

Students as Community Organizers

By Seth Borgos

Volunteers work with low-income citizens to help them combat common problems.

Cought out of his element, the Memphis city traffic engineer was visibly uncomfortable. He was accustomed to working with traffic counts, master plans, engineering specifications—the tools of his profession—not with the people affected by his policies.

Yet here in his office folks from a down-on-the-heels neighborhood were telling him how hard it was to cross the streets, explaining how traffic flooded the streets when the shift broke at three nearby factories, pointing to a map on which they had marked their neighborhood's worst danger zones. They were telling him how to do his business.

Some sign of the engineer's feelings, a trace of condescension or indifference, must have shown on his face, because the people in that group detected it. And they resented it. They did not leave until they managed to extract a promise that a traffic survey would be conducted in the neighborhood within four weeks. They were pleased that they had accomplished something.

As they walked back to their cars, they plotted strategy for the next meeting with the engineer—just in case he welched on his promise.

Most of these folks had never been to City Hall before. They

Seth Borgos is Director of Research and Publications of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) in Little Rock, Arkansas. A native of New York, he joined the ACORN staff after graduating from college in 1975.

didn't think of themselves as neighborhood leaders, or activists, or protestors. Yet there they were, trying to exert some control over the policies which determine the fate of their community. Their lives had been transformed in a significant way. These Tennesseans were members of the newly formed College Park Community Organization, an affiliate of ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now.

ACORN is a grass-roots membership organization of low- and moderate-income people. Its purpose is to give people power over the institutions and forces which dominate their lives. Founded in Arkansas in 1970, ACORN has grown to membership of more than 10,000 families organized into some 150 local neighborhood groups in 11 states.

Organizations don't appear out of thin air. They are consciously organized. In the case of Memphis' College Park Community, the organizer was Cecilia McCartney, a Pennsylvania State University undergraduate in Community Development who worked as a volunteer for ACORN last spring and summer.

When she returned to Penn State last fall, she was the only student in her classes who had put theory into practice. At a professor's request, she made a presentation in which she led her fellow students through practical exercises based on her training and experience gained with ACORN.

Cecilia's experiences show how much a student volunteer can learn—and do—as a community organizer. She began on March 7 with six weeks of on-the-job training under the supervision of an experienced ACORN organizer, John Beam. John drew the boundaries of the College Park neighborhood on a city map.

For the most part, the residents of the College Park area are moderate-income homeowners. The west side of the neighborhood is predominantly white, with a large proportion of elderly people. As one moves east through the neighborhood, the proportion of black residents increases. Most of the blacks have moved into the neighborhood fairly recently, and the two groups

have been predictably suspicious of one another.

Cecilia began her first week by taking advantage of the few contacts ACORN already had in the neighborhood. The first person she contacted was Emily Anderson, who lived on the western edge of the College Park area. (With the exception of ACORN staff members, all names in this article have been changed.) John knew that this woman had run for political office, had campaigned for several Republican candidates, and always worked at the polls. He figured she would know the names of many "civic-minded" people in the area.

Emily Anderson knew plenty of names, but mostly of long-time white residents. Each of her contacts provided Cecilia with the names of more people. For two weeks she criss-crossed the central and western portions of the neighborhood, developing this network of contacts. Eventually the trail began to lead in circles, the names repeating themselves. In order to bring in new people, particularly the younger black families, Cecilia would have to "hit the doors."

Systematic door-knocking is the heart of an ACORN organizing drive. Door-knocking has a number of purposes: to familiarize the people of the neighborhood with ACORN, to encourage them to come to the opening meeting of the group, to identify potential leaders for the new group, to determine what people consider to be the community's major problems.

From a broader perspective, the significance of door-knocking is that the organizer establishes direct contact with almost everyone without going through intermediaries. It is all too easy to organize a community group dominated by a small clique of self-appointed neighborhood spokesmen. Door-knocking brings in new blood and democratizes the process. In a racially divided neighborhood like College Park this is particularly important because it helps to ensure participation by both groups.

Every organizer develops a standard "rap" which he or she uses on

the doors. Cecilia's went something like this:

"Hi, Mrs. Roberts, my name is Cecilia McCartney, and I work with ACORN. Mrs. Jones suggested that I talk to you about it. The letters in ACORN stand for Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. There are ACORN groups in 11 states now, nine right here in Memphis. You may have heard how the ACORN group south of here in Binghampton prevented a bus barn from coming into the neighborhood. The Binghampton neighbors got together on that problem and decided that other problems too, like poor trash pick-up, could be better solved by an organized group instead of one or two people trying alone. Mrs. Roberts, what would you like to see a neighborhood group do?"

Cecilia jotted down the neighborhood problems "Mrs. Roberts" mentioned. After she had finished, Cecilia told her about other people in the neighborhood who felt the same way and asked her if she would like to become involved in an ACORN group. Some of the more enthusiastic people joined the organization right on the spot. Others promised to attend the first meeting. Generally Cecilia would end the conversation by thanking "Mrs. Roberts" for her time and leaving an article about ACORN from one of the local newspapers.

Reactions to the knocking ranged from deep suspicion to avid interest. Older residents in the western part of the neighborhood were the least receptive, but even here there were several exceptions.

An early ACORN enthusiast was Bill Rice. Bill, who had a union background, was anxious to convert his enthusiasm into action. Together, he and Cecilia signed up half his block as ACORN members.

Bill Rice was one of eight neighborhood residents whom Cecilia invited to attend the first meeting of the organizing committee, on March 28, just three weeks after she started making contacts. At the meeting, the group discussed neighborhood issues such as lack of places for children to play, rat-infested lots, and high utility bills.

Cecilia again described ACORN and the ACORN model of neighborhood organizing. The group decided to use it. They wrote a letter which would be sent out, under all their signatures, to the entire neighborhood. The letter invited neighborhood residents to attend a big meeting in one month, on April 25, at a local church.

The second and third organizing committee meetings were characterized by mounting enthusiasm and commitment. The folks were talking about "our group," "us"—in organizing parlance, they were beginning to "own the group."

At the third committee session, six weeks after Cecilia started the organizing drive and a week before the big meeting, she mentioned that there were still 200 doors in the neighborhood that hadn't been knocked on, and she doubted that she'd be able to hit all of them in time. Bill Rice assumed leadership and organized community members to complete the door-knocking.

