



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WINNIPEG

***The University and Community Learning:
An Evolving Mission***

*A policy paper prepared by Lloyd Axworthy
President and Vice- Chancellor of The University of Winnipeg*

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During a recent presentation at our University by Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a question was put by an audience member: “When are the universities going to be asked to take on the teaching of residential school history as a required subject so that every Canadian will have some idea of just how devastating and widespread that event has been for Aboriginal and non Aboriginal peoples alike in this country?” I said to myself here is a ‘cri de coeur’ for a community learning initiative.

Community learning is becoming a state of the art term that applies to a suite of post-secondary institutional activities. It describes the active integration of the university into the social, cultural and educational life of the community. It recognizes the responsibility of the university to function in an accessible manner and to open itself up to the wide diversity of knowledge and experience represented within society.

Until recently, community learning has largely been seen as the delivery of continuing educational programs, classes off-site or on-line, and various experiential learning opportunities for students.² However, the vision for community learning is expanding to include a broader response to changing community characteristics which challenge existing academic models and practices. This demands an effort to explore how people, especially children, learn, and how new practices can be shared with the community to improve access and to respond to a range of cultural, social and economic diversities.

Broadly speaking, community learning, as applied in this second sense at The University of Winnipeg, consists of: 1) the provision of innovative learning opportunities for various populations currently underrepresented in the University population; 2) the use of the resources of the University to analyze and address social, economic, cultural and environmental issues in partnership with community organizations and other groups; 3) the cultivation of dynamic and reciprocal relationships between the campus and the surrounding community in which University resources are used to facilitate community-university learning development in ways that are sustainable in social, economic, cultural and environmental terms and; 4) the understanding that these initiatives serve as learning opportunities for our students and others from within a broad range of local and global communities.

¹ With research and writing assistance from Tobia Neufeld

² Experiential Learning is an umbrella term that describes a variety of educational opportunities: co-ops, internships, clinicals, service learning, practicum placements, student teaching, fieldwork and prior learning.

The crucial role of community learning as a powerful tool in our function as an urban university has been identified in two seminal reports on lifelong learning released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 1996. As pointed out by Dr. Ron Faris in his paper *Learning Cities: Lessons Learned*:

“Both reports illuminated the importance of community-based learning and the understanding that learning is embedded in our everyday community settings – the family, the neighbourhood, the school and the workplace. They argued that the foundations of lifelong learning – early learning and the literacy – must be provided to all to enable every person to participate and contribute to their community and society. Notions of the common good, and a balance between individual rights and citizen responsibilities, were to be learned and practiced in the increasingly diverse, complex and dynamic cities where increasing numbers of people are gathering.”³

Building on its founding values and on the important and longstanding work underway throughout its many departments, the University of Winnipeg has, over the past five years, instituted a series of innovative initiatives in an effort to extend its commitment to community learning to deal with issues of access and community capacity building. The goal is to open opportunities and build on the skills of students from all backgrounds and circumstances – to create, in the words of James Comer, “*a community of learners*”.⁴ The experience we have gained in these projects convinces me that these initiatives in their cumulative effect can help us reposition the University in ways that are responsive to the learning needs of our community and the broader challenges of our times.

To date, we have been especially focused on addressing the barriers faced by individuals who have not been able to access resources or whose needs are not fully addressed within conventional school and educational structures. This priority is in keeping with the broader movement to reach beyond the traditionally structured, classroom-oriented, lecture-based and timetabled concept of education into one that is much more inclusive of a wide range of the population, conducted throughout all times of the day and year, and which makes comprehensive use of digital learning media.

A primary area of concentration, therefore, in response to needs urgently expressed during an initial period of community consultations, has been engagement in the education of urban Aboriginal young people – the fastest growing population in our neighbourhood and Canada as a whole. This initiative has subsequently expanded to a similar involvement with new Canadian and refugee children in the inner-city, along with efforts to work in rural First Nations and Métis communities.

³ *Learning Cities: Lessons Learned*, by Ron Faris, President of Golden Horizon Ventures, April 2006.

⁴ Ramirez-Smith, C., “School Reform: What we’ve learned. Stopping the cycle of failure: The comer model. *Educational Leadership*, 52(5), 1995, pp. 14-15

Broadly, our community learning initiatives are designed to promote the understanding amongst all members of the community that the University belongs to them and that they have equal rights to benefit. We work to assist public schools in meeting academic standards and improving high school graduation rates, to reach out to adult learners using innovative career-based programming, to support newcomers in their transition to post-secondary education, and to create opportunities for retirees and seniors to engage in dynamic learning experiences.

The existing platform of University-based community learning activities encompasses a wide spectrum of initiatives currently underway in various faculties and departments, practicum and mentoring opportunities for students, and community-based research. A portion of this work reflects the traditional effort by individual faculty members to define and shape their specific teaching and research agendas. However, if we are to expand community learning to include more extensive community engagement and concerted efforts to engage community problems at an appropriate scale (e.g. challenging the graduation gap), then there will have to be a more comprehensive and well-organized approach. And it will have to be incorporated into the core of the University's mandate. Such integration would contribute to a reshaping of our character as a modern, urban university.

The purpose of this policy paper, therefore, is twofold. First, to demonstrate in outline that the various initiatives undertaken thus far can be given a shared framework and to illustrate that their combined results set the stage for redefining the role of the University and its relations with the broader world it serves. And, second, to generate a discussion on how to prioritize the issue of community learning as a central pillar of post-secondary education in the 21st Century, and to examine how we – faculty, staff, students and community members alike – can advance this enhanced mandate.

Background

History

To begin, it is crucial to understand why the notion of community learning is so important to The University of Winnipeg. Our history as an institution set up to bring learning to the early settlements, reinforced by the tenets of the social gospel endows a basic commitment to community. In listening to the teachings of Aboriginal scholars and elders who have enunciated the responsibilities that bear on all institutions occupying the lands of Treaty One, it is clear that our University has a special duty to honour the commitments to education embodied in that Treaty by working to advance educational opportunities for First Nations people. Furthermore, the decision made by the students, faculty and Board of the then United College in the 1960's to resist the efforts to move the college to the Fort Garry campus and remain in our central downtown location is a legacy that needs to be respected and built upon.

