The new University Northside Partnership (UNP) is one of the few instances in the United States where a major research university is committing important research and teaching resources to a particular community in its own region. The partnership is a collaborative effort to enhance the health, vitality, social well-being, and economic opportunity of the North Minneapolis community (Figure 1). Partners with the University in this effort include the City of Minneapolis; Hennepin County; the Minneapolis School Board; the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board; and various community organizations, including neighborhood associations, nonprofit and advocacy groups, and grassroots organizations. Initially, the partnership will focus on the well-being of children and families, enhancing educational success, encouraging economic development, and assisting community-based organizations.

Although there is currently great interest in the University embarking on a new, unique, and significant partnership with the communities and organizations in North Minneapolis, the fact is the University of Minnesota has had a special relationship with the Northside for many decades, and CURA has played a large role in that story. Since it was established in 1968, CURA has been involved in more than 100 projects on the Northside. The commencement of a new University Northside Partnership provides a useful juncture to reflect on CURA’s experience working with the people, organizations, and communities of North Minneapolis. This article describes how CURA’s work with the Northside has evolved during the past 40 years, examines in detail a contemporary Northside partnership with Juxtaposition Arts, and concludes with a discussion of how CURA’s work fits within and can help inform the work of the University Northside Partnership.

**CURA and North Minneapolis: Collaboration in the Early Years**

The University of Minnesota’s first formal support and outreach efforts on Minneapolis’ Northside began more
than 40 years ago during the 1960s. Modern urban development was rapidly under way in the years following World War II. By the early 1960s, the University was preparing to establish teaching and research programs specifically directed to emerging urban issues such as affordable housing, poverty, and employment opportunities. At the same time, by the mid- and late 1960s, social and political turmoil had become widespread in cities throughout America. This unrest was related to a number of social and political issues, including opposition to the war in Vietnam, increasing racial strife, and the growing Civil Rights movement. Some communities experienced widespread violence—including arsons, shootings, and looting—that at times came close to open warfare. The most dramatic and serious violence took place in larger cities such as Detroit, Newark, Los Angeles, and Chicago, but North Minneapolis experienced its share of urban unrest as well. According to a January 16, 2005, article in the Star Tribune titled “An Era Defined by Defiance,”

In the summer of 1967, Twin Cities police received more than 100 calls predicting the kind of violence here that already had roared through other big U.S. cities. In July, it hit Minneapolis. There were firebombs, looting, shootings and armored police officers marching shoulder to shoulder as Plymouth Avenue businesses went up in flames. Cars were overturned, a white bar owner shot a black man and scores of others were injured. After three days of race riots, more than $420,000 worth of property was damaged, and Gov. Harold LeVander had called up 600 National Guard troops.

Tensions again reached a high (but nonviolent) point during a march through the near Northside following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. the following year, in April 1968.

In this context of rapid postwar urban change and widespread urban violence, the University’s Board of Regents in September 1966, on the recommendation of University President O. Meredith Wilson, authorized the creation of a “Center for Urban and Regional Affairs.” Speaking before the Board of Regents in support of the center, Minneapolis Mayor Arthur Naftalin suggested that the need for attention to urban problems was “total and pervasive.” One regent opined that in 10 or 15 years, the federal government would be giving “as much attention to urban affairs as to national defense.” And the recommendation of a faculty committee that supported establishment of an urban affairs center noted that the University could not remain “an ivory tower” and that the risks a public university takes in helping to resolve complex and sensitive social issues are worth it and, sometimes, necessary.1

In the fall of 1967, incoming University of Minnesota President Malcolm Moos convened the Community University Conference to seek ways to strengthen connections between the University and the community. His interest in University-community engagement included strong support for CURA.2 However, organizational planning and funding for the new center were not resolved until 1968, with the impetus provided by the continued urban uprisings in other cities and our own experience in Minneapolis, which included burned property, citizen marches, and rising tensions in North Minneapolis. Although CURA was formally functioning by March 1968 under the direction of Assistant Academic Vice President Fred Lukermann, CURA did not have an annual operating budget until the 1968–1969 fiscal year, when geography professor John Borchert became director.