Between 40 and 50 neighborhood people attended the April 25 meeting. Bill Rice moderated. The chairman of another local ACORN group described what his organization had already accomplished.

The content and tone of the meeting impressed Cecilia. People seemed ready to do something to improve their community, and they seemed to understand the advantages of being organized. The group decided to visit the traffic engineer's office to discuss the dangerous lack of stop and speed limit signs and to invite the local gas company to inspect some rat-infested vacant lots it owned in the College Park area.

With the completion of the College Park organizing drive Cecilia's formal training period was over. She had, with only limited guidance from her supervisor, organized a neighborhood group, the essential building block of ACORN. Despite this very substantial accomplishment, her organizing perspective was still rather limited. She had yet to test her skills outside the narrowly circumscribed model of the organizing drive.

Cecilia was transferred to Conway, Arkansas, a small city (popu-

lation approximately 15,000) 30 miles northwest of Little Rock. She was the only ACORN staff member in Conway. At times she felt lonely, but as she immersed herself in the challenges of the job she became more and more comfortable in her new home.

The toughest challenge initially was learning to manage her time. She was no longer following a neat, step-by-step model, and her supervisor was 30 miles away. She now had to work with four groups instead of one, and each group was in a different stage of development. She had to balance responsibilities to local campaigns already in progress and statewide campaigns to which Conway was expected to contribute.

Cecilia's work schedule reflected these multiple demands. Morning and early afternoon was a time to do paperwork, make fliers, scan the Conway and Little Rock newspapers, talk to city and state officials, do research, and contact ACORN members who were home during the day. Midafternoon to dusk was door-knocking time. (This is the period of the day when people are most likely to be home and receptive to a stranger knocking on their door.) Neighborhood group meetings were normally scheduled in the evening.

Other ACORN group activities, commonly lumped under the word "actions," might take place at any time of the day or night, depending on the target of the "action."

Cecilia chose to work particularly closely with the Pine Area Community Organization, the youngest of the existing Conway groups. The Pine Area community had suffered from the conspicuous neglect of the city government, and the members were ready to fight. For six weeks the group did an action a week. Several of the actions concerned vacant houses in the neighborhood. Three weeks after the initial action one of the worst of the houses was torn down by the city. These quick results spurred the group on, and by the beginning of August, three months after Cecilia arrived in Conway, the group had doubled its membership to some 50 families.

Working with the Pine Area Com-



An ACORN community group (top) had 75 members turn out to complain to city officials about a dangerous intersection. Groups from throughout Arkansas send representatives to the state capital to press for specific goals set at association board meetings.

munity Organization was similar to working with the College Park group in Memphis. The issues were fresh; the members of the group were inexperienced and enthusiastic. On the other hand, many of the other ACORN members in Conway had belonged to the organization for several years and their relationship to the organization was more complicated. They had suffered defeats as well as victories. Some of these long-time members had a highly sophisticated understanding of ACORN's role in the community and there was as much for them to teach Cecilia as there was for Cecilia to teach them.

"In Conway," Cecilia recalls, "my organizing skills were tested and expanded. My 'rap' became more con-

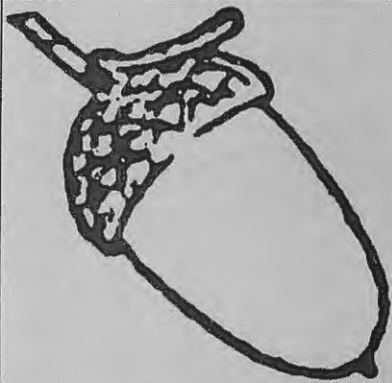
cise, my confidence in my own abilities grew. I learned to temper optimism with a realistic assessment of the target. Most important of all, I learned the importance of *making* and *keeping* an agenda. Being an organizer can be an overwhelming experience if you and your groups don't have a clear idea of where you're going. Daily, weekly, monthly plans that are adhered to—yet flexible—help create order out of what is often chaotic."

Cecilia's experience was characteristic of the most ambitious and committed volunteers who have worked with ACORN in the past seven years. The staff and membership of ACORN viewed her as a professional organizer. She could not be dismissed or condescended

to as a student dilettante because Cecilia did not think of herself in that way.

Not every volunteer is willing to make that kind of commitment, but there are plenty of other options available. Many community organizations offer special summer internships for student volunteers. A summer is just enough time to do a complete ACORN organizing drive, especially since those long summer days provide plenty of daylight hours in the evening for door-knocking.

Some students and other young people living in ACORN cities volunteer as "organizer aides." They help the organizer with tasks such as phone-calling, distributing flyers,



Founded in Arkansas in 1970, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) has a dues-paying membership of more than 10,000 low- and moderate-income families in 11 states. These are: Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Missouri, Nevada, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas.

Each member belongs to an affiliated community group which meets monthly to discuss issues, choose those to pursue, and plan strategy. Dues, \$16 per year per family, support the organization, including subsistence wages for organizers and other staff members. City, regional, and state policies are set by executive boards on which each local group has one vote. The multi-state Association is governed by an Association Board composed of two elected representatives from each ACORN state.

ACORN's successful campaigns have included blocking expressway projects through residential neighborhoods in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, lowering residential telephone rates in Texas, ending sales tax on food and medicine in Arkansas and Missouri, electing members to local government offices in Arkansas and South Dakota, and preventing pollution of neighborhoods from industrial sources in New Orleans.

ACORN welcomes student volunteers as part-time workers, summer interns, and full-time workers.

Those interested in assisting local groups part time should contact the ACORN office in

their state. The addresses are:

Arkansas:	523 West 15th Little Rock 72202 (501) 376-7151
Colorado:	1724 Ogden Denver 80218 (303) 831-1094
Florida:	561 NE 79th Street Suite 220 Miami 33138 (305) 754-0342
Iowa:	412B East 5th Des Moines 50309 (515) 288-2740
Louisiana:	818 Howard Ave. Suite 302 New Orleans 70113 (504) 524-4474
Missouri:	3177 South Grand St. Louis 63118 (314) 865-3833
Nevada:	195 North Arlington Reno 89501 (702) 323-0781
Pennsylvania:	528 North 21st Philadelphia 19130 (215) 567-2537
South Dakota:	611 South 2nd Ave. Sioux Falls 57104 (605) 332-2328
Tennessee:	11th So. Cleveland Memphis 38104 (901) 725-1956
Texas:	3814 Ross Room 201 Dallas 75204 (214) 823-4580 2405 San Jacinto Houston 77002 (713) 658-0945

Students interested in summer internships should contact: Meg Campbell, 3814 Ross, Dallas, Texas 75204, (214) 823-7490.