In doing so, we must take these traditions and translate them into a contemporary idiom and define our place as the urban centre of higher education in the province. Indeed, there have been notable advances over the last few decades in responding to that challenge. To give a few examples, our Division of Continuing Education has been a major innovator in offering programs in collaboration with Aboriginal communities, unique learning experiences for seniors, a series of thriving career-based courses, and special lecture series designed to bring new knowledge to the community. It also developed a strong English Language Program which is now part of our new International Office. Our Faculty of Education has taken a special interest in constructing a curriculum geared to urban education. They have established special initiatives for gifted, high risk and war-affected children, provided unique mentoring, outreach and service-learning opportunities for Education students, and conducted a wide range of community-based research.

Other examples can be found in the work of the Faculty of Science to create an Indigenous science curriculum, the Women's and Gender Studies Program of the Faculty of Arts which has been particularly active in the area of community outreach, the new Human Rights and Global Studies major which will use practicum placements as a key learning tool, and a student-led experiential learning program Sustainable University Now, Sustainable Earth Together (SUNSET) is connecting students with social and environmental justice research projects in partnership with campus and community organizations.

There is, therefore, a legacy to honour as well as a base of recent experience on which to build.

The University of Winnipeg's Sustainability Mandate

The University of Winnipeg is the largest institutional concentration of population in the downtown, with over 10,000 faculty, staff and students generating major traffic flows and contributing significantly to the downtown economy. Current projections predict a University population of between 12,000 and 14,000 in the next eight to ten years. Indeed, this institution occupies a strategic place in the inner city of Winnipeg. It is a culturally rich and diverse area, but also a community that struggles with inadequate housing, poor public services, and high rates of poverty, crime, and environmental disrepair.

This reality was a catalyst for the development of a broad sustainability strategy that has as its ultimate goal the creation of a truly sustainable campus – a campus that acts upon its local and global responsibilities to protect and enhance the health and well being of humans and ecosystems, actively engaging the expertise of the University community to address the ecological and social challenges that we face now and in the future. In our efforts to systematize these commitments, a Sustainability Task Force was established in the fall of 2005 with student, faculty, and staff representatives to draft a series of policies aimed at reducing this University's ecological footprint and at making it a socially responsible institution.

A first set of policies, aimed at addressing environmental dimensions of sustainable development, was passed by the Board of Regents with a standing ovation in 2006. We are continuing to bring social justice and human rights into the purview of our sustainability lens – a necessary step if we are to support current academics in addressing the most pressing issues in the world today and if we are to fulfill our community responsibilities and prepare students for the world they are inheriting. A recent development in this work has been a new Academic Plan adopted by the University of Winnipeg Senate in the spring of 2009 which identified community learning as an integral component of the University's overall mission.

It is in this context that I want to point out that, increasingly, universities are being understood as instrumental in sustainable community development, integrating the academic and theoretical elements of university education with practical experience through collaboration and partnership within the community, increasing access to university programs, resources and physical facilities, managing assets that incorporate both private and public/community businesses and institutions, and playing an active role in urban revitalization.

The ethical rationale behind this development is that universities have a responsibility to be 'sites of citizenship,' using their substantial resources to participate in reciprocal community relationships that contribute to the well-being of the people who live, work, and study in and around the universities and to catalyze greater well-being, civic engagement and interest among all those whose lives are affected by them.⁵

Our Learning Community

We were inspired in this work by the Office of Sustainability Programs (OSP) at the University of New Hampshire. At the centre of UNH's work is the concept of a *Sustainable Learning Community*, a term employed "to acknowledge the straightforward and educationally profound fact that the community teaches."⁶ This community involves faculty, students, staff, administrators, and the residents, community groups, and business neighbours that make up the neighbourhood to which we belong.

OSP Director Tom Kelly explains that "the learning community approach assumes that everything is curriculum and everyone is an educator."⁷ Within this framework, curriculum exists on a continuum, from the scholarship of pedagogy in the classroom, to the scholarship of integration on campus, and the scholarship of application in the wider community. Thus, core university functions that are traditionally understood to be providing logistical support for the academic mission

⁵ Alexandra Winter, John Wiseman & Bruce Muirhead, 'University-Community Engagement in Australia: Practice, Policy and Public Good', *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, Vol 1 (3), 2006, 211-230. p. 212

⁶ Kelly, Tom, *Building a Sustainable Learning Community at the University of New Hampshire*, http://www.vink.helsinki.fi/files/Theoria_building.html, p. 4

⁷ Kelly, p. 4

of the university become an active and intentional part of curriculum while the daily struggles and successes of the community become a meaningful arena for careful and committed community engagement.

Thus, if we think about *all* activity at the University as an educational opportunity for students, faculty, and staff – if we begin to see our University as a living learning community where everything from bricks and mortar to meetings and consultations to research to community engagement are not just occasions for accomplishing something but are also processes whereby learning can take place – then a culture of cooperation and partnerships can be formed, providing unparalleled learning opportunities and rallying everyone on campus and in the community around common goals, projects and learning experiences.

This way of thinking about our University can help to cultivate trust among all stakeholders on campus and in the community, garnering much needed engagement from faculty, staff, students and neighbours. For significant change to occur, we all need to feel like members of a team working together towards a common goal, and one of the most effective ways to do this is to treat the entire University and surrounding community as a place of learning and to encourage University faculty, staff and students to *all* see themselves as teachers *and* as learners prepared to challenge and be challenged by the ideas and experiences of the people with whom they share the campus and neighbourhood.

Campus Development

As part of our attempt at meeting this responsibility we are in the midst of a major effort to refurbish campus facilities and consolidate programs currently scattered around the city into a more coherent University precinct with a distinctive physical identity and centralized services. This was a major thrust of our campus development plan of four years ago. Now nearing completion, this renewal is helping to reinforce broader efforts to strengthen the downtown and nurture the economic and social fibre of Winnipeg's inner city.

