actively through creative team problem solving. For students especially, this is a most valuable experience because active learning requires them to take "ownership" of their academic training and, in so doing, to experience the inter-connectedness of their program of study.

"Students have the right to expect their major to provide a set of learning

experiences that will teach them how to use their field's approaches in pursuing significant questions. They have the right to expect opportunities to integrate the learning... They have the right to expect opportunities and support for relating their learning to their own lives and to significant questions in the world beyond the classroom. Finally, students have the right to expect that all of the capacities and knowledge that they have gained will be assessed, by faculty members, through carefully designed occasions that challenge them to integrate and demonstrate their learning across their specific programs of study." (Challenge, pp. 6-7)

The design of the built environment is a concrete expression of societal values. As a process, it can also be an expression of academic values. One of the most direct means by which an urban university can positively enhance and enrich the urban built environment is through an integrative outreach initiative into the community involving a variety of disciplines.

The Project also encourages active learning through teamwork involving student and faculty teams from diverse disciplines utilizing distinct research methods to solve problems within urban and developing communities. Experiential learning has enhanced the undergraduate experience for both faculty and students, and provided a sense of purpose through service. Through Donaghey sponsored community service internships and assistantships, students have developed a keener appreciation and deeper understanding of their academic training.

### **A Description of the Donaghey Project**

The Donaghey Project is located about five miles from campus in downtown Little Rock. While removed from campus, it is strategically placed in the heart of the city close to architectural firms, City Hall, and the Old State House Museum, the site of Clinton's election night victory speech. The Project is immediately accessible to clients as well as convenient to the various municipal and state agencies that utilize its services. Adjunct faculty from the planning and architectural professions also find the location convenient to their work, and students interning in the center can be easily mentored by design and planning professionals within a few blocks distance from the Project. Future plans call for the addition of a gallery area on the plaza level accessible to the public. The gallery would serve to educate the public through displays of design projects that illustrate both problems and solutions.

The Donaghey Project is a professional program with a few indigenous faculty in the unlikely location of a college of liberal and fine arts. It has three full-time staff as well as several adjunct faculty who teach urban studies and design courses, or courses in the associate degree in landscape management and design that is also housed in the Project. Architects and planners from central Arkansas serve as advisors and participate in critiques of student projects. For urban-issue related courses, it utilizes faculty from disciplines across the campus and the community. This cost-effective and flexible arrangement is one of the great virtues of the organization. The enriching interchange which occurs because liberal arts and design are housed in close proximity within one college is appropriate for our non-traditional student population. The academic program is not so professionally rigid that the value of a liberal arts undergraduate education has been lost. Rather, the methods of inquiry and the "culture" of the humanities and social sciences contribute to more sensitive and contextually inspired design responses.

Several academic programs are offered within the Donaghey Project, two

of which are inter-institutional. One is an associates degree program in landscape design developed in cooperation with the School of Architecture at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville (UAF). The Project also serves as a site for UAF architecture students who need a semester's urban experience to complete degree requirements.

The Project offers an 18-hour Urban Affairs minor within the B.A. in Liberal Arts program. In the Fall of 1993, an 18-hour minor was added in Urban Studies and Design, and a proposal for a masters program with the same title was readied for system approval. The association of the planning and design cluster within the context of a 60-hour Liberal Arts program is unusual. The goal is not to professionalize the undergraduate degree, but to prepare students who have good communication skills, think critically, write well, and have sufficient background experience in computer technology, economics, social sciences, and fundamental design to work effectively at mid-level positions in civic or corporate planning and design offices. A programmatic goal is to prepare students who are empathetic problem solvers — whose designs reveal a sensitivity to the social, cultural, and ecological environments within which they work. A strong liberal arts background with concentrations of study in the social sciences, design, economics, and a humanities discipline enables students to work effectively, utilizing multiple perspectives. These students will leave the university prepared to assume positions in the corporate or public sectors.

