University-Neighborhood Network brings neighborhood projects to academic classrooms, encouraging faculty, students, and neighborhood activists to work together in solving real neighborhood problems. University-Neighborhood Network (UNN) is a project of NPCR (Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization) developed over the past academic year with support from The Minneapolis Foundation. UNN links neighborhood projects with areas of academic research in order to serve the mutual interests of Twin Cities’ neighborhoods and the colleges and universities participating in NPCR’s consortium. To date, thirty-two projects have been completed for twenty-two Minneapolis and St. Paul neighborhood organizations.

The Pilot Phase
During the 1996-1997 academic year, UNN reviewed action research models, met with college and community representatives, identified and interviewed faculty with an interest in neighborhood-based research, and designed the pilot phase of the UNN program, including a dynamic Web page. Nine university professors agreed to participate in the spring quarter by offering their students the opportunity to complete neighborhood projects as part of their course work. Ten projects were completed for eight neighborhood organizations. One of the projects gathered information about welfare reform and how it would affect the children of the Summit-University neighborhood in St. Paul.

Roger Meyer, Director of Information and Community Services for the Summit-University Planning Council, was worried about the major changes unfolding in the national welfare system. If the social service agencies in his community “put their heads in the...
sand” and did not proactively address these changes, they would have difficulty advocating for clients, restructuring services, and accessing the funding changes needed as the new welfare system took shape. Welfare reform is a social policy change of extreme relevance to the Summit-University community, where a third of the population lives in poverty, including nearly 3,500 children under twelve, according to the 1990 Census.

Sheila Ards, Assistant Professor of Social Policy at the University of Minnesota’s Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, was scheduled to teach a graduate level class on Topics in Social Policy. University-Neighborhood Network linked Ards with Meyer, who presented the need for a resource manual that would explain the changes to the federal and state welfare system and how they could potentially affect the Summit-University community. A team of student researchers, representing six different academic departments at the University,* took on the task with enthusiasm and apprehension, knowing that the information about welfare reform and the community would be a challenge to collect, because the state’s response to the federal changes, the Minnesota-Family Investment Program—Statewide (MFIP-S), was still being ironed out by the state legislature.

Together Ards and Meyer organized visits with Summit-University social service providers and Meyer took the class on a bus tour of the neighborhood to provide the researchers with some background understanding of the Summit-University community. Ards arranged for representatives from public agencies as well as past and current welfare recipients to come and speak to the class. Student teams worked together to research each part of the welfare reform act (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996) and Minnesota’s response to it. They compiled their work into a report—Federal and State Welfare Reform: Implications for Children in the Summit-University Neighborhood.

Most social policy makers agree that child care is critical in moving people from welfare to work. The student researchers identified a child care gap that will make this transition particularly difficult for Summit-University families. They reported an extremely large gap between the number of children who will need child care and the number of spaces available for infants, toddlers, and children with special needs. In addition, Summit-University lacks child care that is located near transportation lines, and care that accommodates alternative work schedules.

To make the findings available to a larger audience, Meyer organized a presentation for local agencies and community members. Nearly forty people attended, including representatives from the YWCA, Ramsey Action Program, and the Youth Service Coordinating Committee, as well as State Representative Andy Dawkins. Over forty copies of the final report were distributed to local agencies to use in anticipating the effects of welfare changes and when writing grant proposals for new services.

Afterward, Roger Meyer evaluated the project results as “extremely useful.” The students provided focused research that neither he nor many of the other agencies would have had time to complete. Their report provided the Summit-University community with the information they needed to manage change. “I enjoyed the students, the process, and the results...More classes should be doing things like this.”

The students were also pleased with their experience. One student commented, “This class provided me the chance to really see public policy in action and the neighborhood focus was a great way to get hands on experience. This type of applied learning is an essential part of a graduate education. The University-Neighborhood Network concept is wonderful and should be continued.” Currently, NPCR is supporting two undergraduate research assistants who are working with Meyer at the Summit-University Planning Council. Their task is to work more directly with social service agencies and residents to document the impact of the welfare changes. They are compiling case studies of MFIP families as they adjust to program changes, a good complement to the policy research done by the students last spring.

The UNN Process

The University-Neighborhood Network acts as a matchmaker between neighborhood organizations, faculty, and students. The process begins when UNN staff follow leads about courses that offer a student research component and are relevant to urban neighborhoods. UNN works within NPCR’s consortium schools to identify such classes. Faculty that teach the classes are then invited to submit their course as part of the network. If they agree, they are asked to provide a course description and define course project parameters. UNN distributes course descriptions to neighborhood organizations in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Interested neighborhoods develop specific projects that will serve their needs and fit within the context of the courses being offered. Prior to the start of the course, faculty and neighborhood liaisons work together to fine tune the project proposals.