The Center for Urban and Regional Affairs was immediately assigned a wide range of activities designed to implement the University’s response to “demands” from the community, primarily from low-income communities and communities of color, many of which were located in North Minneapolis. As Borchert noted in the first issue of the CURA Reporter in June 1970, CURA projects were designed to match community requests with available University resources, to promote pilot and experimental projects, and “to help build successful projects into an appropriate part of the academic or community agency structure.” Early examples of CURA projects included the Martin Luther King (MLK) and Higher Education for Low Income Persons (HELP) programs, which expanded counseling for minority and low-income students; the “Storefront University,” where residents in North Minneapolis and other communities and neighborhoods not previously served by the University could take college-level courses for credit; and the Center for Youth Development and Research (CYDR), which provided training for and research about the problems of teenage youth. The Storefront University delivered more than 40 courses to 1,300 students on the Northside in its first two years, many of them taught at the Pilot City location (now Northpoint, operated by Hennepin County). As the University became better organized to respond to newer community needs, these four experimental programs were transferred to other University departments—MLK and HELP to the General College and College of Liberal Arts, the Storefront University to Continuing Education—Extension, and CYDR to the College of Home Economics. In most cases, they became permanent University programs.

Through the mid-1970s, CURA continued to support minority and low-income communities on the Northside and elsewhere in a variety of ways—providing tutoring for students and adults, preparing instructional materials for public schools, offering vocational opportunities in correctional institutions, and supporting research projects on racial disparities and economic development opportunities. Other CURA projects during this period included the Black Community University Project, the Migrant Tutorial Project, the “Way” Pre-School program, American Indian Education Development project, Model Cities Alternative School, the Afro-American Studies Laboratory, the Business Education for American Minorities program, the Plymouth Avenue Business Study, and Ethnic Studies program development at the University of Minnesota. Many early CURA projects on the Northside were supported through a program originally called CommUniversity Personnel Grants. Later shortened to simply CommUnity, these grants funded a part-time graduate student to provide additional “personnel” to assist with research or technical assistance at community-based nonprofit organizations.

By the mid-1970s, many of the local, state, and (especially) federal programs and funding created to respond to the urban crises of the preceding decade were gone or on their way out as the country found itself in the midst of

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1 Irv Letofsky. “‘U’ Urban Affairs Center Looks Anxiously Ahead.” Minneapolis Tribune. 18 September 1966. np.
serious financial difficulty, best exemplified, perhaps, by New York City’s bankruptcy. One inevitable consequence of the nation’s and Minnesota’s fiscal situation and the resulting cutbacks in programs and funding was the limiting of further growth in University resources devoted to inner-city and urban issues. Nonetheless, CURA, on behalf of the University, continued to develop research and educational projects and programs in low-income and minority communities in the inner cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, including North Minneapolis, throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s.

For the most part, University faculty members and graduate research assistants carried out these projects. However, an increasingly important component of these projects was an emphasis on more active participation by community partners. An emphasis on citizen participation in the decisions that affect their lives is one of the most significant legacies of the intense federal involvement in the urban crisis during the 1960s and early 1970s. This emphasis was embodied in the phrase “maximum feasible participation,” and eventually included requirements in a wide range of federally supported urban programs that citizens must be directly involved in the development and implementation of those programs. There was even a brief period when the federal government cut city and county governments out of the funding process and provided program monies directly to local citizen-led organizations. CURA’s programs reflected these changes and, over time, have increasingly emphasized citizen and community participation. The Community University program was one of the first to formally adopt this philosophy, and CURA’s Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR) program further formalized this concept by linking directly to Minneapolis’ Neighborhood Revitalization Program, which empowered citizens to participate directly in decisions affecting their own communities. Although maximum feasible participation is still not fully realized, this philosophy of citizen participation has become so engrained that today we take it for granted that citizens must be involved in public decisions.