### **The Outreach Functions of the Project**

Important for the college, however, is the role the Donaghey Project can play as a vehicle for interaction with our stakeholders which it accomplishes through brokering the necessary expertise to solve specific real-life problems. The Project offers four major assistance programs:

1. small town development assistance
2. strategic planning assistance
3. conferences, symposia, and design workshops
4. advice on social, economic, administrative, design, and environmental issues.

In the first year, under the direction of George Wittenberg, the Project submitted over \$250,000 in grant proposals and received nearly \$60,000 in awards. An essential key to the success of the Project has been the active engagement of the principals in community activities. Jim Mercado, a full-time faculty member of the Project, established the Arkansas Low Income Housing Coalition with assistance from the Rockefeller Foundation and serves on the Affordable Housing Advisory Council of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Dallas. He is also on the city of Little Rock's Comprehensive Housing Affordable Strategies (CHAS) and the State CHAS.

During the 1992-3 year, the Donaghey Project has managed or advised on numerous projects. A few of particular merit are:

- State Hospital Facilities Master Plan. This project called for a comprehensive review of State Hospital facilities to advise on use and development.
- The City of Little Rock asked the Project to develop a signage plan for

- the city which would include routing, type, and style considerations.
- Housing Handbook for Historic Districts. A handbook is being prepared by the city of Little Rock, the Arkansas chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and the city historic preservation program. It will contain useful information about architectural styles and construction guidelines residents in the districts of Little Rock could use as a guide for remodeling projects.
  - The Donaghey Project has assisted the city of Little Rock on zoning issues through mediation of differences and the presentation of information. Their work contributed to the siting of a major expansion of the Post Office in Little Rock.
  - The Donaghey Project was asked by the University of Arkansas System to advise on master planning issues at system sites.
  - The Donaghey Project is consulting on the Main Street Plan in the city of Russellville.
  - The Little Rock Center City Project provides an excellent illustration of how the Donaghey Project works. Center City is a 435 acre 12-block area of Little Rock that had fallen into neglect. Crime was so rampant, the *New York Times* referred to it as one of highest crime areas in the country. Six students and four professors formed a team to work on this project. The student team included four architecture majors, one sociology, and one urban psychology student. The faculty included two urban designers, a psychologist, and a sociologist. Also involved were a city planner, a Central High School teacher, and an administrator from Arkansas Children's Hospital — the latter because the area under study borders these institutions. The group formed a community review task force that met with representatives from the neighborhood to gain a sense of the place and the concerns of the residents. Students had to assemble sets of planning criteria; investigate all other government activity in the area, collect census, crime, transportation, and building permit data; and develop concept plans. The final project was the presentation of a series of renewal concepts or feasibility studies that were reviewed by the faculty as well as representatives from the city and the neighborhood.
  - The City of Little Rock has asked the Donaghey Project to evaluate the expansion of the city's Convention Center and the redevelopment of one of the city's main streets into an arts and entertainment area.

## Challenges

Launching the Donaghey Project has not been without problems and a few cautionary notes are in order. Because it is physically separate from the main campus, better funded than many established teaching-research programs on campus, and more visible to the public, special efforts had to be taken to assure productive relationships were formed between on-campus undergraduate and graduate disciplines and the Project. Academic organization and departmental units based upon disciplines can compartmentalize vision and restrict faculty involvement. Because personnel decisions and annual assessment of faculty performance are largely decentralized with authority vested in departments, traditional faculty interest focuses more on teaching and research than valuing public service. The Project was de-

signed from the outset as an applied research program. Its successful bonding with the academy depended upon the formation of disciplinary linkages and faculty/student involvement in order to develop a pool of expertise needed to respond to the problems brought to the Project. Viewed from the community, the Donaghey Project appeared to have the potential, through consulting work, to intrude into territory that some might consider lies within the purview of the private sector. Nothing dampens the spirit of interaction more than a tax-supported university activity undermining professionals in their place of business.

