

# Building Franklin's Truly Democratic, Engaged University: Twenty Years of Practice at the University of Pennsylvania

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## Abstract

*Benjamin Franklin founded the University of Pennsylvania as a secular institution with the pragmatic aim of instilling in its students the inclination and ability to serve humankind in both the civic and mercantile realms. On this, the three hundredth anniversary of his birth (1706-2006), Franklin's ideal of a democratic, engaged university has finally begun to bear fruit. This article reflects on twenty years of experience and describes the University of Pennsylvania's progress toward and challenges to achieving Franklin's dream.*

Benjamin Franklin had a dream. Having studied history intensely and reflected thoughtfully on his own life experiences, he became convinced that “nothing is of more importance for the public weal, than to form and train up youth in wisdom and virtue” (Best 1962, 162-164).<sup>1</sup> In 1749, therefore, he proposed that the flourishing, cosmopolitan, city of Philadelphia establish a startlingly innovative institution of higher education to “obtain the advantages arising from an increase of knowledge.” Radically differing from existing institutions of higher education in America or Europe, the College of Philadelphia (later the University of Pennsylvania and commonly referred to as Penn) was conceived as a secular institution dedicated to the advancement of scientific learning and knowledge for the benefit of humanity.

Franklin's ideas were expansive and unconventional. He argued vociferously against using Latin and Greek as languages of instructions.

he wrote that they were the “chapeau bras” of learning, like the hat carried by an elegant European gentlemen [sic], a hat never put on the head for fear of disarranging the wig, but always carried quite uselessly under the arm (Best 1962, 14-15).

Rather than assisting a very small number of upper class students in becoming cultivated and socially prestigious gentlemen in a highly stratified society, Franklin proposed to educate a large number of non-elite students in a socially mobile, rising

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Franklin to Samuel Johnson, August 23, 1750.

middle class society, who would possess both the “Inclination” and the “Ability” to “serve Mankind, one’s Country, Friends and Family.” Two leading American historians (Charles and Mary Beard) glowingly characterized the institution Franklin founded: “To suggest that it anticipated the most enlightened program evolved by the liberal university of the late nineteenth century is to speak with caution; in fact, it stands out like a beacon light in the long history of human intelligence” (Beard and Beard 1930, 173).

As Edward Potts Cheyney regretfully observed in his magisterial *History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1740-1940*, the college Franklin envisioned would have provided “an education for citizenship” and led to “mercantile and civic success and usefulness.” We say “regretfully observed” because Cheyney concluded his summary on a somber, critical, note: “It is unfortunate that it was never tried” (Cheyney 1940). The vision departed too radically from traditional conceptions of higher education to be embraced by the elites whose support was mandatory to establish a college in Philadelphia. Ever the pragmatic realist, Franklin yielded to their demands hoping his ideals would prevail over time (Hoeveler 2002; Pangle and Pangle 1993).

In this, the three hundredth anniversary year of his birth, we believe Franklin would be pleased to see that his ideal of a truly democratic, engaged university is beginning to bear fruit. This article, then, offers a reflection on twenty years of experience, describing how Penn has conceptualized and structured this work and pointing to some of the significant challenges to achieving Franklin’s dream.

## **Defining Engagement**

The term, “engaged university” was coined in 1994 by Russell Edgerton, then president of the American Association of Higher Education. It was popularized by Ernest Boyer, the highly influential president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, who substituted “scholarship of engagement” for “scholarship of application,” (Boyer 1996) the term originally used in his seminal work, *Scholarship Reconsidered* (Boyer 1990). During the 1990s, Boyer called on American colleges and universities to pursue a broader public purpose. If ivory towers, walled off from the external world of practical affairs, occupy one pole of a continuum, then truly engaged universities occupy the other. Not content to merely prepare students for successful careers, engaged universities cultivate a sense of professional responsibility—serving the common good rather than the individual pocketbook. At such institutions knowledge production is accounted for not in numbers of publications in prestigious journals and national academy memberships but in the evidence of real world problems mitigated or resolved by scholarly expertise. As institutional citizens, engaged universities democratically partner with local organizations and elected officials to build safer, economically stronger, and culturally more vibrant communities.