The projects that CURA supported and participated in during the mid-1970s included an examination of housing for American Indians in Minneapolis, development of minority businesses in the Twin Cities, analysis of the housing stock in North Minneapolis and throughout the city, a study of American Indians and African Americans in the criminal justice system, a needs assessment in the Harrison Neighborhood, and an extensive survey of low-income residents in the Twin Cities. By the late 1980s, CURA research projects focused on inner-city Minneapolis and the Northside community had expanded to include studies of problems with absentee landlords, housing development in the Harrison Neighborhood, homelessness in Hennepin County, adolescent parents and mandatory social services, analysis of out-of-home placements for children in at-risk families, and several cooperative projects with the W. Harry Davis Foundation.

Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization on the Northside

In 1993, CURA received a $1.1 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Urban Community Service Program to encourage greater involvement of higher education institutions in their surrounding communities, and Neighborhood Planning for Community Revitalization (NPCR) was born. The NPCR program was established specifically to serve community-based organizations involved in neighborhood revitalization, and involves a consortium of nine schools of higher education in the Twin Cities, with the program’s administrative home at CURA. Following the model of the Communiversity program, community organizations initiate NPCR projects by submitting a brief proposal for a student researcher to provide assistance with a specific project. Students from any of the NPCR member institutions can apply for the position with the community organization. Once the community decides which student can best carry out the project, CURA places them on the CURA payroll. The community determines the purpose of the project and the research product, and supervises the research assistant. Research assistants typically work out of the community office and conduct their research in the community, often with the direct involvement of community members. NPCR projects also engage faculty members as mentors to support the student researcher, offer advice and guidance on research methodology and references, and provide a sounding board for research questions and findings. Students provide the community organization and CURA with a final report that documents the research and findings.3

Since 1994, NPCR has supported more than 40 projects on the Northside

3 Reports from NPCR projects, as well as other CURA publications and reports, can be located online through CURA’s Publications Catalog at www.cura.umn.edu/search/index.php.
with 17 organizations serving all parts of the community. These projects have covered a range of issues from housing conditions to public art and economic development, but all have focused on how the community organization can enhance its capacity to plan and carry out revitalization activities. Community organizations consistently report that these projects have value to their work, with 90% reporting in a two-year follow-up interview that the research was “useful” and a sizeable percentage stating that the research was “catalytic” in initiating new strategies or programs. This indicates that the program is achieving its goal to “enhance the capacity of community organizations to undertake revitalization planning and program development.”

In 1997, CURA recognized that with the growing interest in and support for service learning on campus, University courses offered another resource to serve community organizations. The challenge was to help connect community organizations with specific project needs with faculty members teaching courses that could meet these needs through course-based student projects. The result was the University Neighborhood Network (UNN, online at www.unn.umn.edu), which provides a Web interface to facilitate these partnerships. Faculty are able to post their course-based student-project opportunities online, where community organizations can locate project opportunities that meet their needs. Community organizations can then submit their project proposals online for consideration by the faculty instructor and students in the class. Each year, UNN facilitates some 40 course-based projects in departments ranging from history and landscape architecture to computer science and photography. Recent projects on the Northside include creating GIS maps for community organizations to assess a variety of program activities and plan new projects and assessing the impact of predatory lending practices.

Faculty participating in UNN projects report that their students are highly motivated and challenged by community projects and the opportunity to apply their learning in the community. Community organizations are impressed by the professionalism of the students and the value of the students’ work to their organization. Moreover, UNN has helped engage students and faculty who previously had little knowledge of or experience with North Minneapolis. Students who only know of the Northside from news reports frequently indicate how surprised they are by the level of commitment residents and organizations have to the revitalization of their community.