The director of the Project developed strategies to address these complex issues. To avoid giving the appearance of unfair competition, clear policy guidelines were developed concerning paid and unpaid consulting, and the referral role of the Project. The director was careful to solicit the advice of faculty and other program directors across the campus during the development phase of the Project, inform them of the mission of the Project, and discuss areas of mutual interest where collaboration would be beneficial. Chairpersons and faculty have been invited to the Donaghey Project offices. Scholarships and paid internships for students in disciplines outside the Project were created and faculty have been invited to participate in teaching activities. Incentives include establishing joint faculty appointments between the Project and departments in the college, providing research support for faculty to work on urban issues, co-hosting symposia, providing office space in the downtown location, and developing course offerings for a minor which, when joined with other course clusters in related departments, will meet baccalaureate degree requirements. Thus, the Project has secured a special niche as a teaching, research, and applied scholarship program that can contribute to the teaching and research functions of faculty in other departments.

In order to develop the respect of the community and make manifest the university's commitment to interaction, a prestigious advisory board has been formed composed of members who genuinely reflect the diversity of the metropolitan population as well as a broad range of professional expertise. The Board lends power and credibility to the Project both on and off-campus and enhances the image of the university.

## Summary

The Donaghey Project represents an exciting response to UALR's new definition of itself and its relation to the state. As a metropolitan university, it can respond to urbanization or developmental issues across Arkansas following the tracks previously laid down by county extension agents intent on their land-grant mission. The Project, by virtue of the diverse problems it tackles, depends upon a diverse faculty working within it. As an academic program, the Project, by stressing active problem solving within teams in upper division course work, has added value to the undergraduate experience at UALR. The service role of the design outreach program provides the students with a sense of personal accomplishment through service, and ownership of their educational experience. The university benefits because it is able to point to specific projects in which the university and its faculty and students have made a difference. For faculty, as well, the Donaghey Project has broadened the criteria defining research so to include active scholarship through the application of teaching and research to serve societal needs. By uniting the resources found across campus with those in the community and at other professional programs in the state, the university can embrace the challenge described by Ken-

neth Eble as quoted in *Scholarship Reconsidered*: "Do less longing to arrive at the higher goals of academe and more about making wherever you are a liveable and interesting and compassionate community."

NOTE: The author wishes to express appreciation to several individuals who have contributed suggestions and information: Paulette Bell, Cheryl Patterson, Malissa Trantham, and George Wittenberg.

### ***Suggested Reading***

Adamany, David. "The University as Urban Citizen," *Educational Record*: Spring, 1992, 6-9.

Association of American Colleges. *Liberal Learning and the Arts and Science Major I: The Challenge of Connecting Learning*. Washington, D.C., 1991.

Association of American Colleges. *Liberal Learning and the Arts and Sciences Major III: Program Review and Educational Quality in the Major*. Washington, D.C., 1992.

Boyer, Ernest L. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990.

Fuhrmann, Barbara S. and R. A. Armour. "Assessing the Liberal Outcomes of Professional Education." *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum* 3:3 (1992) 44-52.

Gilley, J. Wade. *The Interactive University: A Source of American Revitalization*. Washington, D.C.: American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1990.

Gilley, J. Wade. *Thinking About American Higher Education*. New York, N.Y.: American Council on Education and Macmillan Publishing Co., 1991.

Jeavons, Thomas. *Learning for the Common Good: Liberal Education, Civic Education, and Teaching about Philanthropy*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1991.

Lynton, Ernest A., and Sandra E. Elman. *New Priorities for the University: Meeting Society's Needs for Applied Knowledge and Competent Individuals*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987.

Morrison, Jack, *The Maturing of the Arts on the American Campus: A Commentary*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc., 1985.

Sweet, David C. "Urban Extension in the Decade Ahead: Collaboration, Competition, or Contraction." *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum* 4:2, (Spring, 1992), 35-45.