If we take a long, hard look at how American universities have actually developed and how they function today, it becomes painfully obvious, of course, why the notion of a truly engaged cosmopolitan civic university can only be treated as an ideal—even

utopian concept. American universities (alas, including Penn) are complex organizational systems that can be ferociously conflictual and astonishingly unintegrated. Nevertheless, the purpose of ideal types is to provide a standard which enables us to make relevant systematic observations which help us estimate the extent to which social reality approximates or diverges from that standard.

## **What Promotes or Impedes Efforts to Institutionalize Engagement?**

A number of factors tend to hinder engagement efforts. First, colleges and universities are “loosely coupled” organizations (Weick 1976). Each is divided into various schools, which are divided further into divisions and then again into departments populated by autonomous faculty members. This autonomization is the legacy of the German research university model, and though differentiation has certainly proven to be a useful strategy for developing new bodies of knowledge, it has splintered the faculty. Further, power is diffuse in loosely-coupled systems. Because the units have specialized knowledge (the board isn’t about to tell the economics department what to teach) change must occur through discussion and persuasion rather than command. Though the board of trustees has broad powers—the president serves at its pleasure and the board has the authority to create or close entire academic programs—it relies on the cooperation of administrators who understand the institution’s inner workings and the faculty, whose expertise must be brought to bear if there is to be any curricular change. This characteristic tends to make institutional efforts to promote significant change (including advancing an engagement agenda) challenging.

A second factor impeding change is that people are distracted with other things. Altering the status quo requires sustained time and effort, and on any campus, people’s attention is the scarcest resource (Hirschhorn and May 2000). This is particularly true of curricular initiatives. Faculty members teach, conduct research, advise, serve on standing committees, write letters of recommendation, mentor young scholars, participate in peer review for academic journals and much more. They, therefore, have precious little discretionary time and are unlikely to spend it on activities viewed as peripheral to normatively defined core duties.

This brings us to the third mitigating factor, Platonization (Benson, Harkavy, and Hartley 2005). Plato advocated the search for theoretical knowledge as the primary end of the academy—knowledge for knowledge’s sake—and the dead hand of Plato is felt even today. The system of peer review tends to reward scholarship in familiar forms and academic disciplines outside of the professions have looked with less favor on “applied” research aimed at addressing local problems. Although Boyer’s ideas have sparked debate at many institutions, it has influenced expectations of scholarly production at comparatively few research universities (Braxton, Luckey, and Holland 2002). Even if a report to the board of a local community-based organization clearly demonstrates disciplinary virtuosity, at the vast majority of universities it does not count as scholarship: small wonder that faculty members, particularly those working

towards promotion and tenure, are cautious about becoming involved. They are bound by “ancient Customs and Habitudes,” the same enemy of educational progress that Franklin pointed to in 1789 (Best 1962, 173).

In our experience, academically-based community service (ABCS) courses take considerably more time to design and implement than “traditional” courses. Though good teaching is valued, promotion and tenure decisions are largely governed by assessments of scholarship and research productivity. This presents a conundrum for faculty who wish to partner with community members. Each discipline has the capacity to speak to real-world problems. However, such problems are highly complex and interventions are unlikely to yield measurable (and therefore “publishable”) results in the short-term. Thus, engaged scholarship is something of a risky proposition for assistant professors. Absent publications, in the minds of faculty colleagues, community-based work falls squarely under the category of “service,” a vastly subordinate consideration in the calculus of promotion and tenure at Penn. It is, therefore, not surprising that the majority of faculty involved in such research or teaching Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) courses are already tenured.

Finally, it should be noted that some scholars question the propriety of pursuing a civic engagement agenda. Institutionally, this is summed up in the comment made by a senior administrator at one institution we have visited: “This is a university, not a social service agency.” Although a recent survey of 32,840 faculty found that 60 percent believed it is important to “prepare students for responsible citizenship” and one in five (21.7 percent) reported that they had taught a service-learning course in the past two years (Lindholm et al. 2002), others contend that higher education ought to focus solely on conveying knowledge and skills—enhancing written and oral communication, fostering critical thinking, and developing familiarity with the precepts of a particular discipline. What students choose to do with this knowledge (or whether they do anything at all) is, from such a perspective, immaterial—beyond the scope of higher education (Fish 2003). The idea of value neutrality is a potent inhibiting force. The German university model and its ethos of “value freedom” in research heavily influenced academic norms and helped to de-emphasize higher education’s role in shaping students’ values (Reuben 1996). Historians Lee Benson and Ira Harkavy note that

“[although] ‘value-free’ advocates did not completely dominate American universities during the 1914-1989 period...they were numerous enough to strongly reinforce traditional academic opposition to real-world problem-solving activity, and they significantly helped bring about the rapid civic disengagement of American universities” (Benson and Harkavy 2002, 13).

