



Perspectives From the Field

Journal:	Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education
Article Title:	<i>Perspectives From the Field</i>
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Volume and Issue Number:	<i>Vol. 8 No. 3</i>
Manuscript ID:	<i>83006</i>
Page Number:	<i>6</i>
Year:	<i>2005</i>

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is a refereed journal concerned with publishing scholarly and relevant articles on continuing education, professional development, and training in the field of social welfare. The aims of the journal are to advance the science of professional development and continuing social work education, to foster understanding among educators, practitioners, and researchers, and to promote discussion that represents a broad spectrum of interests in the field. The opinions expressed in this journal are solely those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the policy positions of The University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work or its Center for Social Work Research.

Professional Development: The International Journal of Continuing Social Work Education is published three times a year (Spring, Summer, and Winter) by the Center for Social Work Research at 1 University Station, D3500 Austin, TX 78712. Journal subscriptions are \$110. Our website at www.profdevjournal.org contains additional information regarding submission of publications and subscriptions.

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ISSN: 1097-4911

URL: www.profdevjournal.org

Email: www.profdevjournal.org/contact

Perspective From the Field—Universities and Community Relations

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Universities, like other large complex institutions, for a long time depended upon community relations specialists to handle on-going dialogue with the community. The specialists invariably were personable, smiling individuals who ran numerous meetings with the university's neighbors.

The specialist became the face of the organization.

The problem with that approach was the specialist could not solve the underlying problems that existed between a university and the community. A more modern approach is that community relations should not be centralized in one person or department. The delivery of services and opportunities to a university's neighbors should be shared by several different venues throughout the organization.

One blueprint for delivering service and opportunity to the community would be to take a holistic approach involving the following:

1. Overlapping Services
 - a. Safety services-patrols that foster a safe university and surrounding community.
 - b. Facilities Management-provide street cleaning, landscape and lighting projects throughout the neighborhood.
2. Academic Enrichment
 - a. Local school consultancies.
 - b. Tutoring by staff and volunteers.
 - c. Scholarship opportunities.
 - d. Service learning opportunities.
3. Physical Plant/Development Management
 - a. In-Put of area residents on all major projects.

- b. Ensuring the development of green space in and around campus.
 - c. Development of a master plan.
 - d. Management of construction execution-ensure street closure and construction debris are kept to a minimum.
 - e. Manage parking around campus.
4. Economic Opportunities
 - a. Job opportunities.
 - b. Business opportunities.
5. Develop a Culture of Respect
 - a. Even in times of disagreement there has to be a respect between the University and Community.

The blueprint above described a holistic comprehensive initiative requiring a diverse cadre of university administrators and faculty and while I cautioned not to centralize these various activities in one person or department, it does remain obvious that a measure of centrality would be required to assure a timely integration and coordination the different services required. The level of coordination and the locus of the authority to bring the services together would require the highest level within the university structure, with the authority to convince or cajole the necessary authorities to cooperate. There is some evidence to suggest that the higher level of authority in the coordinating role, the more probable is a successful outcome of any project's goals.

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