The West End of downtown Portage Avenue is taking on renewed vigour as a result of nearly \$130 million of University development encompassing a new campus and science complex, new student and community housing, a new and expanded daycare centre, a new fitness center, the refurbishment of the former bus depot into a classroom and bookstore service area, the construction of a new home for our Division of Continuing Education and our Faculty of Business and Economics on the site of the former Army Surplus building, a new theatre, and the development of public green space and recreational areas. These initiatives have enabled us to consolidate a number of University activities previously scattered about the city, generating renewal and creating a very clear destination point in Winnipeg for academic research, cultural activities, and community learning initiatives.

The bulk of this expansion has been managed by The University of Winnipeg Community Renewal Corporation (UWCRC), the development arm of the University

responsible for the University's comprehensive Campus and Community Plan. The UWCRC's Board is made up of both University and community representatives. By using the UWCRC as the vehicle for our development activities we attempt to ensure that community interests are built into the planning and implementation of our activities. A good example of this in practical terms can be found with the inclusion of community and family housing into the new student residence.

Changing Demographics

At the same time as this physical transformation is taking place, we witness the increasing urban residency of Indigenous people, now more than 10 per cent of the population in Winnipeg and more than 20 per cent of the population in the inner-city⁸, along with the growing numbers of new Canadians, a consequence of a significant policy decision of the provincial and federal governments to substantially increase immigration to Manitoba. This increase represents a change of great importance to our city and region as it creates a growing pool of learners from a wide variety of rich and diverse cultural backgrounds. But it puts enormous pressure on educational systems to ensure that the transitions occasioned by these population movements are successful ones.

So far the pressures are not being fully met despite the valiant efforts of the school systems. Currently only 60 per cent of Aboriginal Canadians aged 20 to 24 has graduated from high-school (compared to nearly 90 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population in that age category) and less than 10 per cent of the Aboriginal population 25-34 years of age has a university degree, compared with almost 30 per cent of the non-Aboriginal population in the same age category.⁹

Comments from community respondents to our consultations sum up the reality for many Aboriginal children and adolescents: "Their survival is where they're at, never mind learning;" "School is the first thing to go, it's a pressure they can do without;" and "There's so much of a survival mentality that it disables you from dreaming."

In today's complex world, we can scarcely afford to sit idly by when confronted with this reality in our backyard, nor can we afford to waste the talent and human potential that could help shed light on the challenges ahead. These inequities in learning are an extremely important issue in our community, to say nothing of the nation as a whole. They are undermining both the future of the University – by reducing the pool of potential students – as well as the future of the economic and social health of the broader community by denying the potential of a highly talented young workforce to replace those who are retiring. According to the Centre for the Study of Living Standards, if Aboriginal people were able to achieve the same level of education by 2017 that non-Aboriginal Canadians achieved in 2001, Canada's gross domestic product would increase by more than \$70 billion over those 16

⁸ Census of Canada, 2006

⁹ John Richards, *Closing the Aboriginal/ Non Aboriginal Education Gaps*, C.D. Howe Institute, No. 116, October 2008, pp. 3-6

years. If the education gap was closed completely and educational parity was achieved by 2017, Canada's gross domestic product would increase by more than \$160 billion.¹⁰

This gap in educational opportunity is obviously not unique to Winnipeg. Describing the situation in the Harlem area of New York the report of the Harlem Children's zone, another group dedicated to community learning, says this:

"Under these circumstances, the gravitational pull of negative forces is so strong on already fragile families that only a small fraction of the children in these neighborhoods thrive. These exceptional youths are labelled *resilient* and are justly celebrated for beating the odds. But by definition, most children are not exceptional. Most poor children lack the means to overcome these crushing forces and reach their potential. Instead, they grow up poorly prepared to find good jobs with decent wages as adults, and many fall into substance abuse or end up incarcerated.

Most traditional poverty-fighting approaches are narrowly focused. Hampered by a lack of resources, many are not able to provide high-quality programs, or if they do so, it is only for a few hundred children. Others attend only to a single issue or single age group, approaches that fail to address all the developmental needs of children throughout their childhood. And the great majority of approaches neglect the neighborhood environment that surrounds children and affects them profoundly."¹¹

Learning is a seamless experience and we must create the opportunities to make it available both before and after regular school and work hours with the involvement of all learning institutions within a defined area. It is simplistic to classify learners only according to grade, age or tiers of elementary, middle school, high school or post-secondary schooling and to assume that valid learning occurs only within traditional classroom walls. Learning, as the Harlem Children's Zone report suggests, needs a comprehensive neighbourhood approach.

Community Learning at The University of Winnipeg

To achieve this, community engagement must become a core value for the University. Engagement, according to the Association of Commonwealth Universities, "*implies strenuous, thoughtful ... interaction with the non-university world in at least four spheres: setting universities' aims, purposes and priorities; relating teaching and learning to the wider world; the back-and-forth dialogue between researchers and practitioners; and taking on wider responsibilities as neighbors and citizens*"¹²

¹⁰ Andrew Sharp, Jean-Francois Arsenault and Simon Lapointe, 'The Potential Contribution of Aboriginal Canadians to Labour Force, Employment, Productivity and Output Growth in Canada, 2001-2017, *Centre for the Study of Living Standards*, CSLS Research Report No. 2007-04, p. 6

¹¹ The Harlem Children's Zone, 'Executive Summary', *White Paper on HCZ Model*, p. 2

¹² 'Engagement as a Core Value for the University: A Consultation Document,' *Association of Commonwealth Universities*, London, April 2001.

In that spirit of engagement and responsibility let's begin by citing some of the community learning developments that have begun recently at our University. The following is a snapshot of what a community learning strategy can mean in practical terms:

The Innovative Learning Centre

This fall, The University's Innovative Learning Centre (ILC) is preparing to bring a host of students from across the city into the University to participate in a series of unique learning initiatives for inner-city, Aboriginal and new Canadian youth designed to close the graduation gap by helping students to develop their potential, increase academic achievement, and inspire a desire to learn. Since it was established three years ago, the ILC has served over 5000 students aged 7-21 through programming both during and after school hours, on weekends and in the summer months. The ILC develops strong partnerships with school superintendents, principals and teachers from inner-city schools and with the families of the children and youth involved.