Thus, promoting change as inherently value laden as civic engagement requires a shift not only in organizational structures but also in the very norms that shape institutional life (Hartley 2003).

Susan Ostrander's (Ostrander 2004) research in this area focuses on four essential points. First, a civic engagement initiative will differ from institution to institution. One campus may see its central project as making curricular change while another may emphasize the importance of building equitable partnerships with community organizations. Second, certain "local factors" tend to support or impede civic engagement—a distinctive mission, a consensus that the curriculum needs to be revitalized, a faculty that is actively involved in institutional decision-making. These unique elements must be identified and addressed for institutionalization to succeed. Third, a successful initiative requires the development of a convincing intellectual rationale that explains how the effort will result in better teaching and scholarship. Fourth, new organizational structures must be built to sustain the initiative and these structures not only must support the work within the campus (that is, the faculty and students) but also serve community partners.

In our experience at Penn, the institutionalization of civic engagement is the product of both structural and ideological change. No band of idealistic enthusiasts can spur broad-based change if they cannot secure adequate resources. However, structural elements such as the creation of the Center for community Partnerships and the establishment at several schools of senior academic affairs positions dedicated to community outreach will yield few results if people's values and priorities don't change. Structure and ideology are the twin drivers of institutionalized change (Hartley, Harkavy, and Benson 2005).

## **Towards a Meaningful Engagement**

Two decades ago, Penn's relationship with the West Philadelphia community was tenuous and even contentious. A number of historical events contributed to this state of affairs; we will offer only three here. During an ill-fated effort at urban revitalization during the mid-1950s and 1960s, Penn began expanding into existing residential areas. It purchased and demolished the adjoining neighborhood of "Black Bottom." This event proved to be a powerful and enduring symbol for many, of the University's indifference to community needs and interests. In the 1980s, Penn was embroiled in a very public lawsuit mounted by a public interest group over scholarships Penn provided to graduates from city high schools. A vaguely worded provision made the total number of recipients unclear. Penn found itself in the unenviable position of arguing to constrain the number of scholarships. For nearly a year, Penn was characterized in the news as an elitist, self-interested ivory tower. Finally, Penn's weak financial situation throughout the 1980s made significant investment in West Philadelphia a politically untenable priority for prior presidents.

Despite these challenges, in 1992, Sheldon Hackney at the end of his presidency founded the Center for Community Partnerships (CCP). CCP was created to serve as the University-wide structure for coordinating student and faculty involvement in West Philadelphia. The use of the term "partnerships" in the Center's name was not accidental. It was meant to convey Penn's recognition of its interdependence as one institutional citizen participating jointly in the civic life of West Philadelphia with

others. Within the University community, CCP symbolized a presidential commitment to realigning the efforts of the University to better serve its neighbors.

In 1994, the board of trustees selected Judith Rodin to succeed President Hackney. Rodin had grown up in West Philadelphia and attended Penn as an undergraduate. President Rodin had gone on to enjoy a distinguished academic career culminating in her role as provost of Yale University. The board of trustees selected Rodin because of her commitment to rejuvenating undergraduate education and improving Penn's local environment. To that end, Rodin established the Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education and charged it with designing a model for Penn's undergraduate experience in the twenty-first century. The Council's charge emphasized the action-oriented union of theory and practice and "engagement with the material, ethical, and moral concerns of society and community defined broadly, globally, and also locally within Philadelphia." It proved to be a critically important venue for building a compelling rationale for Penn's engagement in West Philadelphia.