In addition to student involvement in community-based projects through NPCR and UNN, CURA has long supported faculty engagement in community research through the Faculty Interactive Research Program (FIRP). One of CURA’s most important programs for more than 20 years, FIRP provides direct support for University faculty research projects that involve engagement with community and public organizations and agencies throughout Minnesota. Many of these projects have directly or indirectly involved Minneapolis’ Northside or issues important to Northside communities. Recent projects related to the Northside include the following:

- a study of safety issues in middle schools
- the problem of subprime lending and foreclosures
- childcare demand and affordability
- the development and assessment of midnight basketball programs
- the impact of extended day/year schedules and community volunteers on school performance
- the psychological and situational predictors of successful transitions from welfare to work
- multicultural perspectives on family involvement in children’s learning
- teacher preparation for classrooms with diverse student populations
- the spatial mismatch between where jobs are located and where people live
- the impact of class size on student achievement
- academic risk and resiliency among homeless or “highly mobile” children

Case Study: Juxtaposition Arts

In 2002, CURA began an association with Juxtaposition Arts that has evolved into a continuing partnership. The story of this partnership provides an excellent example of the type of community engagement that CURA’s approach to University-community collaborations makes possible.

Juxtaposition Arts was founded in 1995 with a mission to “empower youth and the community to use the arts to actualize their full potential.” Started with a $1,500 grant to support an after-school arts organization for youth from a North Minneapolis public housing project, Juxtaposition Arts has grown into a nationally recognized community arts organization now serving more than 600 young people annually.

In addition, the organization now plays an important role in the revitalization of West Broadway, a major commercial artery in North Minneapolis. West Broadway starts in North Minneapolis near the Mississippi River and adjacent industrial area, crosses Interstate 94, and continues to the western border of Minneapolis. The street is lined with aging commercial buildings. One of the most significant recent developments is a strip-style shopping center, Hawthorne Crossings, which abandoned the street front by placing a block-long surface parking lot along the sidewalk. Target closed its doors on West Broadway due to low sales in this low-income community, and because customers from outside the community avoided the store due to the community’s reputation for criminal activity. A major grocery store has now replaced Target and is the only major grocery serving all of North Minneapolis.

The challenge of revitalizing West Broadway was noted in a November 4, 2003, Star Tribune editorial titled “West Broadway: Bringing It Back to Life,” which noted that, “More than any other commercial street in the Twin Cities, West Broadway retains a scary feeling of abandonment.” In 2001, Juxtaposition Arts purchased and began developing a corner of West Broadway and Emerson Avenue. This corner is the nexus for the Hawthorne, Jordan, and Near North neighborhoods. Juxtaposition Arts purchased three storefronts and transformed one of the buildings into their studio/exhibition, classroom, and organizational office space to grow their program.

To help plan for the use of the other two storefront buildings, Juxtaposition Arts applied to NPCR in the fall of 2003 and was approved for a graduate research assistant to help with the project. The organization chose a talented University of Minnesota landscape architecture student, Satoko Muratake. Muratake conducted demographic and historical research for the West Broadway area. She also reviewed the many plans that had accumulated over the years to revitalize the avenue. She began to realize that what happened on the street had a greater impact than the uses to which
The buildings might be put. Thus began what became known as “Remix: Creating Places for People on West Broadway.” The idea of expanding their purview to the public street resonated with Juxtaposition Arts since much of their program involved public art. Over the years, the organization had created many street murals (including the well-known cows mural on the Kemps building on West Broadway). Muratake sought the advice of landscape architecture faculty and began to solicit their involvement.

The scale of the challenge to assess West Broadway as a public corridor and to plan public art to enhance the corridor as a viable public realm conducive to pedestrians required additional resources. Juxtaposition Arts and NPCR applied for a Building Social and Economic Capital Planning Grant from the Minnesota Campus Compact, a higher education coalition committed to the civic purposes of higher education. Funding from this grant enabled Juxtaposition Arts to hire Muratake after she graduated to coordinate the West Broadway Remix Project.

Meanwhile, George Latimer, distinguished urban affairs professor at Macalester College, taught an Urban Studies seminar in spring 2004 that took West Broadway as the focus for a semester-long class project. This connection was made through UNN. Student projects in the course included field observations to document current conditions on West Broadway, research of current and future plans and projects that could impact West Broadway, historical research about West Broadway Avenue, review of current land use and zoning regulations along the street, and development of a work plan to serve as a framework for implementation.