Information about courses, neighborhood organization profiles, and project descriptions are placed on UNN’s Web site (http://freenet.msp.mn.us/org/npcr/projects/unn/). At the start of the term, students are invited to choose a project that will both fulfill their course requirements and be of value to the neighborhood. Students, it turns out, are more likely to take on a neighborhood project if someone from the neighborhood comes to the classroom to talk about the project. The UNN Web site is an essential tool for project management. It provides an important point of contact between participants, but in no way does it substitute for the personal interaction that takes place both before and during a project. In person collaboration, on the other hand, is key to the success of these neighborhood projects.

The Network Grows

The network expanded during the summer of 1997 to include the University of St. Thomas and Augsburg College, thirty additional neighborhood organizations, and twelve new faculty. During the fall term last year, thirteen faculty—teaching at the University of Minnesota, the University of St. Thomas, and Augsburg College—offered their students the opportunity to complete a neighborhood-defined project. Classes included undergraduate and graduate-level students and ranged from Research Methods in Sociology to Housing Policy to Community Economic Development to American Labor History. Seven different academic departments participated: Public Affairs; Rhetoric; Design, Housing, and Apparel; Sociology; Political Science; Business/Management Information Systems; and History.
Neighborhood organizations enthusiastically responded to the invitation to suggest projects. Fifty-three were proposed and, of these, twenty-two were completed by students or student groups. Over fifty-five students completed projects for fourteen different neighborhood organizations while earning course credit. One of the classes that UNN matched to neighborhood project proposals was an undergraduate class in sociology at the University of St. Thomas.

Jan Milner, who teaches a course on Sociology of Race and Ethnicity, firmly believes that having students do projects outside the walls of St. Thomas is a necessary fulfillment of the university’s mission as an urban university that is “in and of the city.” By choosing to participate in UNN she hoped that students would learn the core theories of race and ethnicity, become “comfortable having a discussion about race,” pick up something about sociology field research, and provide something of value to the neighborhood. Though traditional classroom teaching methods are more manageable, Milner incorporated applied neighborhood projects into her class as a way of immersing students in the city and expanding their knowledge of racial and ethnic groups in the Twin Cities.

Students in Milner’s classes seldom venture into urban core neighborhoods. She chose to work with the Powderhorn Park and Phillips neighborhoods in Minneapolis. In order to introduce the twenty-one students in her Race and Ethnicity class to these communities, Milner organized a field trip. Gayle Lamb, a long-time Powderhorn resident, neighborhood activist, and staff member at St. Thomas, led the students on the trip that included a city bus ride to the neighborhoods and stops at local organizations.

In class, students were assigned to target different racial or ethnic groups in the two neighborhoods: African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, American Indian, Somali, and Southeast Asian. Scott Hawkins, from the Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association, and Tony Looking Elk, of the Minneapolis Human Services Network in the Phillips neighborhood, gave the students background information and a neighborhood contact from their assigned target group. Students met with neighborhood contacts; collected demographic, historical, and cultural information; conducted an interview with a business owner; and attended cultural events sponsored by their assigned target group. Each student group was required to write up their findings in a final report and to create something of value for the neighborhood.

To set an example for her students, Milner organized a Holiday Shopping in the City event. She created brochures and led a group of faculty, staff, and students on an exciting shopping trip down Lake Street on a Saturday in December. Three of the students, assigned to the American Indian community in the Phillips neighborhood, created a Native American Information & Resource Brochure for the Phillips Neighborhood that summarized important demographic statistics about the population. They distributed it to the people and places they visited.

Other student projects included the creation of donation boxes for a Southeast Asian daycare center, which students placed in Southeast Asian businesses, and a flyer for an African American-owned business, which students distributed at St. Thomas.

The class projects in Powderhorn Park and Phillips provided the undergraduate students at St. Thomas with a challenging, “real world” learning experience. Though the project products may have been small contributions to the two Minneapolis communities, the St. Thomas student’s eyes were opened to the values of urban neighborhoods and they now understand the importance of reciprocity when doing community-based research. One student commented, “From day one I approached the entire research experience...
with both trepidation and excitement . . .
Although the initial fears and concerns slowly subsided with the frequency of my visits to this inner-city area, shedding the image of being an outsider plagued me throughout the course of our research.” But, he concluded, “Crossing back over the Lake Street bridge, I no longer view this landmark as a boundary, but rather a link and connection between two metropolitan communities.”