Using the resources and the infrastructure of the University, ILC programming serves as a 'tap on the shoulder' for these children and youth so that they can begin at an early age to see that a post-secondary education is indeed possible for them.¹³ It engages students in activities that stimulate their curiosity, cultivate problem solving and critical thinking skills and develop the tools for life-long learning. ILC curriculum nurtures an understanding of environmental stewardship, Indigenous science and traditional knowledge, incorporating the Seven Sacred Teachings of Anishinabe People - courage, wisdom, love, truth, humility, honesty, and respect - to create a bridge of cultural understanding for all participants.

During the regular school year, students from local elementary and high schools are engaged in our Eco-Kids and Enviro Techs programs which provide on-campus learning experiences in science, sustainability, human rights and community engagement. The programs, which have been in operation for three years, are dependent on foundations and private funding and do not draw on public funds or on the operational budget of the University.

The Eco-Kids on Campus program brings Aboriginal and inner-city children from local schools into the University to participate in a wide range of hands-on science experiments facilitated by our Faculty of Science and the Collegiate High School. This program has grown to include a partnership with the River East Transcona School Division and brings students to our campus to learn about human rights and social justice issues as part of the UNESCO Human Rights Curriculum Project. Randy Kobes, our Associate Dean of Science, has applied for an NSERC grant to develop a fuller integration of the Eco-Kids on Campus program with the University.

¹³ See video at this link: <http://vod.uwinnipeg.ca/uw/taponshoulder.html>

The ILC's Enviro Tech program offers a course through The Collegiate High School that is designed to bring inner-city and Aboriginal students into the University to develop an understanding of the critical environmental issues facing the global community. It provides them with the opportunity to become role models and mentors to younger children involved with the ILC and to obtain Grade 10 credit in environmental science.

Over the past three years, 2400 children have participated in the ILC's Eco-U Summer Camp initiative – one of the largest day camps in the city for inner-city and Aboriginal youth in Winnipeg. Campers are engaged in a full slate of activities from traditional dance, to tending a community garden, to participating in smudging ceremonies and traditional Aboriginal storytelling, to environmental science and sustainability experiments. Daily field trips provide hands-on learning in Winnipeg's parks and conservation areas. Eco-U Summer Camp employees, drawn from high schools and the University, are often participants in other ILC programming. They have an inner city background and a strong interest in careers in education and social development.

These direct community learning activities have been augmented this past year with perhaps our most innovative and complex program: a Model School set up in cooperation with the University's Collegiate High School and based on successful models developed in Chicago and several other jurisdictions in the United States. The idea was to involve students of potentially high achievement who were at high risk of dropping out of the regular school system or who were running into behavioural problems, addictions or criminal activity. The first intake of 20 students took place last fall and 26 students are registered this year.

The Model School offers an individualized style of education that helps students achieve success by drawing on their individual strengths, talents and interests while integrating them into the mainstream programs of the well-regarded Collegiate High School. The program occupies its own space in Wesley Hall and immediately became a source of interest and at times intense examination as we attempted to work out what would be the most effective means to optimize its success. Its location on campus and the partnership with the Collegiate has been extremely beneficial to the students as they have been able to utilize all of the resources and materials of the Collegiate while developing a sense of identity as members of the University of Winnipeg community. Incidentally, the Model School kids made our basketball teams powerhouses, which won great respect from the Collegiate students.

This year, the Model School is placing a special focus on integrating new technology into its learning programs. Every student has been equipped with a Mac laptop computer and in-services have been planned with experts who will teach them about the various applications and tools available to them.

We have also developed a proposal to set up a green collar employment training program to enable the students to develop practical skills and gain meaningful job

experience as workers in the environmental sector through a community service-learning practicum and summer employment program. This plan was inspired by Van Jones' recent book, *The Green Collar Economy*, which lays out a comprehensive approach to achieving social, economic and environmental renewal through the promotion of green-collar jobs to build an inclusive economy that is "strong enough to resolve the ecological crisis and lift millions of people out of poverty".¹⁴ Participating youth would learn to conduct home energy and water audits, install simple retrofits and plant community gardens with inner-city residents, helping our neighbours save money on utility and food bills while creating a positive social and environmental impact. We are actively searching for a foundation to support this initiative.

In April, we celebrated the first three graduates of the Model School. It was a powerful experience to see these students, who had initially dropped out of their regular high school programs, cross the stage to receive their diploma. All three students have now returned to the Model School to upgrade their courses and prepare for eventual studies at the post-secondary level. The teachers of the Model School are developing a process to aid graduates in the transition from high school to post-secondary studies so that students can cope more effectively with the social and academic challenges that all too often confront students in their first years of college or university.

The collective outcomes of these programs to date include marked improvements in participating students' academic achievement, stronger links that parents are developing with their children's school and teacher, and a high turnout of families at various ILC events and parent-teacher meetings. Students and their families have said that this University-based programming has removed a stigma that they have felt with some other programs targeted at low-income students; they feel that the University is a place for them and not an exclusive, closed institution situated within their neighbourhood. Participants and their families have also gained access to an incredible source of social capital as they have built relationships and made connections with students, faculty and staff on campus and learned how to tap into various opportunities for social, academic and financial support of which they may not otherwise have been aware.

Opportunity Fund

While the Innovative Learning Centre programs are underway, organizers from the University's Opportunity Fund, an initiative that grew out of the 2006 Access Task Force, meet with families and teachers of children involved in the programs to establish tuition credit accounts in which the University will register credit for specific academic or community achievement. Children earning these credits can apply them toward a post-secondary education when they graduate from high

¹⁴ Van Jones, *The Green Collar Economy*, New York: HarperCollins, 2008

school. They are an example of earning by learning and appear to be a positive way of attracting family support.

The Opportunity Fund organizers also use these community meetings to introduce families to the special low-income RESP offered by the federal government, and to facilitate their ability to register by helping them secure birth certificates, SIN numbers and bank accounts. Funding for the Opportunity Fund is a product of University fundraising and not part of regular government grants. The RESP initiative is funded by the federal Department of Human Resources and Social Development. By these means we are exploring new strategies by which financial incentives can be linked with the opportunity to learn and to work with local teachers, parents or guardians and community groups to provide alternative routes by which to access education.