A highly publicized murder of a student in 1996 prompted the University to move forward expeditiously. Under Rodin, significant changes were made to the administrative structure of Penn. The Board of Trustees created a standing committee on Neighborhood Initiatives whose chair serves on the Executive Committee of the Board. The position of Vice President for Government, Public and Community Affairs was created whose office serves as the University's primary contact with city, state, and federal officials. The office facilitates close positive interactions between Penn and governmental entities and also acts as an important conduit of information when complex or contentious issues arise. CCP's director reports to the Vice President, the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and has a dotted line reporting relationship to the provost. Thus, CCP bridges the world of administrative and academic affairs. The University currently supports ten full-time "core" staff members at CCP. However, the Center has actively pursued external funding to support its work and currently has thirty-five grant-supported staff members. In fact, from 1998 to 2006, fully 60 percent of CCP's operating expenses have been covered by grants and contracts.

An Office of Facilities and Real Estate Services was formed through the merger of two other offices to coordinate the purchasing, development, and sale or rental of off-campus real estate. The Graduate School of Education began working with the Philadelphia School District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers to plan a new University-assisted elementary school. Monthly meetings were also held with University officials and members of neighborhood organizations and civic groups to discuss ongoing plans, and open community meetings were also held to encourage dialogue. Overall, Penn's aggressive economic revitalization program had a significant impact on West Philadelphia:

- Penn made the decision to actively seek the patronage of local suppliers. By 1996, Penn purchased \$20.1 million from West Philadelphia businesses and by 2003 that number had grown to \$61.6 million.
- The construction of a \$95 million Sansom Common retail and hotel facility and a multi-million dollar biomedical research building that relied heavily on local and

minority labor. In the short-term 170 new construction jobs were created and, later, more than two hundred permanent jobs were created and filled by West Philadelphia residents.

- Penn purchased twenty abandoned homes, refurbished them and resold them at or below cost to ensure that local families would be able to purchase them.
- Between 1998 and 2004, 386 homes were purchased through a mortgage program for Penn employees to encourage them to purchase homes in the area and 75 percent had mortgages less than \$150,000.
- A Home Improvement Program for existing homeowners in West Philadelphia provided a \$7,500 interest-free matching loan to be used for exterior improvements. The loan principal was then forgiven at 20 percent annually over a five-year period provided the borrower continued to maintain the home as a primary residence. A total of 147 households participated from 1998 to 2004.
- Crime reports from Penn's division of public safety indicate that overall crime has dropped 40 percent: robberies 56 percent, assaults by 28 percent, burglaries by 31 percent and auto thefts by 76 percent.

In 2004, President Rodin was succeeded by Amy Gutmann, a highly distinguished political philosopher whose scholarly work has explored the role universities play in advancing democracy and democratic societies. In her inaugural address, President Gutmann unveiled the three-fold "Penn Compact," the third element of which is local and global engagement:

The third principle of the Penn Compact is to engage locally and globally. No one mistakes Penn for an ivory tower. And no one ever will. Through our collaborative engagement with communities all over the world, Penn is poised to advance the central values of democracy: life, liberty, opportunity, and mutual respect. Effective engagement begins right here at home. We cherish our relationships with our neighbors, relationships that have strengthened Penn academically while increasing the vitality of West Philadelphia.<sup>2</sup>

## **Curricular Engagement**

Penn's engagement efforts are also evident in its curriculum. An evaluation of the Center's efforts from 1996-1999 for the Kellogg Foundation and a recent self-study as part of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's pilot initiative on developing a community engagement classification, recognizes a significant growth in the number of Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) courses and participating faculty members over the past decade. In 1991-92 three faculty members offered four ABCS courses to approximately one hundred students. In 2004-2005, there were sixty-two ABCS courses (forty-six undergraduate and sixteen graduate) offered at the University by forty-five faculty members from nineteen departments at the school of arts and sciences and seven other schools at the University. This academic year, 1,446 students participated in ABCS courses and fourteen faculty

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.upenn.edu/secretary/inauguration/speech.html>.

members have submitted ABCS course development grant proposals for the 2006-07 academic year.