Students interested in long-term (at least three months) full-time volunteer work should contact: Carolyn Carr, 523 West 15th, Little Rock, Arkansas 72202, (501) 376-7151.

door-knocking, putting actions together, preparing leaflets, and setting up neighborhood meetings.

While organizing is the heart of ACORN's work, many other tasks help support an organizing operation. These include research, legal work, bookkeeping, photography, art work and design, newsletter production, printing, fundraising, office work, and recruiting. Volunteers with these skills are almost always welcome on the staff of a community organization.

Communities are being organized everywhere in the country. ACORN has offices in 11 states, and other community organizations include Fair Share in Massachusetts, Carolina Action in North Carolina, the Northern Plains Resource Council in Montana, the Vermont Alliance, and the Citizens' Action League (CAL) in California. Community organizations are chronically short of funds and staff, and in most cases they will greet serious-minded volunteers with open arms.

Nothing says that students must work with an existing community organization. In the 1960's it was very common for groups of students to go together into a community to organize it, and while that is no longer as common today, it is still an option that is available to student volunteers. Working with an existing organization, however, has certain advantages. Cecilia cites a number of them:

- On-the-job training from experienced organizers;
- Greater "credibility" in the community;
- A pool of resources to draw on even after the formal training period is completed;
- The opportunity to be part of a larger movement, to participate in statewide campaigns dealing with issues such as health care, utility rates, property taxes, and pollution;
- Less likelihood of ripping off the community. Many of the student organizers of the 1960's left the communities they'd been organizing after six months or a year to go back to school, and people in the community often felt that they'd been deceived and exploited. Community organizations like ACORN and Fair Share are committed to building

permanent organizations. The work that a student volunteer does with these organizations will be carried on by other organizers when the student goes back to school.

A student volunteer program benefits everyone involved: the community organization, the school, and the students. The organization gets a beefed-up staff, which is always desirable, and an infusion of youthful enthusiasm. Students often bring a fresh, critical perspective to their work which long-time organizers, engrossed in their work and set in their values, do not have. Students look at the organization with somewhat more detachment than the permanent staff, particularly after they've returned to school and analyzed their experience on paper.

The schools get an invigorating blast of fresh air from students returning from an organizing experience. This is particularly true of schools which have departments in community organizing or community development. When Cecilia returned to the classroom, her practical perspective balanced the theoretical perspective which tends to dominate academic environments.

On the subject of how students benefit from working with a community organization, Cecilia says:

"ACORN made me more sure of my abilities. I'm not afraid to deal with people; I'm not afraid of new situations.

"I never had a romantic view of the poor, but I now realize even more clearly that they're people like everyone else, neither better nor worse. I think schools tend to approach things from a social worker perspective—helping people as individuals. ACORN taught me the importance of group identity, group goals. Organizing attacks problems at their roots.

"Before going to ACORN, community organizing, power, and social change were abstract concepts which, as a Community Development major, I had read about, wrote about, and thought about. After ACORN, I finally understood what was involved in all these processes. Change is a slow process, but it is achievable. Without ACORN I would still be wondering." **S**

JOB DESCRIPTION

JOB TITLE:

Community Organizer

BASIC FUNCTION:

To work as an organizer with low to moderate income neighborhood groups affiliated with ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now. The self-governed local groups confront a broad scope of economic and political issues which affect their lives—utility rates, health care, taxes and neighborhood deterioration.

MAJOR DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

A. To complete a two month in-house training program devoted entirely to direct organizing. The first week is an orientation period during which the trainee gains familiarity with office systems and research techniques, reads compiled organizing materials, and meets with staff members to discuss the basics of setting up an organizing drive. In the second phase of training, the trainee works under the direction of an experienced ACORN organizer in the actual organization of a community group in an urban or rural area. After the organization is formed, the third phase of training stresses maintenance of the group, development of strategies and tactics, and the mechanics of internal financing.

B. To assume the responsibility of coordinating the organizing activities of existing neighborhood groups in one of ACORN's regional offices. The organizer works with ACORN members in the planning, implementation and evaluation of group strategies.

Other responsibilities include research on local campaign issues, leadership development, participation in large-scale statewide campaigns, developing the financial self-sufficiency of ACORN at the neighborhood level by coordinating the membership dues system.

C. The organizer must attend project and statewide staff meetings and participate in ongoing training sessions.

SUPERVISION:

The Head Organizer of each state meets regularly with the field organizers to consult on organizing problems and offer guidance.

STIPEND:

Organizers are paid a living allowance of \$220 a month with increases determined by the length of time they work with ACORN. The stipend is sufficient for basic living expenses since the cost of living is relatively low in the areas where ACORN works. There is a mileage subsidy. You are paid while in training.

BENEFITS:

6 paid holidays, 1 week vacation for the first year, 5 sick leave days, moving expenses, Social Security, Unemployment Compensation, option to be included in ACORN's group major medical insurance policy.

REQUIREMENTS:

Applicants must demonstrate a concern for economic justice, a dedication to social change, a willingness to move according to the needs of the organization, and an ability to work well with people of varied backgrounds. Driver's license is a necessity. The applicant must be willing to work with ACORN for at least one year.

INQUIRIES:

Send résumé to Carolyn Carr, ACORN, 523 W. 15th St., Little Rock, Arkansas 72202 (501-376-7151).





NSVP Forum Advocacy

Synergist invited six people of differing professional experience to discuss the issue of advocacy as it relates to student volunteer programs.

Advocacy projects proliferate within the student volunteer movement as students seek greater involvement with contemporary social issues. Commitments to community organizing and client rights increase as service-learning programs develop a more permanent position within high school and college curriculums. An advocacy objective now plays an increasingly important role in the program design in scores of new projects (see "Students as Community Organizers," pp. 3-7 in this issue). These efforts include activities such as a patient's rights project, where students help to articulate and implement better relationships between a mental hospital's staff and their clients. Welfare mothers, prisoners, and other client groups become the focus of a student's efforts, rather than the institution or social service agency.