A secondary component of the Opportunity Fund resulted from recognition by the Access Task Force that the conventional way of awarding bursaries was creating a number of handicaps for low-income students, such as the initial cost of registration at the University, and the waiting period while financial need and income capacity were assessed. As a result we incorporated a fast-track bursary option into the Opportunity Fund that offers students financial support through a relatively quick and simple process when they are endorsed by a community group. The values of these bursaries vary for each student depending on need, but can be given to a maximum of \$5000. There was initial concern that this approach would not yield a high retention rate. However, during the two years in which we have given fast track assistance to over 300 students in need the retention rate of these students has been equal to the average for the student body as a whole. A third pillar of the Opportunity Fund program is a micro-financing component designed to build community capacity by providing small business start-up and operating funds for local entrepreneurs.

Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre

To supplement these initiatives the University maintains, on an ongoing basis, the Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre, a drop-in center for inner-city residents managed by our Aboriginal Student Services Centre. Funded entirely by donations from the private sector, Wii Chiiwaakanak offers free computer access along with complementary academic programs, traditional language programs, and a homework club in the Helen Betty Osborne building on Ellice Avenue. The centre plays an important role in redressing what is sometimes called the 'digital divide', a gap in effective access to digital and information technology. The demand for such access is dramatically demonstrated by the fact that an average of 1000 users per month use the computers and services of the centre. Our hope is to further develop the program by experimenting with the use of video games as a teaching tool along with other innovative digital media methodologies.

The Global Welcome Centre

Also at the Helen Betty Osborne building, we have established a mirror program to help meet the needs of newcomers. The Global Welcome Centre, (GWC) which is directly supported by the Manitoba Department of Labour and Immigration, assists new Canadians in preparation for learning activities and other transitional issues. The GWC offers a university preparation course, mentorship and tutoring programs, computer skills classes and an Immigrant Access Advisor to provide academic advice and support tailored to the needs of newcomers and refugees. This centre has been tied into our English Language Program (ELP) and our International Office in order to integrate a broader range of learning options and language programming at the University. The ELP also runs the English for Specific Purposes Program which offers classes that focus on developing the language skills required for success on the job, at college, or in university programs.

Academics and Athletics

Another element of our community learning work has been an emerging effort to support local inner-city recreational and athletic activity. The report of an Academics and Athletics Task Force headed by our Dean of Arts and encouraged by our new Athletic Director, combined with enthusiastic representations from community activists, led to a strong recommendation to expand our athletic efforts into direct community support. This resulted in assistance to the local community center with the provision of uniforms, coaching, and the sponsorship of an inner-city girl's basketball team which became an instant contender in the local leagues. In late spring we organized a basketball clinic for inner-city kids on the same weekend as convocation and attracted 300 children from local elementary to high schools. There is a strong commitment to broaden these athletic activities within our community learning strategy. In addition to our new fitness centre we hope eventually to expand our capacity to support a community recreation program and enhance our kinesiology and athletic therapy programs with wellness and nutrition components.

Other Community Learning Initiatives

Other related programs fitting under the rubric of community learning have been introduced by a wide variety of divisions and departments within the University.

Our Division of Continuing Education in partnership with the RCMP and the Louis Riel Institute and in consultation with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Winnipeg Police Service, and Manitoba Justice offers a preparatory course for Aboriginal peoples who want to start a career in policing. DCE also recently launched an Aboriginal Information & Communication Technologies Diploma program in partnership with the Information and Communication Technologies Association of Manitoba to begin closing the techno-gap that currently exists in the province's workforce.

We are also working to bring traditional Arts and Science learning to a broader base of students. A unique partnership between the aerospace industry and the

University has given life to an innovative and flexible program for employees in the industry to earn a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Business and Management Studies. Students take University courses in the evenings and on weekends and apply both their work experience and credits earned in the Certificate in Management Program (CIM) towards their degree. The University has also partnered with the Great-West Life Company to develop a similar program that leads to a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Management Studies. Great West Life offers a full scholarship to participants, provides summer employment between each of the three years of study, and employs each successful graduate with Great-West Life upon completion of the program. Both programs give students the opportunity to focus on career-based learning while also building a solid foundation in the liberal arts.

The Institute of Urban Studies, which celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, is engaged in a wide variety of community-based research initiatives in the inner-city, and they are working with the Town of Churchill on a sustainability study and action plan. The Urban and Inner-City Studies program of the Department of Politics offers a host of courses devoted to the examination of inner-city issues.

Our Faculty of Education is involved in a large number of community learning projects – from mentoring and outreach, to targeted community research, to developing meaningful practicum placements and service-learning opportunities for prospective teachers. For example, they are presently working on a partnership with northern institutions to develop new career paths for Aboriginal youth based on traditional science. The Faculty also works in partnership with the Winnipeg Education Centre (WEC) to offer a five-year Bachelor of Education/Bachelor of Arts integrated degree that is specifically tailored to Aboriginal students, visible minorities, recent immigrants, refugees and others from Winnipeg's inner-city neighbourhood. The WEC program is unique in that it offers students additional academic supports, skill development opportunities, and a cultural component that includes traditional Aboriginal teachings and sharing circles. Class sizes are smaller and an emphasis is placed on the inner-city setting.

Students, staff, and faculty at the University have gathered together to form Experiential Learning Initiative Network to support and extend the vision and practice of experiential learning within the University community. We have also hired a Co-op/Experiential Learning Coordinator as part of the dynamic response to the interest in community-university partnerships across disciplines and communities.

We have also partnered external agencies on community learning activities. For example, the non-profit organization, Career Trek, brings young people into The University every Saturday for a five-week term to explore various departments, programs and faculties through hands-on activities. And the College and University Bound program, a partnership between the University, Seven Oaks School Division and Red River College, exposes students who face barriers to post-secondary

education to a broad range of cultural, athletic and political events that are part of university and college life.

While this is far from an exhaustive list of the initiatives underway, these efforts at community learning have convinced us that impacts on both the community and the University are positive and that these initiatives have added a new dimension to our role as an urban University in our mandate to tackle the unique challenges of our times. It has also taught us a great deal about how to make more effective use of the resources and infrastructures of the University, and about how to form community partnerships. It has suggested that partnerships involving a combination of various techniques of intervention can make a difference in outlook and achievement.

