Community and Regional Research in Duluth

by Frederick T. Witzig

As an all-University unit CURA has always been involved in projects and programs in many departments and colleges on the Twin Cities campus, but it has sometimes been difficult to participate as effectively on the coordinate campuses. The answer to this problem may have been found for the Duluth campus with the establishment, in 1985, of the University of Minnesota-Duluth’s Center for Community and Regional Research (CCARR). CURA asked the director of CCARR to write a background piece about this new CURA of the north.

The University of Minnesota-Duluth (UMD) has a history of formal involvement in community and regional studies going back many years. Through the 1970s and early 1980s CURA provided support for numerous projects in Duluth and the surrounding region. Two housing studies were completed in the mid-1970s for the city of Duluth. These examined transient housing and housing for the elderly and were prepared by faculty in the social sciences: William Fleischman from sociology, and Wayne Jesswein and Richard Lighty from economics. Sociologists Robert Franz and William Fleischman helped with the land use study of lands perimeter to the Voyageurs National Park. Geographer Frederick Witzig studied the Duluth City Planning Commission. And in the spring of 1983, CURA joined the City of Duluth and several private donors in supporting the highly innovative Future City Conference chaired by Dale Olsen (political science), then president of the planning commission. This was a six-session symposium that drew on the expertise of nationally recognized professionals to examine issues central to preparing planning strategies for the city.

In addition to these CURA supported research projects, in 1970 the Duluth campus established a bachelor of arts degree program in Urban and Regional Studies. It has been coordinated since its inception by professor Dale Olsen. The program is interdisciplinary in nature, requiring courses from seven fields of study: business administration, economics, geography, history, psychology, political science, and sociology. Policy formation and direction of the program have come from an advisory committee of faculty from these disciplines. The advisory committee has served to promote interdisciplinary cooperation not only in the operation of the B.A. program but in research efforts as well. In the years since it began, the program, through its internships and faculty involvement, has helped establish linkages and promote cooperation between the University campus at Duluth and a wide range of community agencies. The program has not only provided a solid educational component for the UMD curriculum but has also laid the groundwork for greater interaction between the University and the local and regional public agencies in northwestern Minnesota.

The opportunity to combine the degree program and the activities of UMD faculty interested in community and regional research came in 1985 when CURA’s proposal to encourage and support a campus-based regional studies center in Duluth fit nicely with the plans of the College of Liberal Arts at Duluth to include regional studies as one of its major new emphases for faculty and students.

The fundamental objective of the Center for Community and Regional Research (CCARR), which grew out of the CURA proposal, is to provide faculty and students in the social sciences the opportunity to work with community agencies on research projects of local and regional significance. The mission of the center is educational. It enables students to be actively involved in their community while learning specific research skills and general principles of social planning and evaluation. Faculty benefit by having financial support for their research and students to assist them in their work. Community agencies benefit by having access to University resources to assist them in conducting studies related to planning and evaluation. Typically, the center will support up to half the cost of community research projects with funds allocated to the UMD center by CURA.

Since the summer of 1985, the CCARR board has approved twelve projects, seven of which have been completed. Two more proposals are in the planning stage with several more expected by spring quarter. The studies touch on a number of issues and needs in the Duluth area. UMD faculty associated with the research center believe they are clearly responding to one of CURA’s objectives for the 1980s—to expand its outreach to Minnesota communities located outside the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The variety of projects undertaken by CCARR can best be shown by a few examples.

Sport Fishing

Sport fishing in Lake Superior has grown significantly in recent years, both in numbers of participants and in economic importance. A major study of recreational fishing in the lake is now underway. It will provide detailed information about the economic impact of sport fishing in the areas adjacent to the lake and will suggest ways that fish management policies and fish supplies may be modified to meet the demand for sport fishing.