The Benefits of Collaboration
An evaluation of the pilot phase of UNN, at the end of the spring term in 1997, revealed that despite the challenges of cooperation, neighborhoods, faculty, and students were almost unanimously satisfied with their collaborative projects. Thirty-five of the thirty-six participants that completed the evaluation stated that they were pleased with the experience and would recommend participation to their peers.

The evaluation showed that neighborhoods were anxious to collaborate with the University. “Neighborhood organizations do not have enough resources and the UNN provided a resource for a project that we would have not done without the help,” one participant said. Neighborhood staff appreciated being able to delegate a project to students, who worked efficiently and had definite deadlines for completion. They saw student projects as a useful alternative to volunteer efforts that sometimes languish. UNN students freed up staff time to accomplish other important tasks. Eighty-nine percent of the spring neighborhood participants were satisfied with the performance of the students. All of the neighborhoods said they would use UNN again and would recommend participation to another neighborhood group.

For many students, neighborhood projects were time consuming and at times frustrating, but overall they valued the opportunity to have a more practical learning experience and a taste of the challenges of working in the real world. Students cited the opportunity to work on a project that applied course theory to a real situation as a major advantage of UNN. “It gave me more depth and application,” one student said. Students choose neighborhood projects based on their interests, so many noted that they gained a good foundation of knowledge. Seventy-nine percent said that their UNN project experience will influence their future work. Some will use their project as the basis for a thesis or Plan B paper.

UNN has resulted in unexpected projects and more awareness of the field of neighborhood work. In several cases, students, once presented with the idea of applied neighborhood research, contacted the neighborhood organiza-
tion in their community to inquire about needed projects. Other students mentioned that they now understand the depth of work that neighborhood organizations accomplish and would like to get involved as a volunteer. Students also mentioned that the project increased their interest in urban neighborhoods and introduced them to a possible employment field they were unaware of. One student said, "It has increased my interest in urban neighborhoods . . . now I want to move back to the city and get involved."

Faculty were excited to have students working on "real world" projects. They said that working with neighborhoods on applied research projects enhanced the quality of learning that took place in the classroom. Another advantage is "the work done by UNN prior to the start of the quarter in organizing the community projects." Using the network for identifying projects "makes an otherwise difficult task much easier." Instructors commented that UNN gave them an opportunity to expand their community networks. "It is very valuable to have UNN maintain these contacts. (It) makes the university visible and relevant to the community and helps faculty in identifying projects."

Faculty were satisfied with the project proposals created by neighborhoods, but said it is important to work closely with neighborhood liaisons to refine project expectations so that they are realistic for students. The quality of the relationship between the faculty person, neighborhood liaison, and student is an important element to successful projects. Adequate project planning time is needed prior to the start of the term for faculty and neighborhoods to iron out the specifics of a project. UNN hopes that as the roles become clear, relationships between specific neighborhoods and faculty will form and allow for more depth and continued research assistance to neighborhoods. As one neighborhood participant said, "I firmly believe that the University of Minnesota and other colleges have a huge pool of talented people in need of practical experience. This co-operation could bring great resources to our neighborhood so that the relationships are formed and cemented."

Neighborhood Projects in 1998
To date, thirty-two projects have been completed with twenty-two different neighborhood organizations. The total number of neighborhoods that are a part of the network has grown to include forty organizations across Minneapolis and St. Paul. Ninety-three students have complete projects for Twin Cities neighborhoods and twenty faculty have submitted courses to be a part of the University-Neighborhood Network.

During the winter and spring 1998 terms, seven classes at the University of Minnesota and Augsburg College will be participating in UNN. A graduate level course on Strategic Planning and Management has students working with the Bancroft Neighborhood Association to prioritize the neighborhood's strategic planning issues. Undergraduates taking The History of the Twin Cities at Augsburg are working with the Beltrami neighborhood to compile a history of Beltrami as "Minneapolis' Little Italy," while students in Information Systems and Projects, also at Augsburg, are working with the Stevens Square Community Organization to develop a volunteer database.

Eight neighborhoods are collaborating with a graduate level geography class, Urban Geographic Information Systems, taught during spring term at the University of Minnesota. A geography graduate student, supported by NPCR, is working closely with neighborhood groups, students, and instructors on the neighborhood GIS projects. On March 5th, the neighborhood groups attended a neighborhood GIS workshop, where they learned geographic information systems basics and worked to refine project proposals.