But the innovation does not stop there. This first tranche of projects has encouraged us to take additional steps that broaden the concept of community learning. One was the launch this summer of another level of initiatives that support, complement and enhance the first wave. The second is to begin thinking about how to develop a way to broadly integrate the various projects in order to gain the benefit of common resourcing, evaluation and mobility of participants between programs as well as to engage our faculty, students and staff more comprehensively.

On the first point, for example, we have created a unique University food service that has hired and trained local inner-city residents who will ultimately be eligible to own 25 percent of the stock in the company and whose mandate is to supply locally grown, diverse menus that fit the contemporary needs of our multi-ethnic campus. Diversity Foods is owned by the UWCRC as a joint venture partner with SEED, a community-based economic development organization. Diversity Foods employees learn about Canadian business practices and customs, specific food handling and preparation skills, and multiple aspects of business management. There will also be a shared learning experience among workers and the University community about healthy and tasty food choices made by other cultures, and the benefits that nutrition has for learning itself as it enhances brain function and learning capacity. The social outcome is to develop local economic enterprise using the University as a catalyst for downtown inner-city economic and social renewal.

In the new McFeetors Hall: Great West Life Student Residence, we have used a mixed-use housing model made up of both University of Winnipeg students and other neighbourhood residents seeking additional education. In recognition of the challenges that face student parents, we reserved 25 townhouse units for single parents wishing to go back to school. Applications for these apartments far exceeded the number of spaces available.

The new University day care centre, with spaces for the children of both University and community families, is located directly across from the new community housing. It is our hope that this facility will become a comprehensive early childhood development site offering a full range of alternative learning programs for neighbourhood children and their parents.

The ANX on the site of the former Greyhound bus depot will soon be home to a student services centre that also meets the needs of the local downtown neighbourhood and the broader community who work in the area. An expanded campus and community bookstore will offer a variety books, magazines and general merchandise in addition to traditional course-related textbooks. It will fill the deficiency created when a large downtown bookstore relocated last year. The ANX will also house a student and community medical centre and the other specialized retail services to create a space for community engagement and interaction at a meaningful level.

The construction of an eco-friendly, three-story building on the former Army Surplus site at 460 Portage Avenue will include a new home for the gallery of the popular Plug-In Institute of Contemporary Art. This partnership will help to formalize our relationship with the city's arts community and has the potential to create an arts precinct in the downtown. The project also provides the University with the opportunity to establish linkages with the Winnipeg Art Gallery (WAG) which could not only augment our traditional academic programming but also launch new community learning initiatives. The WAG, for example, holds the largest collection of contemporary Inuit art in the world which could provide opportunities to partner with Aboriginal communities in the far north on Arts-based learning initiatives.

This new building is designed to house one of two CISCO Systems TelePresence sites, which are virtual learning and communication facilities that will be linked to other locations in Manitoba, across Canada and around the world. The implementation of this partnership with CISCO supported by the provincial and federal governments is in the final stages of discussion at the time this policy paper is being written. This new technology will enhance the University's ability to broaden the reach of community learning initiatives and to ensure northern and rural learners have greater access to the classrooms and research initiatives offered by the University. In addition, the University will use this technology to transmit traditional Indigenous knowledge in order to incorporate it into curriculum and share it with the broader community.

Our Global College and Criminal Justice department are setting up a community-based legal centre in partnership with the University of Manitoba Law School and Faculty of Social Work to provide inner-city residents with the knowledge and expertise to learn of the various rights they have before tribunals, regulatory bodies and the courts and to assist them in accessing those rights. A sitting judge from the Superior Court will take a sabbatical to act as mentor in this program. This is authentic learning for personal and social empowerment. It gives students direct experiential learning and on-the-street experience and helps us to compile data and to assess how legal rights can be used as a tool for poverty reduction.

Our Aurora Family Therapy Centre has created a new Therapy Program for Immigrant and Refugee Families to make family therapy more accessible to refugee and immigrant populations. With financial support from Manitoba Labour and Immigration, the program is designed to address a variety of obstacles, including language, cultural differences, and the stigma many members of refugee and immigrant communities associate with mental health issues.

Academic libraries are natural partners in community learning environments both in real space and online. Our new Librarian is working to extend the reach of the Library by seeking ways to collaborate with the City of Winnipeg's public libraries on downtown outreach and education programs and by exploring the potential to develop and maintain an online digital learning commons that would support both traditional academic work and community learning initiatives.

Community Learning and Neuroscience

One area of important consideration is the way in which community learning provides an outlet to test and employ the revolutionary findings emerging from the growing field of brain research, an area of increasing involvement at our institution. Alongside my own readings on the powerful impact of ingrained brain responses to social and political issues, along with recent discussions with neuroscience researchers at our University, on the subject of 'brain plasticity', have underscored that the University has a crucial role to play in shaping the abilities of individuals and the community to meet contemporary challenges.

In what is becoming a seminal article published in the New York Times the question is asked 'why isn't the brain green'?¹⁵ The answer is that we are wired for short term responses and therefore find it difficult to imagine ourselves dealing with risks of longer-term consequences. The antidote is to foster the capacity of people to accommodate these longer-term impacts using the demonstrated ability of the brain to change as a consequence of education and other mental exercises. This argues for efforts at broader-based community learning initiatives. For example, this fall, our Division of Continuing Education, members of our Psychology and Physics departments and the National Research Council diagnostics lab are offering an eleven-part community lecture series, *Frontiers in Neuroscience*.

Similarly, we are also beginning to understand how learning interventions can offset the deprivations of experience faced by many low-income children as compared to their more privileged middle- and upper-income peers. We are already involved in providing this kind of compensation in our Innovative Learning Centre programs. However, the potential of marrying the cascade of insights flowing from the field of brain research with learning techniques has scarcely been scratched. A year ago we partnered with the MacArthur Foundation to present a workshop on the use of multimedia technologies for learning which demonstrated, among other things, the capacity of video games to enhance learning opportunities.