The study is a survey research project with four components. First, an analysis of charter boat business on Lake Superior will be pooled with work recently completed by Michigan State researchers for the Great Lakes waters perimeter to the state of Michigan. This is the first study ever done to determine the size, economic importance,
and geographical distribution of charter boats on Lake Superior. The study will also survey attitudes toward current fish management techniques and how these attitudes correspond with practices that are biologically possible for Lake Superior.

Second, the study will examine the annual trout and salmon derby on the North Shore of Lake Superior. Data will be compared to previous surveys in 1979 and 1983 to provide trend data useful to state fish managers. And third and fourth, anglers in lakes and streams will be surveyed about their 1987 fishing experiences. This part of the survey will yield demographic information, dollars spent on fishing, and attitudes about alternative fish management techniques and strategies that might be used on Lake Superior and its tributary streams.

The study is conducted by William Fleischman (sociology) and Wayne Jesswein (economics) and funded with matching funds from the Normark Company of Minneapolis and in-kind support from the Minnesota Sea Grant Extension Program.

**Duluth Parks and Recreation**

The first study undertaken by CCARR was a survey of public attitudes and perceptions about Duluth's parks and recreation facilities. Conducted for the Parks and Recreation Department of the city of Duluth, the survey work was done during the summer of 1984 and the project report completed in early 1985. Susan Janssen (sociology), Frederick Witzig (geography), and four students met with James McCord, Director of Parks and Recreation, to plan the survey. A random mail survey drew several hundred responses from Duluth citizens.

In 1985 Janssen supervised students in on-site interviews at two Duluth parks as part of a more detailed analysis. Since these studies were completed, the data and accompanying analytical reports have been used in making personnel shifts, maintenance decisions, and park enhancement plans for the city of Duluth. The information was used in developing a long-range mission and vision report for the city, and parks and recreation director McCord has indicated a desire to use the CCARR for future studies, making the findings an integral part of future park planning.

**Police Services**

During the twentieth century the service function of police departments has grown in comparison to their law enforcement function. Yet there has been little research identifying police services and assessing public perceptions of their delivery. CCARR recently began such a study for the Duluth Police Department. John Hamlin and William Fleischman (both from sociology) and Joseph Erchul (an undergraduate majoring in sociology-criminology) are working on the project. They believe the study will make an important contribution to research in the area of police-community relations. At the same time it will provide tangible evidence of the value of social research to a local law enforcement agency seeking to improve its service to the community. Follow-up projects are anticipated, such as a spatial analysis of crime reporting in Duluth and a survey about the effectiveness of the neighborhood crime watch program.

**Manuscript Archives**

Nine years ago the archival materials of the St. Louis County Historical Society were moved to the Northeast Minnesota Historical Center on the UMD campus, through an agreement between the University and the historical society. These materials are housed on the third floor of the library, where the collection is managed by an employee of the society. The archives include a very large manuscript collection identified through a card catalog and loose-leaf notebooks, but requiring laborious and time consuming effort by both attendant and patron to find specific materials when they are needed.

In 1986 CCARR was asked to develop a guide to the manuscript archives. Three UMD students worked on the project, preparing a computer index for the materials. An annotated guide to the collection will also be published. The students gained concrete experience by working directly with the archival materials and the historical center has, for the first time, a useful tool for aiding researchers who need to use these manuscript sources. Roy Hoover (history) and Pat Maus (administrator of the collection) supervised the project.

**New Parents**

Many social researchers consider that the first birth in a family is the most significant developmental transition of the family life cycle. The new role of parent evokes physical, emotional, psychological, and social adjustments that reach into every aspect of the individual's self-concept and lifestyle. The social support network of parents, spouse, relatives, and friends can offer both material and emotional support during this time of transition. But in an increasingly mobile and anonymous society new parents may lack such a network. Can the community take up where the social network leaves off and provide organized support for new parents?