Advocacy also becomes an issue when students are placed in programs or institutions that are insensitive to their clients' needs. Conflicts arise and loyalties are tested when volunteers seek to solve these problems on their own. Traditionally, students are responsible to a sponsoring agency's staff in the performance of a service project. Sometimes these relationships highlight discrepancies between youthful idealism and institutional pragmatism.

Andrea Kydd, the moderator and Assistant to the Director of VISTA, worked with the National Welfare Rights Organization as a local organizer, the director of several state campaigns and Program Director. She also directed the University

Year for ACTION (UYA) program at Queens College, New York.

Ira Arlook, Director of the Ohio Public Interest Campaign, Cleveland, and Associate Professor in the Social Services Department of Cleveland State University, functions both as a community sponsor and a faculty adviser for student volunteers assigned to advocacy projects.

Alec Dickson, founder and first Director of Voluntary Service Overseas and founder and currently Honorary Director of Community Service Volunteers, London, launched the British counterparts (and predecessors) of Peace Corps and VISTA. He has advised groups and governments in many parts of the world on setting up and operating student volunteer programs.

Karen Nussbaum, Director of the Working Women Organizing Project, Cleveland, heads an outreach program servicing working women's organizations. A founder of 9 to 5, Boston's Organization for Women Office Workers, she has been Director of Organizing for Local 925 of the Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, in Boston.

Robert Sigmon, Director of Continuing Education, School of Public Health, University of South Carolina, Columbia, has helped develop and manage service-centered educational models in South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee.

Judy Sorum, Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Studies, University of Maryland, College Park, works with students who design their own majors. She helped to establish the University's Office of Experiential Learning Programs and was Assistant Director of the Office of Volunteer Programs at Michigan State University, East Lansing.

Kydd: What kind of advocacy projects are suitable for the participation of secondary and post-secondary students? Judy, having worked with college volunteers, how do you answer that question?

Sorum: I can't respond in terms of particular causes or issues as well

as I can in terms of the structure of the project and the volunteer's relationship to it.

Many students are still coming to grips with the issues of commitment in the midst of complexity. A great many of them, and of us as well, need role models, people to help us process some of the things we are going through. I suggest, then, a project structure which allows for a wide range of roles, beginning with direct service. Advocacy roles may be a natural outgrowth.

A project also might involve a team of people with a variety of skills, commitments, perspectives and experiences. This allows students to work with more sophisticated individuals who know the issues, have the philosophical grounding and possess the interpersonal skills needed to help volunteers deal with some of the complexities.

Without this team approach the potential exists for damaging the client, the project and the student.

"Advocacy projects based on the terms of the community group have a different dimension from those of a crusader out there cracking a whip on his or her own terms."

When students are faced with a greater complexity than they can handle, they are likely either to retreat from the whole situation or to leap in headfirst and do some real harm.

I am suggesting a ladder of involvement with rungs for direct service, structured interactions and limited outcomes. Ascending the ladder enables the student to grow within one setting with the aid and support of the team.

Sigmon: In terms of structuring projects, I make a distinction between who owns the service or work outcome and who owns the learning or educational outcome. If we are working on behalf of a group of people or a community agency, then we do the project on their terms.



ANDREA KYDD, ASSISTANT TO THE DIRECTOR OF VISTA, WASHINGTON, D.C.

The volunteer and the school may have their own separate learning agenda.

Advocacy projects based on the terms of the community group have a different dimension from those of a crusader out there cracking a whip on his or her own terms.

An old notion is that jobs break down into three types—working with ideas, with people or with things. Examples of advocacy projects involving working with ideas might be pushing for legislative action on ERA or against installation of nuclear plants. These have some legitimacy as volunteer projects.

I have difficulty thinking of advocacy projects in which volunteers are working with people because a dictionary definition of "advocate" is one who pleads the cause of another. I find it difficult to plead someone else's cause unless they invite me to do it. If you ask me and I can work that into a service-learning program, fine. But I know it is on your terms, not mine. We have to get over our save-the-world approach in volunteer programs.

That leaves advocacy projects in which volunteers work with things. Well, students can develop new technologies on the behalf of other folks.

The question for any style advocacy activity is: What constitutes good service on behalf of people

and society, and what constitutes not good service?

Kydd: Karen, your organization has had students working with people and ideas and the need for change. What has been your experience?

Nussbaum: Coming from inside an advocacy organization, I find it very interesting to hear from university people—because Judy and Bob have outlined what I think are the most important problems.

Sigmon: May we go home now?

Nussbaum: So much of this whole idea of structure relates to how you involve someone in your organization as a member. You have to have work that is clearly defined, small enough to handle and not so demanding on the person coming in that it prevents development. If you don't give people that chance to grow, you create confusion and breed trouble. They develop ideas that are not consistent with those of the organization.

The other idea that particularly struck me was how the role of the volunteer differs from that of a member of an organization. A member has rights to determine policy, tactics, strategy, all of that. The staff doesn't have these rights; it is there to help the membership carry out policy. And volunteers have even fewer rights than the staff members do; volunteers should see themselves as having the oppor-

tunity to observe and contribute to the organization.

We have had difficulty with volunteers coming in with strong ideas, not speaking about them to the people they fear might confront or differ with them, and brewing trouble on the side. It is very destructive. It makes organizations reluctant to encourage more people to become involved, yet involving new people gives us the capacity to grow.

"We have changed from trying to make volunteers into organizers."

We also have had good experiences. A union which grew out of one of our Working Women's groups had an organizing drive on a university campus. We specifically stayed away from student involvement in the beginning, but once the fight to win a fair contract was well established and workers were well organized, we invited student participation. That was done with a clear understanding that the workers would make the policy.

The relationship was excellent.

Sorum: It is important not only that the workers said what they wanted but also that the students worked with them as a team. Students do well in research and reporting, educating and communicating. These are the kinds of skills which they have or are trying to learn. These skills are not linked to their having held the same views as the organization for a long time, but can enable them to explore those views and develop a commitment.