¹⁵ John Gertner, "Why isn't the Brain Green?", *The New York Times*, April 16, 2009

We are also conscious of the fact that Canadians are living and working longer than ever before. Therefore, it is important to provide them with the tools and information that flow from advances in brain research to maintain high levels of cognitive functioning in later life. This field is one that, with the right resources, we could incorporate as a key element of our community learning strategy. Brain education is about tapping into the infinite potential of our brains in order to create positive change within ourselves and in the world. It is about enhancing the use of our brains through the new understandings that science is producing to create health, happiness and peace and to contribute to the creation of hope in the world. One of the important elements of community learning, therefore, is to enrich the learning environment in order to allow learners to reach their full potential. If we are committed to equity and fairness in society, community learning is vital.¹⁶

The University of Winnipeg's Community Learning Strategy: Lessons Learned and Next Steps

These descriptions of the various projects give a brief overview of what is underway. The central issue is: What does this portend for the role of the University and what are the next steps to bring a broader, more permanent approach to our community learning strategy? First, let's extract some lessons from recent experience.

Lessons Learned

- 1) We have demonstrated the capacity of a university in an urban setting to extend its reach into the community and, through a variety of partnerships, to have an impact on the learning experience of a significant number of people beyond the conventional orbit of University programming. What has been a particular lesson for me coming into the University from an outside career is the immense potential that exists within the infrastructure, and among students, staff and faculty to be an anchor or hub of innovative community related learning activities. In a very real way we are extending our mandate as a public institution. And in the process we are substantially adding to the learning experience of our students. There is a reciprocal, mutually reinforcing, benefit.
- 2) Community learning can make a difference. Our Planning Analyst is currently working with the Model School, Global Welcome Centre, Wii Chiwaakanak Learning Centre and the Innovative Learning Centre to develop a standard process of collecting and analyzing data that can be tracked in the coming years to provide consistent reporting on progress. But we can already observe a variety of impacts not just on the students themselves (e.g. the increased number of Aboriginal students who are enrolling at our University, the

¹⁶ The Guardian Weekly, "You have less control than you think", August 28-September 3 2009, p. 19

increased number of low-income students who are gaining access) but also on various community stakeholders, governments, teachers, and families. There is a growing recognition that the University has become an active contributor to the community and that it is not aloof or uninvolved.

- 3) The community learning strategy is giving the University a chance to show that as an independent institution, albeit one dependent on public funding, the University can use its basic mandate to meet contemporary social and economic issues through its own initiative and not simply be responsive to public policy demands. In fact our work can help set new paradigms for public policy. But it is crucial that the ability of universities to maintain – indeed enhance – their role as independent engines of innovation be affirmed. I'm reminded of the important role played by universities in the early days of the 20th century through their extension programs when they brought learning and research to the newly-opened agricultural areas of Canada. I see the same role playing out in a complex urbanized society interconnected to global trends and developments. There must be partnerships with community organizations both locally and worldwide to find answers. We must develop new and innovative methodologies, find ways of protecting and advancing basic human rights standards and community goals, and overcome the growing gap in wealth and education. There is the exciting potential for a comprehensive action research agenda that can draw upon the important findings emerging from the neurosciences and apply it to a broad category of social and, ultimately, policy issues that may well make important contributions to meeting the transcendent challenges facing 21st century communities.
- 4) What's important to recognize, however, is that the promotion, nurturing and funding of community learning endeavours have not been part of the conventional structure of the universities, nor have they been incorporated into the funding models. We have had to proceed *ex cathedra*. Thus far, much of the initiative for fundraising has come from the President's Office, the University of Winnipeg Foundation and individual faculty and staff. Funds raised have been primarily private with substantial corporate contributions. This reveals a present weakness of the community learning program. For this reason we have been brainstorming effective ways to integrate these initiatives into the regular structures of the University and to see how we can better secure a funding model that allows for both continuity and expansion. The beginning of this process took place when community learning was adopted as an element of the new Academic Plan. The next step is Board approval of a "Community Learning Mission" drawing upon elements of this policy paper and consequent responses. Running parallel will be attempts to develop both publicly- and privately-secured funding. A key to making the case for this is to show how community learning is playing a fundamentally crucial role for the University as it works to meet broad community needs.

- 5) A wide variety of important community outreach activities have been spearheaded by many faculties and program areas. As we move forward it will be important to identify synergies, to combine efforts and to provide real and effective incentives for service in the larger community. To that end, we are seeking ways to ensure that involvement with community and University learning initiatives is honoured, valued and rewarded, as are research and teaching, as integral parts of the professorial role.
- 6) What ideally should be looked at is a network of learning opportunities in a specified area of the inner city that can draw in all the major participants – public schools, NGOs, the University and others – to work together in a fully compatible way with the same cohort of children to ensure that there can be a continuous set of learning experiences delivered in a seamless fashion to meet a variety of needs. While it seems halcyon when there is so much fragmentation, it is worth considering as a potential pilot scheme.
- 7) A variation of this would be to bring together a team of learning practitioners into a cohesive group that could supply the set of skills and the organization necessary to create a fully coordinated neighbourhood approach. Such an approach would ensure that educational, recreational, cultural, and economic development learning activities would be buttressed by sufficient resources for programming and financial learning incentives would be available to every child and their family. The University could act as a hub for such a community learning approach. If we want to take on the gangs, then is this not one way, as improbable as it might seem, to take on the task? There is no doubt that this would be an enormous undertaking. We would need to organize and engage in diplomatic consensus-building, and we would need the backing of the three levels of government. I do recall, however, that in the early 1980s, Winnipeg was the home of the Core Area Initiative that brought about a high level of government cooperation that resulted in everything from The Forks to the building of a network of community groups which are still functioning today. It doesn't hurt to look to history to see what's possible.
- 8) A corresponding initiative would be to explore how we can expand our community learning work to more broadly engage non-traditional adult learners. Could we begin, for example, by reserving two or three seats in a select number of Arts and Science courses for community members to audit free of charge? Furthermore, as the number of career-based learning opportunities grows, we will have to continue to seek ways to offer a more comprehensive learning experience by bringing together vocational study with traditional liberal arts education.