The new parents project is being conducted in cooperation with the Early Childhood and Family Education Program of the Duluth Public Schools. Susan Janssen (sociology) and Suzanne Starr (Hibbing Community College) are examining the effectiveness of the parent-infant classes now provided by the Early Childhood Education Program. Several students are also participating. A survey was designed and mailed to two groups of first-time parents: those participating in the parent-infant classes and a general population of couples giving birth to their first child at Duluth hospitals. Survey results are currently being coded and analyzed.

**Clover Valley History**

CCARR is funding the initial phase of a history project in Clover Valley, a farming
community near Duluth. David Smith (anthropology) states that his general objective is to "comprehend the history of this rural northeastern Minnesota community from its inception to the present. Our research places special emphasis upon cultural and ecological contexts and focuses upon agricultural activity. We are concerned with the nature and types of agricultural activities that have existed, how and why these activities emerged, how these activities were socially sustained, why agriculture underwent historical decline, and the prospects for future agricultural development and redevelopment." Four students are associated with the project at present, doing archival research, cartographic work, and local interviewing. The Clover Valley community enthusiastically supports and cooperates with the project and the local Homesteaders' Club has contributed some matching money for the study.

Projected Studies

These six projects are a sampling of the kind of studies being supported by CCARR on the UMD campus. The diversity of research interests in northeastern Minnesota is further illustrated by two projects still in the planning stage.

One anticipates working with the Voyageurs National Park study on its ambitious cultural history research program. CCARR would study the activities and impact of the Civilian Conservation Corp in the park area. The other is a feasibility study of the diversion of Keene Creek near its union with the St. Louis River. The potential recreational and land use benefits of such a diversion were suggested in a planning study of West Duluth that was recently completed by the city of Duluth.

Institute for Community and Regional Studies

Beginning in July 1987, CCARR became a unit within the newly established Institute for Community and Regional Studies. This institute, along with three others (Interdisciplinary Studies, International Studies, and Women's Studies) was part of a reorganization program launched by Dean Judith Gillespie, who has assumed leadership in the College of Liberal Arts. A number of the programs in the new institute were already established programs that had been housed in the departments or were free-standing programs administered directly by the dean. CCARR had been one of the free-standing units. This new administrative pattern brings related programs and functions together under an institute banner with a budget and a coordinator for each. It should provide opportunities for consolidation and

At the Northeast Minnesota Historical Center on the UMD campus Pat Maus and Roy Hoover initiated a project to index the manuscript archives.
Scene from the Jacobsen farm in Clover Valley where UMD researchers are constructing a history of agricultural activity. Above: Ernie Jacobson in front of the homestead in 1919. Below: Haying time in the late 1920s.

coordination not readily achieved under the previous arrangement.

Four programs are units within the new Institute for Community and Regional Studies: the B.A. Program in Urban and Regional Studies, the Center for Community and Regional Research (CCARR), Northeast Minnesota Historical Center, and the UMD Archaeological Outreach Program.

The B.A. program and CCARR have already been discussed in some detail. The Northeast Minnesota Historical Center is a special research center operated jointly by UMD and the St. Louis County Historical Society. It is unique as a source of information about the economic and social history of Duluth, St. Louis County, and the Arrowhead region. The center is one of eight regional research centers in Minnesota and has direct contact with and support from the Minnesota State Historical Society. The center is important to CCARR's future plans for expanded regional research.

The UMD Archaeological Outreach Program was formally established in CLA in July 1987. It seeks to stimulate public awareness of the region's prehistoric cultures. The program works in cooperation with the state archaeologist, the United States Forest Service's Cultural Resources Laboratory, and the American Indian community to achieve this goal. Lecture and slide programs on prehistoric artifacts and cultures are regularly presented by program staff to public school children and the general public.

The Institute for Community and Regional Studies has an important role to play in the University and the regional community. A primary function of the institute is coordination—linking these four units into an interrelated program of teaching, research, and public service. The CURA supported CCARR is a key element in this new institute since, by its very nature, it draws the academic and larger community together.

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Photos on pages 11, 12, and 13 by Ken Moran.