In addition, NPCR provided support for a dual-degree urban planning and landscape architecture graduate student, Craig Wilson, for fall 2004 and spring 2005 semesters. Wilson identified three potential public art sites along the gateway (the eastern edge of West Broadway), contacted site owners to garner support for the public art projects at those sites, and began to build relationships with neighborhood and organizational partners.

During the 2005 spring semester, a Department of Landscape Architecture studio and design seminar at the University of Minnesota taught by Professors Kristine Miller, Clint Hewitt, and Marcy Schulte joined the West Broadway project. Students in the seminar not only conducted studios and class projects focused on West Broadway, but they also worked with 15 Juxtaposition Arts youth artists to conduct site analysis and develop models for public art installations.

Juxtaposition Arts continued this work in the summer of 2005 with 20 neighborhood kids to develop specific designs for two public art installations in the West Broadway gateway area: a mural on the Canadian-Pacific Railroad bridge that intersects West Broadway in the riverfront industrial park, and a sculpture garden located on Second Street and West Broadway closer to the Mississippi River. Professional architects James Garrett, Jr., and Ryan Rademacher committed their time to work with Muratake, the Juxtaposition Arts instructors, and the youth participants.

Juxtaposition Arts involved the West Broadway Area Coalition and the Hawthorne Area Community Council.
to raise funds, and together they implemented the sculpture garden in the summer of 2006 on the Vogel Paint property at the corner of Second Street North and West Broadway. Juxtaposition Arts youth artists worked with experienced artists and Twin Cities Tree Trust landscapers to install the sculpture garden. In addition, Juxtaposition Arts youth artists designed and fabricated hand-painted light post banners, which were erected on West Broadway between Dupont and Fremont, and on Emerson Avenue.

As a result of the initial engagement of students and faculty, as well as the growing body of research developed through these partnerships, longer lasting relationships have been formed between University researchers and Juxtaposition Arts. Professor Kristine Miller, who co-taught the landscape design studio, became interested in the pedestrian implications of a proposed bus rapid transitway on West Broadway. She applied for and was awarded a CURA Faculty Interactive Research Program grant in 2005 to support the project. Miller and her colleagues have continued to focus both the design studio and seminar on West Broadway.

In the winter of 2006, Juxtaposition Arts youth conducted six hours of person-on-the-street interviews with more than 40 individuals to assess the community’s perceptions of and dreams for West Broadway. Juxtaposition Arts produced a short film titled Speak Your Mind to summarize the street interviews. A second round of street interviews is planned for spring 2007, in collaboration with Asian Media Access—another Northside community youth program—and Twin Cities Public television. This resource will provide valuable input into the City of Minneapolis efforts to plan the future of West Broadway. Juxtaposition Arts and its collaborative partners also have secured national funding support from the Ford Foundation and Partners for Livable Communities to grow its community engagement and public development work, leveraging the arts as bridge and glue in its fragile urban community.

CURA’s association with Juxtaposition Arts illustrates how the University of Minnesota can partner with small community organizations and increase their capacity to undertake important community work. Beginning with an initial project to explore how Juxtaposition Arts could best develop two storefronts, a growing network of University faculty and student research assistants have become involved in community-led projects that will literally transform the Northside community. The key to the success of this and other CURA projects is a consistent emphasis on the importance of community and University partners drawing on their respective strengths and unique perspectives to work toward a larger community-identified goal. These partnerships developed organically through continual engagement based on past knowledge, experience, and outcomes. At each step, the results of the partnership were assessed to determine how that knowledge and experience could be developed further.