Yet often we say that the first requirement for volunteers in an advocacy project is that they share a complete and abiding commitment to that issue.

Nussbaum: We have changed from trying to make volunteers into organizers; instead we assign them to more specific and less explosive tasks, such as surveying members. Through performing such simple duties volunteers come to understand what the organization is about.

Dickson: Speaking from a quite different perspective, I find that much



ROBERT SIGMON, DIRECTOR OF CONTINUING EDUCATION, SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

of my time back in Britain is spent on diminishing fears and lowering anxieties on the part of professionals. For example, we are promoting volunteering through television programs. If we are to show the public children in institutional care with a view to their being taken into ordinary families, we have to lower the matron's anxiety that this public display is unethical and vulgar, that her children are going to be put up for public sale.

If we put a volunteer into a correctional institution, his or her role is to involve the young offenders themselves in community service. We must lower the anxiety of the superintendent that some scandal will emerge, that offenders will get away.

I know the school of thought promoted by Saul Alinsky, his exhortation that we should rub raw the sores of discontent. But I think that this postulates highly intelligent, politically oriented, self-confident young men or women, certainly in their twenties. It might eliminate from participating in a basically humanistic movement those average people who don't possess the abrasive quality that is necessary for confrontation, those quieter people whose role may be to convince rather than confront the anxiety-

draped professionals. Asserting rights is not automatically more noble than responding to human needs. They are equally important.

Sigmon: I think we can understand the fear and anxiety stage from another perspective if we look at the designs of our programs. Volunteerism has a built-in design dilemma: because there is a learning dimension that academic people want to sanction, they have trouble understanding that the agency—not the professor and not the student—has the right to set the work, service, or advocacy task and own it. We resolve the dilemma if we acknowledge that the ownership of the work and the service is with those people to whom it is going to make a difference.

We have set terrific precedents in our rhetoric about the local folks determining what volunteers do, but the espoused theory and the theory in use bear little resemblance in many instances.

Kydd: Based on what you and Judy have said, structuring the program is its key to success from the perspective of both the student placement component and the organization. Assigned tasks must be well defined within the needs of the organization and take into account

the capability and potential of the student.

One of the ways in which I, as an organizer, used the PIRG's (Public Interest Research Groups), for instance, was as an avenue to

“Then, of course, we face the problem of assessing whether taking volunteers is worth the additional administrative work, and the tension.”

get information which the organization could build on.

Ira, how does your organization use student volunteers?

Arlook: Our problem in using volunteers was to be sure that we could structure enough jobs so that we weren't just throwing students into situations they could not handle. Research became important simply because it was easier to train students to do that than other things.

As Judy said, there is a progression: Students get interested in the research, become committed to the organization, become more capable and then get involved in aspects other than research.

It is a rare student who can play

the role of a staff member because of the level of knowledge and experience with people needed. But the key has been structure, and the appropriate level of supervision.

Then, of course, we face the problem of assessing whether taking volunteers is worth the additional administrative work, and the tension.

My department at Cleveland State University, which has many students older than the average college age, has made the Ohio Public Interest Campaign one of its certified field placements. The faculty members have a lot of ideas about what type of learning experience students who work with the Campaign should have. I get double pressure because I am on both sides, which is not bad. It is very important to make clear what will be in the organization's interest to provide students. Otherwise the organization takes on the role of the educational institution.

Often it is a very seductive thing for an organization to think of the possibilities opened up by bringing in volunteers, but unrealistic expectations may mislead the organization, the students and the college or high school.

Kydd: What do you university people use as criteria to select students and to hook them to the available projects?

Sorum: When students are required to do a placement, screening is too often a matter of putting everybody of X group with X major at X point in their program in X placement. This doesn't work when a student in A or Z group comes in and volunteers. In either case, the possibility of understanding the important things about that student is slim. I am talking about the ability to handle structure and lack of structure, to be self-motivated; whether the student is dualistic or simplistic in terms of his commitment; whether the student can handle complexity.

Instead we end up asking, "What year are you? What is your major? Have you ever done this sort of thing before? How did it go? What do you think you would like to do?"

We assume that the agencies are

mind the store, that they have a clear idea of what they need, that a placement will end up being productive.

I don't think that is a good system. On the other hand, in-depth get-acquainted sessions are not a realistic possibility in an institution with 33,000 undergraduates.

Sigmon: Placement is a no-no word for me. I come at the volunteer as the one who has something at stake, who wants to do something useful and learn something. In the design we have drawn up, students may start from one of two bases. They can say, "I need to learn A, B and C, so I want to find a task or an organization or a set of circumstances that will enable me to learn A, B and C."

Or they may be interested in a specific task or issue; they can say, "I have a burning desire to get involved with hospital emergency-

"On whose behalf are you doing this project?"

room care because all the poor people seem to be coming there rather than to the health clinic. I want to understand that because I am a social worker."

Then certain standards have to be met. On whose behalf are you doing this project? Who is going to be helped? Who is going to be hurt? Who are the people involved? To whom do you make a report? What is their point of view? How do they fit into that organization?

We provide work sheets for sorting out project tasks and learning questions.

Dickson: I have the feeling that you are operating light years ahead of us in Britain and in an atmosphere infinitely more positive and affirmative.

Sigmon: If you only knew.

Dickson: In my position I am often confronting academics, saying to them that life is more than individual academic advancement, that meeting social problems requires the commitment of young people as well as professionals.

Today the whole of Britain is scared to death of unemployment, so community service is thrown out

the window as sentimental irrelevance. It's back to basics. You have to get a job straight away.

Sigmon: You think we don't face the same thing?

Nussbaum: Undeniably there is a need for massive programs that involve people in a small way every day. You can see it by the numbers of young people who flock to the various religious cults because they want to do something worthwhile, and find a secure place in society. This is a terrible shame, and it speaks to the lack of organizations that are useful and healthy and can absorb large numbers of people.

Kydd: What happens when a student walks through your door and says, "I want to help you out"?

Nussbaum: We look not so much at the volunteer's background or skills as at his or her general attitude, particularly whether he or she has respect for the organization and its members.

Respect includes several components. One is that the student is polite, and that is not always the case. Another is that the student must not be condescending toward the members, who often are economically disadvantaged or less well educated, or toward their banding together to promote their own interests. A third component is respect for the decision-making process of the organization.