Although schools work closely with CCP on an array of projects, they also have launched engagement efforts of their own. For example:

- **The Law School** was the first in the nation to establish a mandatory pro bono requirement and the first law school to win the American Bar Associations Pro Bono Publico Award for its Public Service Program. Students must complete seventy hours of pro bono work in order to graduate (participation is non-credit bearing.) Penn students work with practicing attorneys in such diverse areas as bankruptcy law, civil rights and constitutional law issues, environmental justice, family law, governmental practice, health law, immigration, international human rights law, labor law, women's issues and youth. The explicit goal of the program is to instill in students a commitment to public service. In 2004, a total of 710 students participated in the program and 71 percent of the students performed more than the required seventy hours.
- **The Medical School** is initiating a program as part of its required course in doctoring, which pairs each medical student with a West Philadelphia patient. The expectation is that the student will work with this patient for several successive years.
- **The School of Arts and Sciences** recently adopted a new general education curriculum. The curriculum and its degree requirements will be in place for students that matriculate in fall 2006. The goals of the new curriculum are to foster the development of graduates who are "broadly-educated people, who have acquired the knowledge, skills, and inclination that will enable them to embark on a lifetime of learning; to assume positions of leadership in their chosen careers; to be independent, creative thinkers; to be able to adapt to rapidly-changing circumstances; *and to become thoughtful, engaged citizens of their community, nation and world.*" Dean of the College, Dennis DeTurck notes that the new curriculum, for the first time, will allow ABCS courses to be used to fulfill some of the distribution requirements.
- **The School of Dentistry:** Each year, approximately five hundred dental students are required to take an ABCS course.
- **The School of Nursing:** Each year, approximately five hundred undergraduate nursing students (as well as the majority of Masters students) are required to take courses with clinical components that directly serve the people of West Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup>
- **The School of Social Policy and Practice:** August through June, students enrolled in the Masters of Social Work program full-time spend three days a week (seven to eight hours per day) in community settings. Part-time students are in community settings, during the same calendar period, two days a week (for about eight hours per day) during two of their three years of the part-time program. Overall, about 250 full-time and part-time students are in community agencies for a total of about nine hundred hours per year academic year per student.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.nursing.upenn.edu/clinical\\_practices/education/](http://www.nursing.upenn.edu/clinical_practices/education/)

- **The Wharton School of Business:** All of Wharton’s entering undergraduates (approximately 650 each year) must take Management 100. A distinguishing feature of this course is a community-service project. The goal of the course is to encourage students to learn about the nature of group work and to foster leadership, teamwork, and communication. The American Association of Higher Education designated the course as “exemplary” for its ability to encourage students to integrate what they are learning both inside and outside of the classroom.

If we include these, the total number of students engaged in academically-based community service swells to nearly four thousand students per year—almost a quarter of all Penn students.

## **Problem Solving in West Philadelphia and at the Sayre School**

Taken together, these activities have brought together numerous faculty, students, and community members in important work for the mutual benefit of West Philadelphia and Penn. However, mounting a coordinated effort to address community issues poses a significant challenge, one aptly summed up in the dictum: communities have problems, universities have departments. Nevertheless, Penn’s work with local public schools suggests that one way to begin building connections across departments is to work on community issues that require the expertise of many.

We believe that truly democratic partnerships between universities and schools are a potentially powerful strategy for changing communities, schools, and higher education itself. But it is no easy task. The partnerships Penn has established with community organizations and public schools in Philadelphia represent the fruits of two decades of collaboration. CCP, together with its partners, has sought to create University-assisted community schools that serve as centers of education and engagement and serve students, their parents, and other community members. Young people at each of these schools are engaged in creative work designed to advance their skills and abilities through service to their school, families and community. At Penn, students and faculty are also engaged in service-learning that entails the development and application of knowledge to solve local problems along with active reflection on the impact of their work.

University-assisted community schools are predicated on the notion that assisting struggling schools requires community change and community mobilization. In sum, good schools require good neighborhoods. However, such broad-based action is possible only through democratic partnering (Benson and Harkavy 2001). This insight is hardly unique. For example, the Coalition for Community Schools has grown from five partner organizations in 1997 to 170 today, including major education, youth development, family support, and community development organizations. We recognize the reciprocal nature of this work—both educational institutions and the community benefit when students are engaged in service and real-world problem

solving. However, for this work to be sustained by the partners, it must be an expression of the core educational mission of the school—teaching and learning.