The opportunities for classroom and neighborhood collaboration seem to be endless. University-Neighborhood Network staff are already planning for the 1998-1999 academic year. If you are a faculty member, neighborhood activist, student, or just interested in this exciting work, feel free to visit our web site, http://freenet.msp.mn.us/ org/npcr/projects/unn/ or contact Stephanie Otto at 625-0744, e-mail:otto@hhh.umn.edu or Kris Nelson at 625-1020 e-mail: nelso193@tc.umn.edu.

Stephanie Otto is a graduate student in the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota, where she is specializing in social policy and public nonprofit management. She is also working, during the 1997-98 academic year, to help develop the University-Neighborhood Network, following work done by Katya Ricketts in 1996-97. Otto's interest in university-neighborhood collaboration began as an undergraduate at DePaul University where she worked with a team of university and community researchers to evaluate an infant mortality reduction program in Chicago's Grand Boulevard community.
Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization has produced close to ninety reports to date. Most NPCR reports can be viewed at the NPCR Website http://freenet.msp.mn.us/org/npcr. These reports can also be read in the CURA library (330 HHH Center, 301 19th Ave. S., Minneapolis) or ordered by calling 625-5584.

Crime

Economic Development
Lake Street Business Profile for the Powderhorn Park Neighborhood Association and the Lake Street Task Force, 1994, by Terri Peterson, NPCR 1004.
Whittier Alliance Home-Based Business Results, 1995, by John Brothers, NPCR 1029.


Employment
Implementing the Stevens Square-Loring Heights Common Social Services Plan: An Examination of the NiCo Employment Project, 1996, by Courtney Knox, NPCR 1044.

Environment
Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Environmental Profile, 1994, by Jennifer Brown, NPCR 1007.
Columbia Park Environmental Profile, 1995, by Scott Ek, NPCR 1016.
Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Environmental Profile, 1997, by Betsy Carlson, NPCR 1056.
Cooperative Recycling in Dinkytown: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, 1997, by Andy Williams, NPCR 1061.
West Side Community Environmental Inventory, 1997, by Andy Williams, NPCR 1063.


History


Historical Assessment of Holland Community Housing, 1996, by Sandra Paddock, NPCR 1027.


A Brief History of CARAG, 1998, by Nicholas Herman, NPCR 1086.

Housing

Whittier Homeownership Center Targeting Project, 1994, by E. Malaby and T. Brady-Leighton, NPCR 1005.

Summary of Neighborhood Housing Programs Submitted to the Field-Regina-Northrup Neighborhood Revitalization Project, 1994, by Steve Johnson, NPCR 1008.


Neighborhood Housing Condition: Survey Methodology, 1996, by Linda McCarthy, NPCR 1040.


Accessing Housing Data in Saint Paul and Ramsey County, Minnesota, 1997, by Stephanie Kellner, NPCR 1077.


Land Use


Neighborhood Survey


Organizing


Profiles of Successful African-Americans in Our Communities, 1997, by Heather Mickelson, NPCR 1081.


Public Health


Schools


Social Service


Fulton NRP Education Task Force Effective Education/Community Programs, 1996, by Jennifer Gillespie, NPCR 1042.

Licensed Child Care Market in Phillips, 1996, by Oriane Casale, NPCR 1050.


Traffic/Transportation


Central Avenue Parking Inventory, a Part of the Central Avenue Plan, 1997, by Betsy Carlson, NPCR 1059.


NPCR Program Evaluation


THOMAS L. ANDING

Thomas L. Anding, who served as Associate Director of CURA from 1969 until his partial retirement in 1991, died of cancer March 16, 1998, at his adopted home in Tucson, Arizona. Tom was a native son, growing up in and around Lake City and Wabasha, studying geography at the University of Minnesota, and returning to work at the University with the Upper Midwest Economic Study before joining CURA. Like most of us at CURA, Tom had some management duties, but he was more interested in the “real stuff” and he led many of our projects, ranging widely from Minnesota educational reform, to peat management in the northern part of the state, to the evolution of retail trade centers around the region, to rural ground water quality, to planning and transportation issues on Indian reservations. Tom brought two great strengths to his work at CURA: first there was his extraordinary knowledge of and love for the richness and diversity of Minnesota and its people and politics, and second, Tom was one of those rare individuals who knew both intellectually and instinctively how to bridge the gaps between town and gown. Tom’s contributions to CURA and the University are immeasurable and we will miss him.