Another thing we look for is the student's willingness to work hard, to be responsible to the organization. You agree on hours that the volunteer will work, and you expect to see the volunteer there. You agree on tasks and you expect the tasks to get done.

That shows respect for the organization and self-respect on the part of the volunteer. It is a serious effort. It is not fooling around.

Arlook: Which is often unlike the school experience. Deadlines can be postponed at school. Nothing except your own personal advancement depends on your completing an assignment. But inside an organization, your failure to meet a responsibility has real consequences for other people. It is very hard for students to make that shift, to understand the level of responsibility, however minimal.

Sigmon: That is one of the most difficult transitions that students have to make.

Kydd: From the standpoint of the organization, Ira, how does the student move from an entry-level position, where every activity is more or less circumscribed, to one in which he or she can demonstrate more independence? And how is that developmental plan assessed and implemented?

Arlook: The academic institution's assessment would not determine when a person is ready to take on additional responsibilities simply because I would never relinquish the right to make that judgment.

If the organization is at all efficient, the staff judges how capably students are performing tasks and knows what additional responsibilities volunteers can and want to take on.

It is in the organization's self-interest to see people develop, move from simple research tasks to new skills and responsibilities.

Speaking as a faculty member, I am not sure we academics have an alternative to accepting the organization's or the student's judgment. Sometimes they are at odds, but we can only make shrewd guesses or analyses based on evidence because we are not there to see. Also, the faculty generally does not know enough about an organization's activities to be able to make judgments very well.

Sorum: I'm not sure that we, as parts of academic institutions, assess what students get out of a service-learning experience. Assessments are often in terms of skills that are readily visible, such as the ability to observe carefully, to do research, to write.

The whole issue of whether the student has matured is not part of grading. One only notes, "Okay, it's happening."

For example, a student says, "Now I see the importance of using wholly objective data rather than slanting the facts to make a case for the client." This is not an intentional outcome, but it is one we bless—and do not evaluate.

Dickson: We have been talking about the student. I would like to feel that in five years we could be



KAREN NUSSBAUM, DIRECTOR OF THE WORKING WOMEN ORGANIZING PROJECT, CLEVELAND

talking about what the faculty, the university, is doing about a situation.

When an army goes into battle, the men don't go by themselves. They go with everything that makes the army effective—their officers, ammunition, the commissary, the whole training mechanism. In most programs the things that made the student—the teachers, the lab, the training—remain back at base. In effect we send the troops naked into battle.

Sorum: Yes, we see ourselves as supporters of volunteers and see the social changes as happening out there beyond the campus.

We are going through an interesting experiment at the University of Maryland now. We have a \$100,000 grant to see if we can bring in volunteers to change us. For example, retirees come in to work with and advocate on behalf of the students.

That and the totality of effort Alec was suggesting run counter to the traditional views of the institution. First, we export knowledge. We have it. You need it. You get it. Second, institutions of higher learning value the specialist. "Generalist" is a negative term, but the skills needed to tackle human problems are multiple skills, those of the generalist. So while we are sending out the troops naked, they are dragging the institution, kicking and screaming, behind them.

Arlook: It is not only generalist versus specialist. Much of the volunteer program came out of the student movement of the 60's when many universities had more to do with the aggravation than the solution of society's problems. I am thinking of research for the Vietnam war effort. We must consider humanistic values.

We have no lack of volunteers in my department, for example, but it is relatively unusual. I would bet that a survey of colleges and universities would find that volunteers are coming out of some departments and not others.

Sorum: Agreed. Generally, volunteers and interns are coming out of the health-related professions, a few out of psychology, some out of political science. You can pick the disciplines.

It seems to me that all of us, both inside and outside the institutions, have missed part of our responsibility of providing roles for people from other disciplines. We haven't had opportunities for physics or math majors to contribute, for example. We have limited the scope of roles, especially in advocacy situations, to those who are already totally committed to the effort and come at it from a social-change perspective. We bear some responsibility to have a variety of roles which would then sneakily enmesh people with differing skills in the issues so that they commit



JUDY SORUM, ASSISTANT DEAN FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND, COLLEGE PARK

themselves to utilizing their skills as, for instance, an astronomer, in the solution of problems.

Dickson: In Britain it is faculties involved in technology who are leading in what Herb Thelen of the University of Chicago calls "the humane application of knowledge," who are doing such things as de-

"We have limited the scope of roles, especially in advocacy situations, to those who are already totally committed to the effort . . ."

signing a wheelchair that can mount and descend a staircase.

Indeed I would be hard put to find those faculties ironically known as the "Humanities" which are as active as those dealing with science and technology.

Sigmon: The best question I know to ask the physicists and engineers as well as the social workers is: How are students served and how do they serve when they are performing any role, whether it is social service or technological in nature?

Kydd: Often a student is assigned to provide a service and, as a result of doing so, sees a need for advocacy. How is the contract which the agency made with the student modified, and how does an organization or school recognize that the student is growing and can provide services which go beyond the original plan?

Sigmon: I offer two axioms. First,

no matter how well you plan, something unexpected is going to come up. Second, understanding the problem might be better than fixing it at a student level. This means that if I am working with a student who comes up against a hard place—sees somebody cheating on an expense form, on clients, on food stamps, whatever—we try to map out who is involved, see what the givens and the interaction patterns are, try to understand. Then I ask: What can you do?

You always have the contract as a starting point with the potential of renegotiating. Those surprises, and even disappointments, can become important learnings. So understanding the situation, rather than fixing it, is vital to students. Fixing it is okay, of course, but be sure on whose behalf you are doing it.

Kydd: If I were a student, catching someone cheating could devastate me, could turn me against the volunteer activity if I could not find a way to do what I felt needed to be done. How is that dealt with?

Arlook: The likelihood of changing things depends on social movements outside of both the service institutions and the university. In years past it was sometimes possible for someone to have recourse to advocacy organizations, such as the National Welfare Rights Organization, that pertained to the service that was supposed to be delivered.

That isn't true nowadays, although I think the day is coming again when we will have strong community organizations—such as those coming from the environmental movement.