Conclusion: The Future of University-Northside Collaborations

As we indicated at the outset, the University of Minnesota is preparing to embark on a major initiative on Minneapolis’ Northside, known as the University Northside Partnership (UNP). At the moment, the agenda for the partnership includes (1) strengthening the community through economic development, stronger job skills, and reduction of poverty; (2) building human capital through education and early childhood development; and (3) improving health through mental health services for children and families and the elimination of health disparities. Already, more
than 40 faculty members from across the University have been identified as being engaged in various projects and programs on the Northside. One of the goals of UNP will be to increase collaboration among these and other faculty, staff, and students working on the Northside to strengthen the University’s overall impact in the community. In general, CURA’s role in UNP will be to continue to build relationships with individual community organizations and to help them by strengthening their capacity to govern themselves and participate as full partners with the University.

More specifically, as part of the University Northside Partnership, CURA has developed a new program to foster Community-University engagements. The Northside Seed Grant program, initiated in the fall of 2006, supports community-initiated research projects by providing a graduate research assistant and faculty member to work with the community organization. Four projects were funded in fall 2006. Community interest in the program has prompted the University to provide additional funding to support projects for the next three years. More information about CURA’s Northside Seed Grant program can be found at www.cura.umn.edu/NSG.php.

CURA has a long history working on the Northside, going back to its formation in 1967. Over this time much has been attempted, many things learned, and much accomplished. The most enduring lesson learned from this experience is the value of engaging University resources in response to community-identified issues and to work closely in partnership with the community to ensure that community interests are respected and lead the University’s engagement. As a land grant University located in the state’s largest metropolitan area, the University of Minnesota has a special role to play in the life of the community. CURA’s work with communities—and particularly the Northside community—demonstrates how the University can provide research and technical assistance to increase the capacity of communities throughout Minnesota. Just as important, partnerships with the community provide University faculty and students with challenging research, learning, and civic opportunities that broaden and enrich the lives of all participants.

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CURA’s Northside Seed Grants support community organizations that operate programs serving residents of the Northside community by providing student research assistants and faculty researchers to carry out neighborhood-initiated and neighborhood-guided projects. Applications from Northside organizations are accepted three times a year. Deadlines are March 15, June 15, and October 15. For more information or to download an application form, visit www.cura.umn.edu/NSG.php.

More information about the University Northside Partnership can be found at www.academic.umn.edu/system/projects/northside/.

Open House for Community-University Partnerships April 11

The University of Minnesota’s Year-End Open House Celebration of Community–University Partnerships will be held Wednesday, April 5, 2006, from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. in the Great Hall of Coffman Memorial Union on the East Bank of the University of Minnesota Twin Cities campus. The event is free and open to the public.

This annual, year-end event offers an opportunity to share information about the wide array of community engagement programs and opportunities on the University of Minnesota campus, acknowledge the time and energy that University and community staff have devoted to collaborative work for the public good, and inspire attendees to think about ways to initiate or expand community-university partnerships. The structure of the open house is informal and attendees are invited to enjoy hors d’oeuvres while viewing posters and other displays that showcase examples of service learning, community-based research, volunteer tutoring and mentoring, student consulting, internships, and active citizenship programs.

This year’s open house is part of the University’s first Public Engagement Day, and will cap off a day-long series of workshops and presentations on the theme “Community and University as Respectful Partners in Knowledge Production.” Goals for the day of engagement include:

▶ providing a deeper understanding of what public engagement means both to the University and its community partners;
▶ learning from examples of community and university work about the many dimensions of public engagement;
▶ inspiring interest and cultivating new relationships.

The open house is sponsored by the University’s Office for Public Engagement and hosted by the Campus Community Coordinators Alliance, whose members include Business and Community Economic Development, Career and Community Learning Center, Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, Community-Campus Health Outreach Liaison, Deborah E. Powell Center for Women’s Health, Healthy Youth Development-Prevention Research Center, Konopka Institute for Best Practices in Adolescent Health, Literacy Initiative, and Student and Community Relations.

For more information about the Open House Celebration of Community-University Partnerships, as well as other Public Engagement Day events, visit www.engagement.umn.edu/public_engagement_day/index2.html.