Under our Academic Renewal Plan there is to be a review of first year curriculum which presents the opportunity to evaluate our various transitional programs to ease the passage of non-traditional students into university.

- 9) Whatever the ambition, range and extent of the outcome, any strategy for community learning must be based on serious consultation regarding how well it fits the evolving role of the University and how it will contribute substantially to satisfying the expanding demands of a knowledge-based society in a way that is fully inclusive and open to all.

Next Steps

To respond to the practical needs associated with making community learning a primary part of the University mission a number of things are essential:

One is the drafting of a mission statement that sets a vision for the University as a centre and catalyst for community learning. Perhaps elements of the present paper might provide some of the building blocks for such a statement which can then be tabled for Board consideration.

The second step is integrating the various functions of the community learning strategy in a stable organizational and financial structure. A series of internal discussions have led to the idea of embedding the community learning strategy initiatives in the existing Division of Continuing Education, a unit of the University that has shown a great capacity for innovation. This change would result in the formal expansion of DCE's mandate to focus on both profit-driven professional development programming and community learning initiatives. Under a new designation as the *Division of Continuing Education and Community Learning* these two parallel models would each be administered by a senior academic representative reporting to the Dean.

For example, an Executive Director of Community Learning would be responsible for overseeing the implementation and advancement of the community learning strategy for the University. In addition to assisting the Innovative Learning Centre, Model School, Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre and Global Welcome Centre in fulfilling their mandates, the executive director would seek ways to integrate the various programs by bringing them into the broad structure of the University and linking them with the existing community outreach, research and experiential learning initiatives currently underway. The executive director would also be responsible for the external relations with community stakeholders, government and the private sector to develop partnerships, support and resources. He or she would prepare an Annual Report on community learning, design a broad-based tracking and evaluation plan, fundraise and lobby, and work with the University budget and strategic plan to integrate program planning and budgeting. A central task of the executive director would be to invite and create opportunities for students, faculty, staff and community members to become involved in the various community learning initiatives underway. The director would work with an organization structured similarly to the UWCRC called The University of Winnipeg Community Learning Council (UWCLC), with a board comprised equally of members from the University and community.

There is the potential for using this model to establish a source of ongoing funds – an idea suggested to us by Rick Frost of the Winnipeg Foundation. As the demand from today’s retiring baby boomers for learning opportunities increases, relevant courses and programs could be set up, the fees from which would, in turn, fund community learning programs targeted at low-income students (e.g. the Opportunity Fund). The University currently does not charge students over the age of 60 who are unemployed. While this is an important societal contribution for students who face financial need, many others have expressed their ability and willingness to pay for their educational experiences. Seniors could be offered the choice of paying tuition in the form of a direct contribution to students in need and could receive a tax benefit. This, I believe, would also have corporate and governmental appeal. Running parallel, endowment funds need to be solicited through annual giving and bequests to the University of Winnipeg Foundation, as is the case with the community learning centre of the University of Pennsylvania, a leader in this area in the United States. Ultimately I would hope to see community learning recognized by the provincial government as a part of our A-base funding.

This immediately raises the question of whether there should be an additional public cost added to the already strained budgets of the university system. The answer is can we afford not to? If community learning results in higher graduation rates, fewer young men and women unemployed and healthier, more engaged citizens does it not add to the public welfare instead of incurring extra cost? If there are fewer children left on the streets to be picked up by the gangs, or if the rates of addiction are reduced and the expense of security and incarceration are positively affected and family life improved, is that not of substantial public value? These are the kind of research questions that must and will be asked as we pursue our community learning strategy.

Another one of the crucial issues raised by the emergence of community learning is the question of evaluation both of faculty and students. Historically, promotion and tenure of faculty have been based largely on the traditional and time honoured parameters of research and publication with some weighting for teaching and administrative work. There is the corollary issue of assessing student performance based on traditional indicators such as papers and exam scores. Some tensions between the old and the new will need to be reconciled if community learning is to become an essential element of our strategic approach. As we move our community learning strategy forward, we have the opportunity to acknowledge the integral relationship that does exist between teaching and research, experiential learning and scholarship and university and community learning.

Certainly a very immediate goal of the University is to have a well-established community learning arrangement for the students so that they can earn credits for experiential learning. This is an idea long advanced by Deborah Schnitzer through the Global College Institute for Literacy and Transformative Learning and can be implemented through our new Vice President, Student and International, Neil

Besner. I expect this can be done in the next year on a broad basis and we may even want to make it a prerequisite for student graduation. We have approved the hiring of a coordinator to help manage experiential learning programs and hope to follow the example set by the University of Ottawa by making experiential learning a basic element in the assessment of the success of our students.

Some encouraging signs have appeared as well in our faculty arrangements. In our latest bargaining agreement with faculty, teaching and community work have been accepted as basis for promotion and tenure. Now it is a matter of making this clause more broadly operational. It should be noted that not everyone will be directly engaged in community learning initiatives as faculty have their own teaching and research agendas. But, as this paper illustrates, there are opportunities for those who wish to become involved.

A very significant step would be to have community learning accepted by the provincial government as one of the criteria in setting grant allocations in recognition of its essential value to the well being of the people of this province. That will be an important goal for the administration to pursue. The beginning of that process will be to have the Board of Regents establish a community learning policy comparable to the forward-looking policy statement on sustainability which has done so much to help define the actions of the University and which, as I pointed out in this paper, was the forerunner for the work on community learning.

There is no one university model that fits all. Each institution has its unique, defining characteristics based on history, location and the policy decisions of its boards, senate and administration over the years. The core principles of teaching and research in university education are therefore reflected by a wide variety of responses. Yet, I would assert that each university must take into its distinctive approaches to education an element of community learning if the institution is to be relevant to society. One of the ways we earn our keep is by extending the immense capacity of the public institutions to participate in the major change underway and the increasing demand that there be an opportunity for learning in society. I hope that these efforts at our University can help point the way and begin redefining the mission of universities in their community. Pursuing the interests of justice and equity, to say nothing of preparing a citizenry to understand their rights and act upon their obligations, freed from the limitations of short-term, restrictive, and worn-out perspectives, will demand a coherent community learning strategy.