My department at Cleveland State seriously considered whether to deal with the correctional system. Faculty members were noticing a pattern in which students, as volunteers or as employees, went from a great deal of idealism to tremendous frustration and embitterment. The institution we were trying to change was much too strong for the university in combination with students to overcome.

The decision was not to take on that institution because of the feeling that the university was channel-

"Who is going to bear the repercussions of your going in to change all this when you go back to class next semester?"

ing students into a destructive situation no one could handle.

Sorum: One thing that takes the bitterness out is to make sure the student goes through a learning cycle. David Kolb has done some interesting work on this concept; learning is through concrete experience, reflective observation, development of theoretical perspectives (either your own or other people's) so that you come up with underlying rules and, finally, development of new alternatives or approaches to be tested out.

Often the student's tendency is to go from concrete experience to new approaches immediately—do not pass reflective observation, do not pass theoretical perspectives, just do something immediately.

Sometimes I, as an administrator, help a student look at a fuller kind of learning process, not saying you can't do anything about the situation but rather that you should spend some time reflecting on it and see what alternative approaches may come forth. This process gives potential for enrichment rather than a nonproductive experience.

Sometimes we make the alternatives seem to be either/or. That is, the volunteers can either leap in to make changes or declare it hopeless and back off. We lose the opportunity to make it a more workable situation for everyone.

Nussbaum: Often I can see no resolution except bitterness. If you see a problem and you are going to change it, you have to have power, to understand power and to have a sense of responsibility.

Who is going to bear the repercussions of your going in to change all this when you go back to class next semester?

Another distinction, do you want to be involved in social change or are you a crusader? Will you organize as a responsible person, or

do you just want to go in and say what is right and wrong? It's not useful to have a crusader unless that is a specific role that is assigned with an organized base.

If your base is organized, if it says we need someone to go out there and scream and holler, fine. But a screamer on his or her own can really accomplish nothing permanent. That makes for unhappiness, makes him or her feel, "Even though I gave it my all, nothing really lasting came of it."

This occurs because there is no real understanding of how you do make such changes.

Dickson: In my experience, the blockage is often three-quarters of the way down the organization. The person at the top is often intelligent, perceptive, progressive. A new director of a mental hospital, for example, recognizes that nursing techniques are old-fashioned and that the "old sweats" who have been working 20 to 30 years in the ward are resisting change. The director hopes that the injection of young, idealistic volunteers will engender a new atmosphere.

There will come an explosion because those called "middle-level manpower" have their way of sabotaging change. Again and again I have seen this. It is not enough to have vision at the top and idealism at the bottom. You have to attack at all stages.

Kydd: My UYA experience showed me that most students were naive. Their concept of what was possible did not relate to the real world. Contending with such problems as sabotage by middle-level employees could do a lot to move the student further in the direction in which he or she was going whether or not that particular experience was frustrating.

How the student handles such an experience has a lot to do with what the university does, and offers possibilities of moving the ivory tower and its resources into the community.

What avenues are open to students to work out whatever problems they encounter? What is the counseling system? Where does the responsibility lie in helping that student think through?



IRA ARLOOK, DIRECTOR OF THE OHIO PUBLIC INTEREST CAMPAIGN, CLEVELAND

Sorum: Often it lies with a faculty member. For example, the students I work with design their own majors and have a faculty mentor, a tutor, to shepherd them through four years of education. The tutor tries to help them understand what is happening in their education. When a problem arises, the students go right to the tutor and say, "You won't believe what happened to me today. I really need to talk to you about it."

The key is having someone whom they can count on who is not invested in that particular institution and who can stand back with them and help process.

Sometimes you can build this in by teaming the students. If you put two or three together, they will function as processors with each other—with more or less sophistication.

Kydd: The situation which Alec has set up seems to be fairly common. The call for volunteers comes from the person at the top, but that person does not take into account the structure with which he or she is dealing. At what point do Judy and Bob, the university staff, come to speak to Karen and Ira, the organization staff, in terms of helping the student work through the problem? Where is the responsibility?

Sorum: My sense would be that our responsibility is to teach the student to go to the organization. If a student reports to me what has happened and we process that, I would

not see my role to then go to the institution's director.

As Bob said: Who owns the learning and who owns the products of the placement? If the student in negotiating with the director needs to pull in university resources, great. But the negotiation is between the two of them, and I am not sure that it is functional, ethical or realistic for me to insert myself.

Part of the experience is learning how to cope with the institution. That may be a cop-out.

Dickson: I don't go all the way with you, Judy. I think that it is my job, pulling the artillery of my position with me, to go see the top person and say, as diplomatically as I can, "This is what one of our volunteers reports and we have confirmed it. It is now over to you."

Otherwise I would be failing myself and the organization where this

"Fundamental social problems cannot be solved by any technique of reflecting and problem-solving."

inadequacy is occurring, and I would forfeit the respect of the student. I have to do a little crusading at my level, perhaps discreetly through an invitation to lunch. The answer may still be no, but I have made an endeavor. I can't just say to the student out there in the sticks or at the coal face, "Please don't rock the boat because this is a project to which we want to send others in future years."

Sorum: I am not suggesting that I would tell the student not to rock the boat. The quandary that the student faces is not something that I can solve but is part of the whole growing and developing relationship within an organization. It may well be that the student goes back to the agency director, discusses the problem and arrives at no solution which seem appropriate to the student.

I think it is dangerous for us to take over the students' problems and thereby truncate the students' potential to go in and have to ascertain, at least initially what the re-



ALEC DICKSON, HONORARY DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICE VOLUNTEERS

sponse is going to be, what kinds of roles may be open.

Arlook: Some situations are just impossible. Many service agencies don't provide services or don't do so in ways we approve of. A student and faculty member may know that, may see it happen but, given

"Not every institution by any means gives volunteers the opportunity to grow, to make a contribution."

their resources, simply may not be able to turn that thing around.

Fundamental social problems cannot be solved by any technique of reflecting and problem-solving. That means only a relatively small range of service agencies are suitable for universities to get involved with in helping create opportunities for students. But then the university isn't going to play a very significant role in transforming institutions, at least by virtue of making volunteers available. And if a university department gets the reputation for sending in volunteers who continually get shocked and upset,

whether or not they raise vocal criticism, the university-institution relationship is not going to last long.