It is vital to recognize the unique positions of the partnering institutions within the local context. Schools are uniquely positioned to be hubs of service delivery and community organizing because they are in and *belong to* the community. When schools fill this role, they can foster decentralized, democratic, community-based responses to significant community problems. Higher education institutions (and especially research universities) can be a significant source of support to these efforts. Further, because of their status as resource-rich and powerful local institutions (in many cities, institutions of higher learning are the largest private employer) (Harkavy and Zuckerman 1999), they also have the capacity to encourage systemic reform. Although systemic reform often involves the participation of other partners, including local, state and federal government agencies and programs, our focus here is on the university-school components of our community school partnerships.

In recent years, it has been increasingly recognized that lack of accessible, effective healthcare is one of the most serious problems affecting poor urban communities. (Indeed, since Benson and Harkavy began work in 1985, community leaders have consistently pointed to health care as a critical need.) As a result, beginning in the late 1980s, they have been trying, largely unsuccessfully, to develop a sustainable, comprehensive, effective healthcare program at local public schools. In the spring and summer of 2002, however, a group of undergraduates in their academically-based community service seminar focused their research and service on helping to solve the healthcare crisis in West Philadelphia. The students' research and work with the community led them to propose establishment of a health promotion and disease prevention center at a public school in West Philadelphia, the Sayre Middle School.

From their research, the students were well aware that community-oriented primary care projects frequently flounder because of an inability to sustain adequate external funding. They concluded that for a school-based community healthcare project to be sustained and successful, it had to be built into the curriculum at both the university and the public school. Only then would it gain a degree of permanence and stability over time. They proposed, therefore, creation of a health promotion/disease prevention center at a local school that would serve as a teaching and learning focus for medical, dental, nursing, arts and sciences, social work, education, fine arts, and business students. Their proposal proved to be so compelling that it led to the development of a school-based Community Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Center at Sayre Middle School. It is worth noting that one of the undergraduates who developed the Sayre project, Mei Elansary, received the 2003 Howard R. Swearer Humanitarian Award given by Campus Compact to students for outstanding public service.

The school-based Community Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Center at Sayre Middle School was formally launched in January of 2003. It functions as the central component of a university-assisted community school designed both to advance student learning and democratic development and to help strengthen families and

institutions within the community. A community school is an ideal location for healthcare programs; it is not only where children learn but also where community members gather and participate in a variety of activities. Moreover, the multi-disciplinary character of the Sayre Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Center enables it to be integrated into the curriculum and co-curriculum of both the public school and the University, assuring an educational focus as well as sustainability for the Sayre Center. In fact, the core of the program is to integrate the activities of the Sayre Center with the educational programs and curricula at both Sayre Middle School and Penn. To that end, Penn faculty and students in Medicine, Nursing, Dentistry, Social Work, and Arts and Sciences, Fine Arts, as well as other schools to a lesser extent, now work at Sayre through new and existing courses, internships, and research projects. Health promotion and service activities are also integrated into the Sayre students' curriculum. In effect, Sayre students serve as agents of healthcare change in the Sayre neighborhood.

The Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Center at Sayre is connected to a small learning community (SLC) which involves 350 students from grades six through eight. In that SLC, health promotion activities are integrated with core subject learning in science, social studies, math, and language arts. Ultimately, every curriculum unit will have a community education and/or community problem-solving component (usually this will function as the organizing theme of the unit). Given this approach, Sayre students are not passive recipients of health information. Instead, they are active deliverers of information and coordination and creative providers of service. A number of Penn ABCS courses provide the resources and support that make it possible to operate.

The partnership is continually evolving and shifting. There is no Sayre staff member dedicate to the partnership, although a number of Sayre teachers and staff members have been involved in the project on an ongoing basis. Like many urban schools, Sayre has experienced turnover in its teaching staff and school leadership and had to navigate shifts in district priorities. Recently the district has considered changing Sayre's status from a neighborhood school to a magnet school that would draw from across the city, which would have implications for how the "community" being served by the school is defined. The sustainability of the partnership is dependent upon flexibility and communication in order to ensure that the needs of all partners are met.

On the University side, the partnership is supported by CCP Associate Director, Cory Bowman, and five staff members. Dr. Bernette Johnson, Senior Medical Officer and Associate Dean of Community Outreach and Diversity for Penn's medical school, leads a committee of faculty members involved in the partnership. The committee is beginning to define specific issues (e.g. college access) that might tie the initiatives of multiple faculty members together. It is also designing an evaluation program in order to better gauge the impact of existing programs.

Currently, hundreds of Penn students (professional, graduate and undergraduate) and dozens of faculty members, from a wide range of Penn schools and departments, work

at Sayre. The participants in these efforts are simultaneously involved in academic research, teaching and learning. They are practicing specialized skills and developing, to some extent at least, their moral and civic consciousness and democratic character. And since they are engaged in a highly integrated common project, they are also learning how to communicate, interact, and collaborate with each other in wholly unprecedented ways that have measurably broadened their academic horizons and demonstrated to them the real value of working to overcome disciplinary tribalism. At Penn, successful, concrete, real world problem-solving has spoken louder and more convincingly than abstract exhortation.

## Conclusion

We are still a good distance from fulfilling Franklin's dream. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina vividly revealed in New Orleans what Jonathan Kozol (2005) terms "the shame of the nation," the daily disasters of extreme poverty, persistent deprivation and pernicious racism that fester in the shadows of some of the nation's foremost institutions of higher learning, including our own. Four neighborhoods quite proximate to our campus (Belmont, Haverford North, Mantua, and Mill Creek) have higher poverty rates per person (40 to 43 percent) than New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward (36 percent). Both West Philadelphia and New Orleans have fully one-quarter of their populations living below the federal poverty line; and in both locations the median income is far less than the national median.<sup>4</sup>

Inspired by President Gutmann's vision for Penn articulated in the Penn Compact and the promising experience at Sayre, the Center for Community Partnerships has recently made several significant changes. CCP's national advisory committee and its faculty and student advisory boards have drafted and submitted reports to Penn's Dean of the College forcefully advocating Problem Solving Learning (PSL) as a new curricular emphasis. Problem-Solving Learning (PSL) is a comparatively recent pedagogic initiative. It is conceptually close to Problem-Based Learning (PBL) which has been employed in professional schools for three decades, having originated at the medical school at Canada's McMaster University. But Problem-Solving Learning is different in that the focus is on addressing a pressing problem in the real world. Further, CCP's faculty advisory board reconstituted itself into various sub-groups focused on particular issues of particular importance to West Philadelphia (e.g. public schools, health). These sub-groups will work closely with community members to define critical problems whose resolution requires the partnership of multiple members of the Penn and West Philadelphia communities. Finally, CCP board members and leaders of West Philadelphia community organizations are now developing a long-range, truly comprehensive project aimed at fulfilling the Penn Compact. The project was described recently at a planning meeting under the following title: "A University-Community Continuing Commission to Overcome Poverty, Racism, and Crime in West Philadelphia: What More Should Penn and West Philadelphia Community

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<sup>4</sup> Source for Data: Philadelphia City Planning Commission and [www.gnocdc.org](http://www.gnocdc.org).

Organizations Do Collaboratively Than They Have Done in the Past and Are Now Doing?”

To summarize this Franklinian essay on what Penn has been doing to build a truly engaged university for the twenty-first century, we think it instructive to cite two leading American academics. In effect, they brilliantly updated Franklin’s fundamental proposition that knowledge is wisdom only when it is *effectively used* for the satisfaction of human needs. To quote rather than paraphrase them, they forcefully asserted:

*The truth of a scientific proposition, finding, or an abstract ethical principal is not a static property inherent in it. Truth happens as the result of the management of human affairs. It becomes true, is discovered and made true by actions.... Knowledge cannot be separated from the process of its implementation.... Truth is knowledge that is gained through the process of implementation. Truth is thereby not only equated with implementation, but it is only said to have occurred, or resulted when implementation has occurred. [Emphasis in the original.]* (Churchman and Mitroff, 1998).

We believe, and have seen, that Penn working with community partners can yield knowledge derived from real-world problem solving. Our hope is that an expanded effort can make Penn a co-participant in creating a better life for all the people of West Philadelphia. That will be the final measure of our success.

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