The problem is clear with, for example, police departments. A lot depends on the nature of that particular police department and the people within it. Where is the university department going to come off telling the police department how to run itself, or thinking up a strategy whereby its volunteers are going in there to make changes?

Nussbaum: It could be that what the student learns is that social service is not being provided well in the society, that what he or she wants to do is find ways to help have that service provided better.

Dickson: Those sending out volunteers do face a dilemma. Not every institution by any means gives volunteers the opportunity to grow, to make a contribution. We send volunteers there over a period of five years and the institution doesn't make a single change as a result. So we say we will strike it off the list. But if we do, we withdraw the buffer zone of humanity the volunteers have provided and surrender the children or patients or prisoners to a sterile, rigid establishment.

Do we just back the lovely projects? It is not a *simple* question.

Kydd: Volunteers could learn that the only alternative left open to them is to turn away. One of the things service-learning should teach is that there are alternatives. How do we find alternatives?

An educational institution full of theory is open to volunteers. Let's find the right one and figure out if it can work. That is part of the learning experience. If the theory cannot work in this situation, the next question we must ask in order to complete the learning experience is: What other avenues are open?

If those questions are not asked, then I, for one, question the value of the service-learning experience.

Sorum: And the value of the education institution which does not raise these basic questions.

Sigmon: You diagnose problems and probe alternative solutions, then you judge those options on the basis of individual values. That is part of the learning we do. When is it my action? When am I part of the school? Part of the agency? Part of the body politic? Part of the family? You must know which you are part of at any given time.

There are no right answers as far as I can tell. You listen, you pose, you stretch, you push. You try to find some avenue that makes it acceptable to the individual.

Dickson: Another organizational problem that we face is the temptation to put a student who is articulate, intelligent, dynamic, into the project which calls for organizing, catalytic capacity. Then we place the much more ordinary, low-key student in dreary institutional settings where nothing ever happens.

I question that. Perhaps we have to put the highly intelligent into the grim, boring situation and say, "Friend, for a lot of people, life is dreary. You have half a year to enrich the lives of those bed-ridden patients." As beauty is said to lie in the eye of the beholder, perhaps it is the role of enterprising volunteers to inject some of their own imagination and vitality into apparently dull situations.

We have been suggesting that the worst that can happen is an explosion where the student comes march-

“Much more common is the student with quite a high degree of idealism who completes the project but never wants to touch anything with a social content again.”

ing into our office asking what we are going to do about something or telling us what he or she has already done. Those moments are relatively rare. Much more common is the student with quite a high degree of idealism who completes the project but never wants to touch anything with a social content again.

Kydd: If a student comes to you with a project which, based on your experience, is not going to work out as he or she thinks it will, do you ever say, “No, that isn’t going to make it?”

Sigmon: Yes. Sometimes we let it go. After all, we don’t really know. This is an art form for which we have no precise measures.

Dickson: And sometimes we plan with our eyes closed. Recently we

developed a one-to-one project at the University of York. A spastic who couldn’t feed or dress himself or take notes won a place at the University and appealed to us for one or two volunteers to look after him. We provided them and he got his degree.

I am now critical of my own staff because we failed to mobilize 10 or 15 different resources. First of all, it might have been the role of the volunteers to shame some of the 3,000 students at the University into assisting with the duties in relays.

York is the headquarters of the eastern region of British Railways. Young technical apprentices could have come from their workshops to the student’s room to develop engineering devices that would swing him into the bath, off the toilet seat, onto the bed. It would have been a marvelous challenge to their blossoming technological skills, and other handicapped students could have benefited from both devices and the designs for them.

York also is the headquarters of the great chocolate firm, Rowntrees, which also employs hundreds of workers. Its charitable foundation could have helped with finances.

And the high schools from which these two student volunteers originally came could surely have devised special equipment in their workshop labs. And local high schools in York could have extended personal hospitality to them at weekends and involved them, in their off-duty hours, in sport and recreational activities.

All sorts of human resources could have been mobilized. Instead of two student volunteers sacrificing a whole year to rather boring and disagreeable tasks, they could have acted as advocates for the student and mobilized dozens of different local organizations to provide more and better services.

It was the role of my staff to have given this multiplicity of ideas to the students. We missed our chance to convert a simple service project with little learning potential for the two volunteers into an advocacy situation involving many people in tasks that could aid not just one but many handicapped students.

Leaving it to the volunteers to go about their daily duties was a failing of the perceptions of our headquarters staff. **S**

Articles on Advocacy

Readers may wish to refer to the following *Synergist* articles related to advocacy. Reprints are available from NSVP, 806 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20525.

“Students As Advocates for Nursing Home Residents,” by Elma Griesel. Winter 1978, Volume 6/Number 3.

“Advocates for Change: University of Maryland’s Public Interest Group Protects Consumers.” Fall 1977, Volume 6/Number 2.

“Georgetown Law Students Serve D.C. Prisoners.” Fall 1977, Volume 6/Number 2.

“Nutrition Students and Rural Community Outreach,” by Kathryn M. Kolasa. Fall 1977, Volume 6/Number 2.

“Civic Competence and Community Service,” by Fred Newman. Winter 1977, Volume 5/Number 3.

“Community Legal Clinic Serves Low-Income Elderly.” Spring 1976, Volume 5/Number 1.

“Using Student Volunteers in Anti-Rape Programs,” by Lynn Wehrli. Winter 1976, Volume 4/Number 3.

“The Legal Angle: Setting Up A Consumer Awareness Outreach Program,” by Hunter Hughes III. Winter 1976, Volume 4/Number 3.

“The Legal Angle: Students Can Help Claimants Get Full Unemployment Benefits Under Federal and State Laws,” by Hunter Hughes III. Fall 1975, Volume 4/Number 2.

“Pratt Institute’s Center for Community and Environmental Development: Art, Architecture and Design Students Serve as Brooklyn’s Advocates.” Fall 1974, Volume 3/Number 2.

“The Legal Angle: Student Volunteers Can Help Handicapped Get Supplemental Security Income,” by Hunter Hughes III. Fall 1974, Volume 3/Number 2.

“The Legal Angle: Helping Enforce the Open Housing Laws,” by Hunter Hughes III. Spring 1974, Volume 3/Number 1.

For additional references on advocacy, see “Resources” on page 53.

